



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me”

by Ethan Bogard
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Well.... I am finally up to the last essay of my bar mitzvah. This is the part where I share with you what this all meant to me.

Let me first say that this was clearly the most complicated and time-consuming project I've ever done in my life. From the beginning, I knew that the Humanistic Jewish bar mitzvah process would be very challenging, and unique. And I knew it would make me carefully think about my values, and would require that I push myself intellectually.

Through the process, I learned a lot about my family history and values. I also learned a lot about Judaism and the Death Penalty. I was really fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet Mr. Scheck and learn more about him and his work. He's a very brave, interesting, smart and inspiring person.

Also, I learned a great deal about my personal values, how I wish to be a good Jewish adult in the tradition of Humanistic Judaism, and how I expect to continue this tradition throughout my life.

I am proud that I have continued the tradition of bar mitzvahs in the family. While my grandfathers' bar mitzvahs were certainly more traditional than mine, my dad sort of paved the non-traditional path. He had his bar mitzvah when he was 19 years old, after returning from six months in Israel on a kibbutz.

And then came my brother Ben. By having his City Congregation bar mitzvah three years ago, he showed me that this was possible, even when it seemed like I could never do all the work that I saw him do. And he showed me that doing something that was very different was really okay, and could be very meaningful to me. With Rabbi Peter's support, Ben also introduced to this congregation the idea of throwing candy at the end of the service. I know I really enjoyed throwing candy at him after his Bar Mitzvah Declaration and I'm sure that he, along with my friends, will also enjoy bombarding me in a few minutes!

I want to thank my parents for encouraging me, even when I didn't want to be encouraged. There were times when I didn't want to hear that we had to work more on my papers or presentation, but I appreciate the fact that they cared enough to be that involved and to push me to do a better job. The opportunity to work with my official and unofficial mentors, Steve Olken and Andy Taslitz, was invaluable, as they are both very smart, gave me so much of their time and helped me think through so many of the issues and themes I have discussed. I would also like to thank my KidSchool teachers, Rabbi Peter and Myrna Baron for all their support and the many questions they posed to make me think about things in ways that I probably would not otherwise have done.

I would like to thank Anne Shoenbrun for her beautiful singing today. I also want to thank all of my friends and family for being here with me today, with a special note of thanks to those who have come from great distances. Our friends Kristin, Hendrik and Sam came all the way from Germany; Richard and Suzie from Texas; cousins Eric, Pam and Melissa from Florida; Andy and Patty from Virginia; my friend Andy Murray from Scotland; and our friends who came all the way from Northern Jersey!!

I learned a great deal throughout this process. I certainly complained when we had to go into the city for KidSchool on Sundays. However, the schlep afforded me the opportunity to spend lots of time with my family, and to listen to a lot of music on my I-pod! I also made some great friends, got to see my dad act ridiculous as president of the Congregation, and learned a lot about Jewish history, culture and my values. Although I missed a few classes for tennis tournaments...okay, maybe more than a few, I still got it done!