



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“What My Bat Mitzvah Means to Me”

by Sophie Silverstein

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I have always known that I wanted to be a performer. I have been working toward that goal since the age of two. I have been taking acting classes, voice lessons, and dance classes. When I was cast in my first production at TADA! -- a youth theater company I have been devoted to since I was five -- I was overjoyed.

I started KidSchool at about the same time. At that age, I honestly did not see its importance -- I did not see where it was all going to lead. I just viewed it as something I had to do every other Sunday. But then I got into the show at TADA and I was unable to attend KidSchool for a month. I felt bad about missing it, but theater was my priority.

When I began thinking about my *bat mitzvah* in the summer of 2007, the latest Tada production stood in the way again. So the following summer, I changed my priority. You see, I've been going to City & Country School for ten years with most of the same people and we are all graduating this June. It was my goal from the beginning to become a *bat mitzvah* and celebrate this special milestone with the friends I have grown up with.

But when I met with my mentor Helene a week before winter break to go over one of my papers, she said that it was overly ambitious to finish the whole process, which normally takes a year and a half, in six months. I was so upset that I questioned whether I would be a *bat mitzvah* at all -- it's not that I didn't want to do it, I just didn't want to do it at age 15. So I decided to put all else aside, other than school work, accelerate the process, and become a *bat mitzvah* in May.

Over the past six months, I looked at my family history, my values, my personal beliefs. I chose a role model I feel exemplifies the values I try to live by. I did community service, helping homeless dogs and cats and getting the word out about ChemoComfort, and I researched the story of Noah and the Ark, the Holocaust and 9/11. In doing all this, I have learned so much about myself, my family, and my identity as a Jew. I learned about how my grandparents and great-grandparents came here from Europe. I figured out what my personal beliefs are, what values I hold close to me. I learned so much about so many things in these short six months, with the help of my parents and my rabbi and my mentor that I almost don't want it to end!

There are so many people I'd like to thank for helping make this day possible. First, I would like to thank my mom for sticking with me through this whole year and encouraging me not to give up. I know she endured a lot, including me saying, "I didn't want a *bat mitzvah* anyway," every time something went wrong. I have to thank her too for putting together the whole party and service. Mom, I know sometimes it seemed like I didn't appreciate all you were doing, but in truth, I am so grateful for everything you have done that words cannot properly describe it! You can expect me to be there next to you at every service. Thank you again, and I love you.

I would also like to thank my dad for helping me with my papers, especially the main project. He helped me find information for the paper, helped me understand it, and helped edit it. To be honest, the paper you all heard me read made no sense at first, but my dad helped me make it the best it could

possibly be, and I am so grateful for all he did. I also want to thank him for helping me with the role model paper, especially for helping me find my values and beliefs within the music of John Lennon and the Beatles, and for helping me pick the music for the service. Dad, thank you so much for all you did to help me, and I love you.

I would like to thank my sister Stella for tolerating me through this whole process. It can't have been easy to watch me get so much attention -- and so many gifts. I will admit I was pretty harsh to her to begin with, and she did not get to use my computer as much as she would have liked, but she always kept her head when I did not have mine. So Stella, thank you for all the emotional support, and I hope I have given you an idea of what you are in for!

I would like to thank Rabbi Peter for helping me come up with the idea for the main paper and helping me put it together, and also for going along with the idea of speeding up this process. I know it was a stretch, and I am so happy it worked out, but it would not have been possible without Rabbi Peter's insightfulness and input.

And my mentor Helene definitely deserves a big thank you for going along with me as well. It started out quite rocky because of a lack of communication on my part, but these papers would not have been any good without Helene's edits. And I thank you for managing to keep up with the pace as well. I could not have asked for a better mentor, and I am so grateful for everything Helene did for me.

Isabel Kaplan also deserves a thank you for always keeping me up-to-date on what I still needed to do and giving me a push when I was moving slowly. And Isabel also is the one who gave the OK to accelerate the process, so Isabel, thank you so much for that. I mean it literally when I say this would not have been possible if not for you!

And I would like to thank Ann and Aram for accompanying me musically. Ann, your singing is absolutely beautiful and I was so happy with our harmonies for *Imagine*, and Aram, I think it is awesome that I got to have you here. The year that you were my teacher at KidSchool was the best year I had there, so thanks for that, and thanks for playing for us.

And lastly, I would like to thank all of you for coming today and witnessing this special milestone in my life. I would like to thank all the family members who traveled from California, Texas, Florida, Boston, Washington, Chicago, Atlanta, and — wait for it — New Jersey! This day is so much more special because you all were able to come and share it with me. I'd like to thank all my friends from City & Country -- I'm so glad I am able to share this with you guys. And I would like to thank all my other friends who came from Upstate, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

While I have learned SO much in this process, one of my most important realizations is that even after this day, I want to continue having the Congregation be a part of my life. Before, I was under the impression that after my *bat mitzvah* I would stop going to KidSchool and would have little to do with it again. But after going through this process and learning so much about myself, I have learned that Judaism is a very important part of my identity. While I won't be continuing in KidSchool, I will attend services and other events and will remain active in the Congregation.