



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me”**

**by Ryan Kramer**

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Becoming a Bar Mitzvah is a major step forward in my life. It is also an important moment for my family and friends. When I first learned about my Jewish heritage, I didn't think it was of much importance. I assumed that it was just one of the many parts of my life. I also didn't understand the importance of the Bar Mitzvah. It wasn't until I started my life at TCC that I began to understand what it means to me.

Having been to some of my friends' Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, my perception of the traditional Bar Mitzvah is the young adult “taking their place before God”. However, my parents and I see it in a different way. We see the Bar and Bat Mitzvah as a time when a young person takes his or her place in an age old tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. We also see the Bar Mitzvah as figuratively being at the top of the hill. You can look back at how far you have traveled, and then you look forward to where you can go.

This leads into another aspect of the Bar Mitzvah process in my mind; memories of all that has happened over the course of the past few years of work. For instance, all of the piano pieces that I had to learn. Then there were all the deadlines. I can't begin to count the number of deadlines I missed while working on this project. I also can't count the number of times that I procrastinated. Maybe I'll do that tomorrow. It was also the cause of most of the arguments that sprouted up at home, not to mention the spark that initiated the famous line “well I never really wanted a Bar Mitzvah anyway.”

Then there were the projects themselves. When I first started the Bar Mitzvah process I figured it wouldn't be a big deal. Boy was I wrong. Not only were the projects hard as far as research was concerned, but they also were very thought provoking. The Bar Mitzvah process really started to make me question just what being Jewish meant to me. It was much more interesting than I ever thought it would be, and though I never thought I'd say this, I have to thank my parents for putting me through this process, because it made me realize things about myself that I would never have found out otherwise. For instance, I have finally found what it means to me to be Jewish.

Over the course of the Bar Mitzvah project, I came to realize that I didn't really consider Judaism as my religion. What I consider Judaism to be for me is a set of customs. I consider my Jewish identity as a connection between me and my Jewish ancestors. Not only that, but I also consider Judaism as a way to connect with others around me who are Jewish, and to be able to share the experiences I have as a Jew with them.

I also want to take a few moments here to recognize one of the influential figures in the conception of the Bar Mitzvah project. My grandfather, Mike Kramer, died before I even started working on it. However, it was one of his wishes that I have a Bar Mitzvah. It was this wish that made us determined to find a place where I could become a Bar Mitzvah. Papa was an inspirational figure to me. I always loved going to visit him, and I loved hearing him talk.

Papa wasn't the only grandfather in my life who had a big influence on this day. Baba has helped out a lot as well. He has given me a lot of information I never would have found out by myself. He is single handedly responsible for practically half of the research of my family tree. He is also the one who made all the awesome pictures for the invitation. He has been supportive of my creativity, and has always encouraged me to take even bigger steps in my musical career.

The Bar Mitzvah service is also a time of celebration. For me, it is the feeling that I have finally overcome another challenge in my life. However, it is more than that. It is the feeling that I have just reached another mile marker. I look back on what has come before, and then look ahead at what is to come, and I realize that this process has changed my life. The path I have been on for so long has ended, but even as it ends, it branches out into several new ones. If I hadn't taken this path, who knows what would have come and taken its place.

Lastly the Bar Mitzvah service is a time for me to honor all those who helped me in this process. First, I would like to thank my mom and dad, who stayed with me the whole time, and made it possible for this celebration to come together. It was they who created this service with me, got the place, created the party afterwards, and forced me to work on all my papers when I wanted to do something else. I owe all the thanks in the world to them, especially since they put up with my whining, and screaming, and throwing a fit whenever they wanted me to sit down and practice when I wanted to be playing video games.

I would also like to thank my grandparents for being supportive and encouraging throughout this process.

I would like to thank all the relatives and family friends who flew in from all their respective areas to come and see my Bar Mitzvah, some of you flying across the country. If it weren't for you guys, this service wouldn't mean nearly as much to me, because I put it together for everyone.

I would like to send a special thanks to my mentor, Jim Ryan, who helped me through the process step by step. I would also like to thank Rabbi Peter, Myrna Baron and Isabel Kaplan for all their support and encouragement. In addition, I would like to thank Rick and Aram for their great music. Lastly, I would like to send a special thanks to the teachers that I assisted both last year and this year. Abby and Diana, you guys have really helped me, and given me an opportunity to help others, which means more to me than I can ever say. In addition to them, I want to thank the kids who were in my classes both last year and this year. You made TCC worth coming to.

One more thanks must go out before we conclude this service. I would like to send out a special thanks to all my friends from Rockaway who took time out of their schedule to hop on a bus, drive all the way out to Manhattan, and then listen to me drone on for two hours. You guys have been supportive and encouraging throughout the major steps in my life. We have had our disagreements, but if there is one thing that I don't regret in my life, it's meeting all of you, and spending the time that we had together.