



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“What My Bat Mitzvah Means to Me”**

**by Emily Dyke  
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It is surprising to many people that I wasn't required by my parents to have a Bat Mitzvah but, rather, that I chose to have one on my own. I must admit that at first I was attracted to the idea by the fun party and the fact that many of my friends were having Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, but that was before I knew anything about Humanistic Judaism. When my dad found TCC, (which is kind of ironic, considering my mother is the one who grew up with this progressive practice of Judaism!) I was intrigued and wasn't sure what to expect. I thought I would learn some Hebrew and read some passages from the Torah like my friends. Once I began attending the classes, however, I actually found myself having a good time! While some of my friends would occasionally complain about having to go to Hebrew school or study their Torah portion, I felt lucky to be able to attend this unique congregation.

After my first class at TCC, called Kidschool, I knew this would be a very different experience than most of the people I know had. I expected a long lesson on the Hebrew language and the Jewish history. Well, I was right about the “long” part, but we ended up doing many fun activities, creating plays, having passionate discussions, and analyzing the history of the Jewish culture and modern day situations that we would relate to Judaism. I would always come home with new facts or viewpoints regarding current events!

Kidschool was not only about learning interesting new facts, though. Our teachers invited and encouraged us to critically analyze and challenge the facts we learned. My homework assignments often involved researching a current political issue and taking a position on it. In class, we dissected quotes and examined stories from the Torah and converted the stories into similar situations that could occur in the modern day world in order to more deeply explore the message or moral of the story. Attending these classes was an enriching and unique experience for me.

Besides learning a lot from my classes, writing my papers has also taught me a great deal as well. I've gained many strategies that will help me to write good academic papers in the future. The massive amount of editing and revising that was done on my final paper has taught me to perfect my essays even further than what might be typical at an eighth grade level. For a few of my papers, I had to interview many friends and family members and use multiple sources to find all the information I was looking for. I gained research strategies that I will be using for all my academic years to come.

But clearly the most important things that I learned about were my own values and identity. I analyzed myself like I never would have done without this project to motivate me. It has brought me closer to myself. This Bat Mitzvah was most meaningful to me for that reason.

I would like to thank all of the people that have helped me throughout this program. First, my mentor, Isabel Kaplan, who has stimulated and motivated the writing of all of the papers that I wrote for this Bat Mitzvah. Thanks to my old teacher, Rick Barenbaum, and to Aram Rubenstein Gillis, for providing great music for this celebration. A huge thanks to Rabbi Peter Schweitzer who sparked the idea for my final project and helped me make my papers the best they could be. And a big thank you to my parents who have given me many ideas to help me create my papers, supported me throughout this process more than I could ask, and encouraged me to keep on going when I got tired or doubtful. Thanks to everyone who has traveled just to support me on this day. Thank you all for coming!