



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“What My Bar Mitzvah Means to Me”**

**by Yana Lyandres**

**November 14, 2009**

Working through my bat mitzvah process, I have learned a lot and grown a great deal. Going to my classes at The City Congregation, called KidSchool, was a lot of fun. I got to meet new people with different points of view. For example, a lot of my KidSchool friends were really excited about President Barack Obama’s inauguration. In my family, we welcomed it, but there was much more enthusiasm at The City Congregation. My classmates were also very knowledgeable about politics, making me feel out of place sometimes, since I don’t watch the news as much. One student asked me, “Did you watch Obama’s speech last night?” To which I replied, “Not really...” He comprehended, “Oh, so you’re a Republican?” I’m not sure yet, I have a lot to learn.

It was an interesting experience to go to classes with city kids, because they’re a lot different from my friends and me. Maybe even more mature, in the sense that they are able to navigate around the city by themselves and more responsible in that aspect too. I also enjoyed the discussions we had because they weren’t just about Jewish history, but also about Jews in today’s society and current events in general.

The Bat Mitzvah program that students at the City Congregation usually complete in two years, I completed in one. My family and I discovered The City Congregation when I was already 12. When we met with the Rabbi of the congregation, Peter Schweitzer, he was very kind and open to us, helping us to learn more about Humanistic Judaism. Once we learned about the cultural Bar/Bat Mitzvah approach, we decided it was exactly what we were looking for. I wanted to accelerate the pace and took both required classes in one year, every other Sunday. It was definitely a challenge, but my tutorial teacher, Rick Barinbaum, made the classes intriguing. He always had cool topics to discuss, and interesting activities to participate in. Though I was there for such a short amount of time, I had a lot of fun and it was amazing.

Working through the steps toward my bat mitzvah, I learned about myself, my family, and the world around me. I didn’t know much about my family history before my bat mitzvah. I also didn’t know much about the topic of my main project, fashion designers, or ways people can be a bigger part of their community. I learned a lot about myself too. Before this process, I aspired to be a novelist. Now, I found out I like to interview people and ask questions. I still want to stay with the theme of writing, but now the field of journalism seems more interesting to me.

I really enjoyed working with my mentor, Nikki Greenberg, as well. She is a very kind and nurturing person, and full of life and loves to laugh. It was very productive to work on my papers with her and she would always say something funny and witty, which helped me a lot with my writing. Thanks for being so cool, Nikki!

Also, Rabbi Peter and Isabel Kaplan, the director of Bar/Bat Mitzvah program, helped me a lot, editing my papers and keeping me on track of what needed to be done. They were great guides and made my Bat Mitzvah service possible. Thank you Isabel and Rabbi Peter!

I should also mention my parents. Though sometimes giving up a good sleepover opportunity and instead spending my weekend on writing five-page papers was tough, it was truly worth it. Thanks for pushing me when I needed it! Thanks for everything else too, from finding TCC, to helping me finish my Bat Mitzvah, to planning my party. You are the best.

And of course, I can't forget my guests! Thank you all for coming! That made this day extra special for me and my family.

A teenager becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is about reaching adulthood in the eyes of the Jewish community. Going to TCC and having a non-traditional bat mitzvah where I learned about my culture, background, world, and most importantly myself, meant a lot to me. It was a bridging year for me. I was able to "find myself", so to speak. Everyone does it at some point in their lives, and I was fortunate to start that process sooner, rather than later.