

Bar Mitzvah Greetings Come From Cyberspace

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In February when Jacob Miller of West Bloomfield celebrates his bar mitzvah, hundreds of strangers from around the world will wish him mazel tov on the occasion.

Why?

Because Jacob's brother, Jason Miller, asked them to send good wishes via the Internet.

Last month, Mr. Miller, a 19-year-old international relations major at Michigan State University, sent an e-mail to over 90 Jewish listservs (a mailing list over e-mail to which people with a common interest can subscribe), asking Jews worldwide to e-mail congratulations.

He plans to compile all the responses — right now there are close to 500 — and give Jacob a book containing each one. Bar mitzvah wishes have come from Jews in 20 countries and almost all 50 states.

Not everyone has embraced Mr. Miller's initiative. Some thought it poor etiquette to use the listservs of Jewish topics.

But, the dissenters are in the minority.

Rabbis and close to 50 Israelis are among the respondents. Some replies also came from celebrities, including movie director James Brooks, Grateful Dead producer John Perry Barlow and actor Ed Asner.

sophomore, said he couldn't think of an appropriate bar mitzvah gift for his only sibling.

"At first I wanted to get my brother a present," Mr. Miller said. "But it's a hard thing to buy. Then I thought I'd do something nice like take my camera around campus and ask everyone from football players to maintenance workers to say mazel tov. But I felt it would get redundant and was too time-consuming."

Mr. Miller said one of the most touching responses came from Harold Gordon, the author of *The Last Sunrise*.

In his book, Mr. Gordon writes about his life story as a boy who spent his bar mitzvah in a concentration camp.

"I studied to be bar mitzvah, but my day did not come," Mr. Gordon wrote in his e-mail to Jacob. "The Nazis came and took my family from me and sent them to the gas chamber."



Mr. Miller, a MSU Brothers Jacob and Jason Miller

Jacob, a seventh-grader at Hillel Day School, is flattered by his brother's pending gift. Mr. Miller originally intended to keep it a secret, but people started talking about it long before Jacob's bar mitzvah.

"I think it's a great idea for Jews around the world to wish me a mazel tov on my bar mitzvah," Jacob said. "It's a great way to link Jews from all over the world. I was really surprised because I had no clue he (Jason) was doing this. I knew he was creative, but not this creative."

One group of responses Jacob is looking forward to reading are the letters from seventh-graders at a Jewish day school in Maryland. The teacher made it a class assignment to write messages to Jacob, who wants to read what teens his own age have to say.

One New York respondent told Jacob of his bar mitzvah ex-

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Harold Gordon

perience. He wrote, "My father denied he was a Jew and I myself did not know that I was Jewish until I was 11 years old ... Every Sunday my mother, somewhat fearful of my father, would take me on a long bus ride, onto the subway and then on another bus ride to Brooklyn where I would be given a rudimentary Hebrew lesson so that I could be bar mitzvah."

Others have written poetry, given advice or just said congratulations.

Every few days Jacob calls his brother just to see how many e-mail messages there are. Mr. Miller has read him a few, but the majority will remain a surprise.

Mr. Miller plans to give Jacob copies of all the responses in a bound and glossy book. None of the responses are edited.

Other books will be left on tables for guests to read at the bar mitzvah party.

"As much as I enjoy public speaking, I was worried about what to say at my brother's bar mitzvah," Mr. Miller said. "This way, over 500 people will have summed it up for me."

One thing Mr. Miller does not want is the spotlight.

"The most important thing about this is that it's his (Jacob's) bar mitzvah," Mr. Miller said. "I did this for him. I don't want it to be a case of, 'Look what I did.' I want it to be a look at what people did for Jacob." □