



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me”

by Murray Rosenbaum

May 14, 2011

Last year, I knew that I wanted to become a Bar Mitzvah, but I didn't want to have a traditional Jewish Bar Mitzvah Ceremony. So my parents and I went looking for a different type of Judaism, something that focused on the traditions of Judaism, but not religious parts so much. My parents came across The City Congregation online and saw that there was going to be an open house soon. So we went to the open house and I saw exactly what I was looking for. A congregation that believes that human beings are the authors of their own actions. Humanistic Jews believe in the power of humans to change the world, and not to wait on God to fix your problems for you. I also liked that I could get more in touch with my Jewish roots in a way that was very meaningful to me!

My brother Max became a Bar Mitzvah at a Reform Temple, Reform Judaism are the most liberal Jews; Jews who do not follow the Talmud strictly but try to adapt all of the historical forms of Judaism to the modern world. But he still had to study Hebrew, and he recited a Torah portion during his ceremony. My cousin, who is also named Max, also recently became a Bar Mitzvah as well, his Temple is also Reform, but I learned more from his ceremony, as I was only 5 when my brother had his ceremony. One of the things I really loved about my cousin Max's Bar Mitzvah was connecting with family members I had not seen in a long time. And I really enjoyed talking with my Great Uncle Jerry at the dinner afterward. It was the first time I've had a chance to sit and talk with him one on one as a young adult.

The TCC was my favorite choice out of everywhere we looked, and when I saw what the Bar Mitzvah process involved me doing, I was frightened and amazed. I was frightened at how much you had to write, and I was amazed at how creative it was. TCC turned just reading a Torah portion, to learning and connecting to your family history and members. I have attended a few TCC Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and they feel like coming home. I can relate to the other kids in the congregation, They come from an interesting mixture of backgrounds and religions – one of my favorite moments at a TCC ceremony was when an ornate and large Chinese Dragon came out to honor the Bar Mitzvah, from the Chinese side of his family.

So what my Bar Mitzvah means to me is going through a gate in my life that will make me a young man in the eyes my community and also so I can follow Jewish traditions in a different and more creative way. This process has helped me learn what those traditions can be: from our ornate High Holiday services, to the songs we learned in Keihella circle, Humanistic Judaism is there with an answer that helps me learn about myself and gives me the type of structure I like - to look at life's challenges through and offers wisdom, guidance and thoughtful philosophy. My parents wanted me to experience this important moment in the life of a young Jewish adult – as these traditions help us grow as a person, and my mom especially always talks about how important it is to have that experience of standing before your family and friends and giving them a chance to see you with new eyes, and you get to declare - and for them to acknowledge, that you have reached a new stage in life.

I would like to thank my parents, Pam Yoder and Steven Rosenbaum, for prodding me along when I would begin to stop or slow down, and also for helping me immensely with this whole process. I would like to thank my brother Max for giving me different opinions and ideas on what to do. My Oma, Gabi, and Grandma, Eileen, were very supportive and helped a lot with the family history, My Grandma was especially helpful as she had interviewed her mother, Rose, in the 1980's and audio taped Grandma Rose's voice and story to keep. Uncle Jerry Landay also took time to talk with me on the phone. I would also like to thank my dog, Louie, for putting up with Zhi Zhi, my community service dog, whenever she would be a pain to him.

I am especially grateful to the people outside my immediate family who stepped up to help me, I want to thank my mentor Debbie, first for volunteering for the position, and second for taking huge amounts of time to proofread and edit all of the papers. I've enjoyed visiting with you and meeting your family, and thank you to them for sharing you with us! And it was due to the efforts of Isabel Kaplan, the Committee Chair of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program, that we made our way successfully through the whole process.

And last - but not least - to Rabbi Peter Schweitzer: thank you for growing this wonderful community of people and leading them. I've enjoyed the High Holiday services, and Kidschool has been an important part of my connection to Judaism. And thank you for sharing your personal Shofars with me – they are truly cool! I would also like to thank all the family and friends who are here today to celebrate this moment with me. It really means a lot. L'Chayim!

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