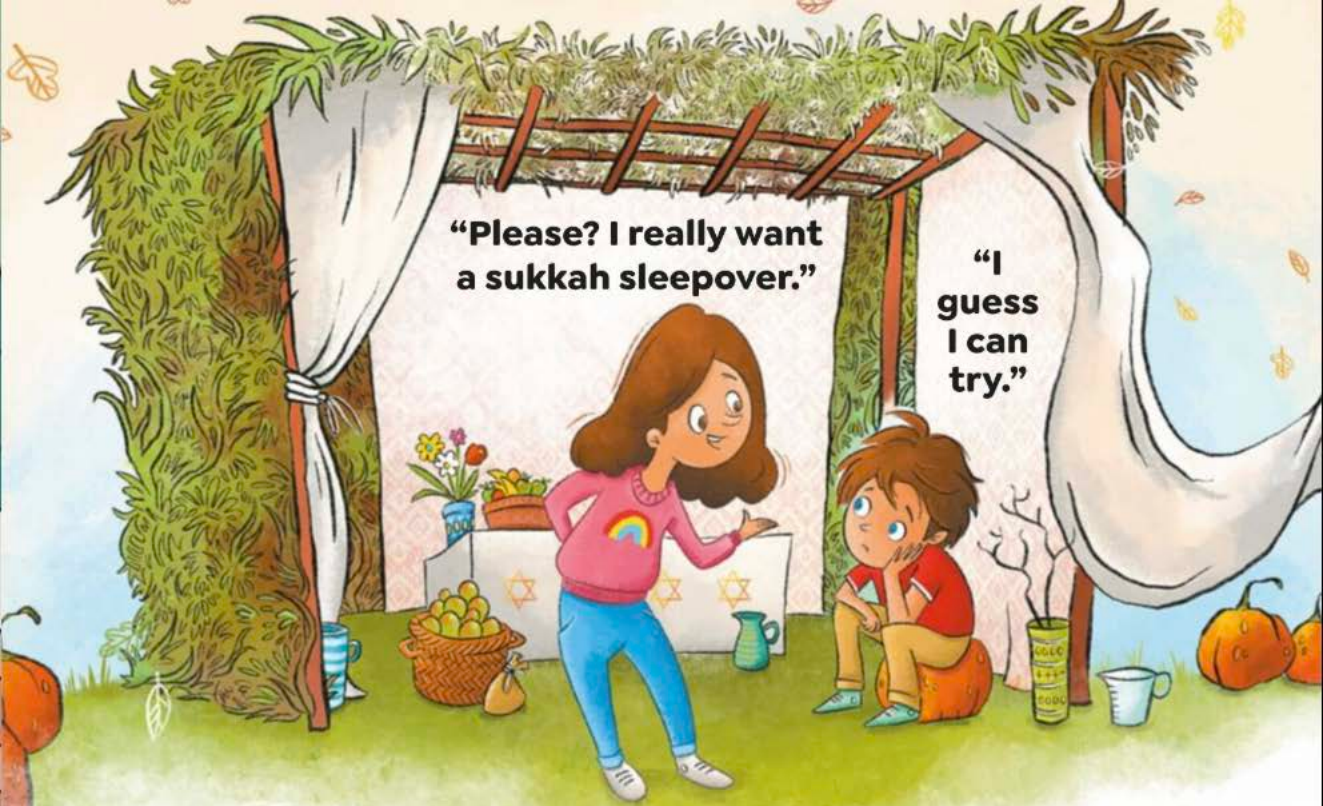




"Please? I really want
a sukkah sleepover."

"I
guess
I can
try."

Backyard Sleepover

By Barbara Kimmel Art by Mike Luckie

"Come on, Ben!" Leah called. "Let's find pretty leaves for the sukkah!"

"OK," her little brother said, grabbing a basket. "You shake the branches. I'll catch the leaves!"

Every fall, to celebrate the Jewish harvest holiday of Sukkot, Leah's family built a sukkah. It was an outdoor hut in their backyard. They decorated the sukkah, ate in the sukkah, and waved the lulav branches and

etrog fruit in all directions to remember that blessings are everywhere. This year would be extra special because Leah and Ben would sleep in the sukkah.

Dear Diary,

YES!!! Mom and Dad said Ben and I can sleep in the sukkah—just like our ancestors did when they wandered in the desert! It'll be our own sukkah sleepover.

♥ Leah

All week, Leah and Ben cut and colored, glittered and glued. They hung paper chains, strung berries, and arranged fruits and vegetables. But on the day of the sleepover, Ben made LOTS of excuses.

"I might be catching a cold. Maybe we should stay in."

"Are those rain clouds? We don't want to get wet."

On the day of the sleepover, Ben made lots of excuses.

"Mom will worry about us and won't be able to sleep!"

"You'll be OK," said Leah. "I'll be with you all night, and

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from page 25)

you can go inside anytime you want."

Ben shook his head.

"Maybe next year."

"Pleeease," Leah begged.

"I really want a sukkah sleepover."

Leah held her breath while Ben shuffled from foot to foot for what felt like forever.

"I guess I can try," he finally said.

Leah wrapped her arms around him. "It'll be great!"

Dear Diary,

Tonight's the night! I hope, hope, HOPE Ben doesn't back out. He's a little scared, but I'll make sure he has fun.

♥ Leah

That night, their family had dinner in the sukkah. They shared stories, played games, and sang songs. Then Leah and Ben slipped into their sleeping bags.

"Have fun," said Dad.

"We'll have our bedroom window open, right there."

"Just call for us if you need anything," Mom said and then kissed their foreheads.

Mom and Dad went inside.

"Leah," whispered Ben.

"It's pretty dark out here. And it might get darker."

"No worries," said Leah.

"I'll be right back."

She tiptoed inside and came back with flashlights.

"Just in case," she said.

A few minutes later . . .
HOO-HOO-HOO!

Leah felt a tap on her shoulder.

"What if an animal gets close?" asked Ben. "How will we chase it away?"

Leah rubbed her eyes.

"I'll be back in a sec."

She returned with pots and pans to bang together.

"Just in case."

Inside, outside, back and forth. Snacks and socks. Blankets and bug spray.

"Just in case."

"Leah . . ."

"Really, Ben?" Leah said.

"You can't possibly need anything else."

"One last thing," he said.

"I promise."

Huffing and puffing, Leah returned with an armful of stuffed animals.

"Thanks!" Ben lined up his furry friends. "You were right—this is fun! Good night, Leah."



Ben shut his eyes, and within a few minutes, he was asleep.

The night was filled with swaying shadows, rustling leaves, and buzzing bugs. Leah shivered.

Leah looked around the sukkah. Paper chains and pumpkins looked different in the dark. The night was filled with swaying shadows, rustling leaves, and buzzing bugs. Leah shivered. No wonder Ben was scared.

Just then, a WHOOSH of wind shook the sukkah.

Paper chains flapped. Beaded strings rattled.

"Ben!" Leah cried out. "Did you hear that?" She dove into her sleeping bag, covering her head.

Ben opened his eyes.

"Leah? Are you OK?"

Leah peeked out, and Ben handed her his favorite stuffed animal.

"Just in case," he said.

Leah and Ben giggled as they lay side by side. Through the rooftop branches, they gazed at the starlit sky, and a chorus of crickets sang them to sleep.

Dear Diary,

Ben and I had a SUPER sukkah sleepover!

OK, sleeping outside was a TEENSY bit scary, even for me! I bet our ancestors got scared sometimes too. But one thing is for sure. It's easier to be brave when you're with someone you care about.

♥ Leah