



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Alicia Blum
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Preparing a paper about my family’s values was important to me because it helped me learn more about my family’s beliefs and what is important to us.

One thing my mom values is Jewish education (Chee-nuch). I also value Jewish Education because I am Jewish and would like to know my Jewish history. I have been in the City Congregation KidSchool since I was in first grade. I actually went to my first High Holiday service when I was in Kindergarten! Jewish education is important to me because it teaches us about our history, holidays and traditions as Jews. I know that when I celebrate Passover, I am celebrating the same holiday as my ancestors and other Jews around the world today. This makes me feel like a part of a community. There are many ways of celebrating these holidays and part of the fun of celebrating is seeing how other people do it.

My mom went to a secular Jewish school - a Shula - when she was my age. It was during the Civil Rights movement and she had one Seder dedicated to Martin Luther King. Mom learned Yiddish at her school along with history, literature, singing, dancing, and art. It was a very nice school, and mom wanted me to have a similar experience! For mom’s graduation, she only had to write two-paragraph essay. Hear that TWO!! Times have certainly changed.

My dad’s religious education was a little different. His family was part of a Reform congregation with a very charismatic rabbi. Dad went to religious school for many years, although he was never taught to read and speak Hebrew. He did learn a great deal about Jewish history and culture, which left a lasting impression on him. Dad was a Bar Mitzvah and he was confirmed as well. He even won an academic award. Dad’s views are a little more traditional than mom’s, and I know that we can be Jews in different ways.

My father’s great grandfather was a lay rabbi and a “healer”. He didn’t have a regular paying job; he tutored young boys for their Bar Mitzvahs. The community revered him as a real holy man. Mothers would bring their sick children to him and he would lay his hands on them to cure them. I think I can relate to the faith healer because he affected people’s lives on a spiritual level. He and dad’s other great great grandfather founded the synagogue in Yonkers. My dad’s grandfather, in reaction to all the intense piety, became an active member of the Ethical Culture Society. The Ethical Culture Society, like our congregation, emphasizes logic, reasoning, and ethics.

Education was always important to my mother's family and to me as well. My great grandmother, who was born in Russia did not go to school but was privately tutored. She read Shakespeare in Russian when she was a girl. I find this pretty incredible. All of my grandparents went to college – most of the men on the GI bill after World War II. My grandmother was a college math professor. It was something she always loved to do, although it wasn't easy being a woman in a "man's" field. My dad's father is a retired dentist and his wife, my nana, helped run his office. Two great aunts Lillian and Sylvia were schoolteachers.

Our next family value is caring for others, charity (Tz-dah-ka). My dad has worked for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York for twenty-five years. They are the nurses, therapists and home health aides who come to the home to take care of people. It was founded by Lillian Wald, a German Jew, on the lower East Side. VNS was really the only health care that poor immigrant women had when Lillian Wald started it. Mom, who is also a lawyer, represents a number of Jewish charities that do relief work all over the world.

At my school, Friends Seminary, we care a lot about charity. We worked all day last spring cleaning up East River Park – pulling out weeds from the cobblestones was no easy thing. We do a lot of clothing and bake drives. We donate clothes to whatever country or city needs the clothes the most. One Halloween, we collected money for Girls Learn International instead of UNICEF. It was for girls in India who could not go to school. They did not even have enough money for the village to build a school.

Personal responsibility (Ah-cha-ry-oot) is an important value to me. My mom and dad make a lot of decisions for me, but they try to explain why the decision was made. In this way, I can learn to make more and more decisions for myself. Right now, my mom lets me buy a lot of my own clothing, because I have my own style. But she'll stop me if she thinks I don't really need something, or if it doesn't fit right, or if it is just too expensive. She lets me choose my after school activities - like wearable art which I love. You get to make whatever you want out of any material available at the school. The only rule my mom has is not to quit. Even though I may not like an activity, I will see it through to the end, although I am never asked to do it again! This is taking personal responsibility.

Friendship (Cha-vey-root) is an important value to me. To be a good friend you have to be caring and truthful. I have a lot of friends. I have a whole bunch of friends at school, and a whole bunch of friends at the City Congregation KidSchool. A friend is a good person to talk to about your feelings or if you are having a bad day. Both my mom and dad still have friends from their childhoods. Mom's Shula friend married mom's cousin and mom keeps in close touch with another Shula friend who lives in Miami. It's a lot easier now with e-mail! Dad has many friends from his Yonkers days. They also live all over the country. What mom tells me is that she feels closest with some of her oldest friends because they grew up together and really share the same values. My great aunt Lillian told me that she still sees her childhood friends, the "Twins"!

Another one of our values is hard work (A-vo-dah ka-shey). I think hard work is important because it shows that you can achieve many special things. It also shows yourself that you can overcome a lot of obstacles in life. Life has a lot of challenges, which you can overcome if you work hard. My great grandfather Phillip Beresin was a carpenter in Russia. He came here after the First World War and owned a woodworking factory. He used to make elaborate spiral staircases and his work was so precise that everyone used to call him "Doc Beresin". My great uncle Lou owned a lumber mill and my great great grandfather Joe Blum owned a cap factory, and my great uncle Hal designed our kitchen. My grandpa Max owned a company that insulated houses and he said the he was one of the first people in the building trades on Long Island that hired African Americans.

My mentor Lauren Block thought I should talk about horseback riding because I work hard at it and it can be scary sometimes if your horse is green. At camp last summer, I rode for four hours a day and had to clean out the stables. I love horses and I love taking care of them. So to me it does not feel like hard work – it’s fun – and as I told my mom I’m not sure “fun” is a Jewish Value, but risk taking (L'kee-khat see-koo-neem) might be. ☺

Lots of things will change as I grow up, but I think my values - friendship, education, charity, hard work and personal responsibility - won't.