



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Alanna Olken
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Values to me are like a guideline to life. Whether I am in school, at home, or on the lacrosse field, I rely on my values. And this Bat Mitzvah process has helped me develop a well-prioritized value system; it's easy to make good decisions and choices, and to be the best person possible.

This is not by coincidence. I'm part of a large family with strong and significant values that I naturally aim to follow. I guess you could say I have a lot in common with my family.

My most important value, the value that I couldn't live without, is the value of **family**, *mishpacha*, which always comes first with me. You don't get to pick and choose your family, so you learn to love them, and that **love**, *ahava*, grows increasingly every day. My family love is different than other love because I know they love me unconditionally and are always there for me, both emotionally and physically.

I have been truly lucky to have most of my family live nearby. This aspect of our relationship reinforces our closeness. We might stop by each others' apartments to use the bathrooms, pull out a loose tooth, share a spontaneous dinner or just to visit. Holidays and family vacations are frequently shared with aunts, uncles, and cousins. This summer I was fortunate to spend sixteen wonderful days with my grandparents in Europe.

My great-grandmother Nana Anne used to say, “I'd moider (murder) for my family.” Although I wouldn't go quite that far, my family stands as my most important value. We remain warm, loving, devoted and loyal to one another.

Another value that is equally important to me is **trust**, *emunah*. When people trust one another, comfortable relationships are easily formed. I am always told that if the bond of trust is lost, privileges, belief and confidence is lost as well. This value of trust is especially significant to my dad. Raised in a single parent household, he and his siblings, my Aunt Faith, Uncle Dave, and Aunt Sandy, formed trusting relationships and learned how to cooperate with each other to make life easier. Since my dad's most important value is trust, it has certainly rubbed off on me. I try to live honestly, trusting and trustworthy.

The next value, **humor**, *humor*, is not merely a way to feel light-hearted and happy, it is also a powerful coping mechanism. For example, I learned that my Poppy Bill used humor as an ice-breaker when he met someone new. He could always be counted on to give people a laugh or share a dirty joke. When his friends were sick and homebound, he would call them daily with a joke.

Humor is a way to see the positive side of situations and to not dwell on the negative. It is said that people laugh to avoid discomfort. I think that is true but people also laugh because it just feels good.

When Poppy Bill died at 93, our family mourned and felt sad, but in order to celebrate his life, we told funny stories about him; how we played with his double chin, and his silly songs he invented and strummed on his infamous ukulele. It became obvious to me that we were using humor to cope with our loss. Humor has the power to sooth and help us view life with optimism.

I've also learned that trust and humor go hand and hand. For instance, when people share a trusting relationship, they tend to be more open and more humorous with each other. When people don't trust each other they act exactly the opposite, cautious and timid.

The value of **charity**, *tzedakah*, has had a large impact on me since my family has a long history of altruism and generosity. My grandparents, Dotsy and Buddy, are founders of Parker Jewish Geriatric Institute, a rehabilitation and health care facility for the elderly. My aunts, uncles, and parents are also committed to tzedakah.

In addition to my family being charitable, they are also dedicated to **social action**. My paternal great grandfather Paul was involved in the garment worker's union that fought for the rights of oppressed sweatshop laborers.

Community service, *heetnadvoot* is equally as important a value as charity. I believe that I am held responsible to do community service as a young and capable teen and I take that responsibility seriously. I'll talk more about that later.

As a practicing social worker and therapist, my mom's contributions through community service are numerous. While still in college she volunteered for a suicide hotline. She currently participates in **Project Liberty**, which provides counseling and therapy to individuals needing support from the events of 9/11.

My dad serves as a trustee of the Associate Board of Parker, an organization dedicated to participating in events that improve the quality of life for geriatric patients.

And my brother Hank already understands the value of community service, collecting donations for Leukemia, Breast Cancer and AIDS research through lemonade stands.

Evidently, my family has a long history and tradition of community service, and I too realize how important it is to help other less fortunate than I am.

The similar value of **community**, *kehilla*, also stands out because I learned through family interviews that my ancestors were community-minded.

My maternal great-great grandparents started a restaurant in England that became the community center for soldiers from the Russian Front to mingle. My maternal great-grandparents started a temple in Bayside, Queens and were life-long members. My other maternal great-grandparents started a community music school where they employed wives of soldiers in World War II.

My paternal grandparents were also extremely involved in their community. My grandfather, Aaron, literally built the *succah* and my grandmother, Selma, was president of her Hadassah chapter and was a lifelong Woman of Valor.

Overall, my own unique and well-structured value system is something that was imprinted early within me and as I grow older, I'm sure I'll acquire new values.

In addition, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that not only do I have similar values to my family, but for the most part my priorities are similar to my family as well. Also, I realized that my father's side and my mother's side shared the same values as well.