



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“What My Bat Mitzvah Means to Me”

by Kaela Walker

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I first learned about what a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is four or five years ago. I used to go to a Hebrew school at the 92nd Street Y, called Connect. The teachers talked to the class about Jewish customs. One thing they mentioned was a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. They explained the concept of what it is and what you do. It hadn't really occurred to me that I would even have a Bat Mitzvah. It was not until three years ago when my family joined the City Congregation that I realized I would be having my very own Bat Mitzvah.

At first, I wasn't sure if I really wanted to go through with this whole Bat Mitzvah thing. I talked to my parents and they said I would be having one. My parents both had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and they thought it is an important rite of passage for Jews. During KidSchool we talked more about the idea of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. I knew I would be doing a lot of work to get it done, but in the end there would be a party to celebrate my accomplishments. While I was worried about how much work it would be, I like what I learn in the City Congregation. We learn about history, values and culture. So, I got started.

First, I researched my family history. I learned about my parent's grandparents and their parents and grandparents. I had never heard of some of these people before. I learned how my family came to America, who they became and why. It was interesting to me that most of my family members weren't from America and had a totally different life than I do today. I made a poster that documents my family tree. It was cool because I got to see pictures of my relatives. I went to the Ellis Island website and tracked down details about my family members' voyages to America.

Next, I wrote about my family values. When I interviewed my family, they told me stories about their childhood or stories about their relatives. I thought it was really interesting hearing about people I hardly knew, and being able to see what life was like long ago. I took the information from the stories and figured out what values these people must have had.

While researching my role model Dian Fossey, I knew she shared some of the same values as I have, especially her love for animals. Ever since I was little, loving animals has been one of my passions. Every time we go on a vacation, we end up going to some sort of animal preserve or zoo. I even incorporated animals into my community service.

Finally, I reached my major project. I spent almost every weekend going to a different Jewish restaurant or deli with my parents. Despite the fact that I am not the tallest person around, I do eat a lot. My mom and I thought it would be fun to taste-test all the different types of foods. We compared our thoughts about the food and tried to decide which restaurant served the best. When we went to Yonah Schimmels, my mom ate that HUGE knish in record time. I didn't even finish. I mostly went to different delis and got pastrami, my favorite Jewish food. I would compare the pastrami I had eaten from other delis and decide which ones tasted the best. It was fun. But now, we are sick of sick of pastrami. Plus, eating all those Matzo Balls really showed me how great a cook Midge is ;)

In the end, I am glad I did all of this work. It was definitely worth it, and so cool to learn about Jewish food. In the middle of this process, it occurred to me that I was independently doing something related to my heritage. Being Jewish and feeling connected to the culture is something that I will always carry with me, wherever I am, and whoever I am with. It is a part of me now, and I understand it much better than I did before.

I would like to thank Rabbi Peter. He came to my house and helped me figure out a project that makes sense and that would be fun for me. In the pile of books he brought over, there was great information for my research. Also, he was always on the lookout for articles and other stuff that were related to my project. Thanks!

I would also like to thank Carol (my mentor). Without her I would be lost in this whole process. She really helped me out. She always made sure I was on track and getting my work done. She edited and helped me organize my papers which really made a big difference. I was so happy every time we met, because she had such great ideas and thoughts. I feel lucky that she was my mentor.

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Bubba, I would like to thank you for spending time telling me about the history of bagels. I really appreciate it.

Last, but certainly not least I would like to thank my family for all the hard work they put in to help me with this Bat Mitzvah. You guys kept motivating me to work harder and harder and it paid off. You guys were always there to help me out when I was stuck or didn't know what to do. Without you I wouldn't know what to do and wouldn't be able to make anything perfect. You guys are great!

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