



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“What My Bat Mitzvah Means to Me”**

**by Kyra Zimmerman**

**November 18, 2006**

Now, all of the pieces I have just read to you were created during a long process involving much thought, time and many revisions. I feel like its been one of the most life changing experiences! This piece, “What My Bat Mitzvah Means to Me” is one of the most important to me. The whole process has been very long and tiring. But it has helped me to find my inner strength and allowed me to evaluate myself. I have found my main values, learned about my family history, and explored and identified the role that Judaism plays in my life.

I have always known I was Jewish. I also know I always will be Jewish. But being a part of any group, especially a religious group can be very difficult. For me, there are times when I wish I was not affiliated with Judaism. I might feel that way with any religious affiliation but it is especially true of Judaism, I think. There have been a few times I wished I could blend in and not be Jewish, because being Jewish has exposed me to feeling isolated.

The difficulty of being identified as Jewish became most obvious when I was in my fourth grade art class. We were studying religious art, a famous Christian cathedral, and Muslim art. The teacher polled the class to see who was what religion. 50% raised their hand to say they were Christian. When asked by the teacher, 20% of the remaining 50% raised their hand to state they were Muslim. She continued with asking who was Jewish. My hand went right up. I was proud and happy until I looked around. My face flushed. I was the only one with my hand. One boy in my class started to laugh! I was shaken into reality. I did not want to cry, so I started to laugh too. It was so funny, how could I really be the only one. It was not possible.

At first I thought it was a joke until I realized how real it really was. “Oh OK, was her reply. Who’s half Jewish, half Christian?” It was amazing how many hands shot up. I felt so secluded and alone. It was like I was carrying everything Jewish, from history to culture, on my shoulders. I wanted to throw it all on the floor and collapse. At the time I thought, this could only happen to a Jewish kid like me.

In retrospect I understand why I felt like that. And I know it is not true, that it can not only happen to a Jew. Our world is filled with so much hatred. People treat each other with so much disrespect and are so discriminatory. Most societies have had to struggle at some point in history to find a way to exist and be accepted. The weight of the world is on their shoulders until they find their spot and way to be accepted or partially accepted. I think what is especially hard for me is being completely Jewish.

Looking back on that fourth grade class there were so many children that were partially Jewish. Sometimes I wish I could escape from being a “whole Jew.” There is some much pressure sometimes to keep up or represent the religion, and my integrity. I will never disown my background and Jewish culture, but sometimes I want to surrender to all the discrimination and hate in our world and go with the crowd. But I don’t worry, I won’t!

I am an individual and believe in being my own person. I stick up for those who I believe in and support friends who are in need. This Bat Mitzvah is one way I am embracing my Judaism and sharing who I am. By doing this I hope that others will learn to be more comfortable with who they are and be willing to share who they are with me and others.

My parents have helped me tremendously and encouraged me with the Bat Mitzvah. They have helped me with this, but they also help me in everyday life. Mom, you really have been such a strong force the whole way through this, moving me along. Even though I probably yelled at you the most, I love you so much and I want to say thank you. And Dad, when you helped me, it was very thoughtful work. So I want to thank you too. Mom and Dad, even at times when I ignore you, you know I really love you.” And you guys are really mad cool!

In life, right now, I have a ton of guy friends that mean so much to me, but besides my father the real guy in my life is my brother, Gabe. I love my brother. I know sometimes we are expected to say we love our siblings, but I really do. My brother and I have always been close but recently I think we have become even closer. We tell each other things before we tell them to our parents, do activities together, and occasionally try to kill each other. But I also feel a closer bond since Gabe came to Shire Village Camp this past summer. He bonded and befriended everyone at the whole camp, just like I have done. But really I just want to thank you, Gabe, for listening to me complain about this occasionally. I can't wait until it's your turn. Then who's going to be the one relaxing!

I also want to thank my mentor, Alan. We have shared so many experiences together beyond just the work. The B63 bus trips, the Tuesday afternoons at your house, the snacks of goldfish and raisins, and the late night telephone “work sessions.” You started off being the congregation storyteller who was my mentor. Now you are my mentor and an adult and friend I respect. You, and by extension Ann, Carly Mia and Jacob, have given so much time to my bat Mitzvah. I want thank you and Ann with a night out on me with free babysitting. Carly and I can have a girls night. So, again, I really want to thank you because none of this would have been possible without you!

I also want to thank Myrna and Peter. Their tireless rereads and edits have made each of my essays the best they can be. My thoughts about my first meetings with Myrna were that she would be strict. But she was supportive, helpful and very nice. So thanks to both of you for all that you did.

Ann, Maxine and Aram, the musical accompaniment today, made this service all the better. To have all three of you added a melodic quality and allowed my singing friends to join right in. Thanks.

This whole process has been a journey and if I could do it over, I would not change anything about it because I know this experience will affect my life. If I could have, I would have written this piece yesterday. Really I could write this piece every day. I think this sounds crazy. But my views of my Bat Mitzvah are changing every day. Every day is a new step in the journey, a new piece of the puzzle. Yes, this process has been long and hard, but I feel like I am starting a new chapter in my life, and though it is scary it will be an adventure! I know it has helped me prepare for whatever is ahead, and I know all my friends and family will be there to help and support me along the way. So I just want to thank you all for being a part of my life.