



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Alex Rawitz
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I define ‘values’ as the ideals an individual or group believes in and wants everyone to work toward. We try to act keeping these principles in our minds and our hearts. We do this because it is what we have been taught and what we hope to teach someday. Here are some of my family’s values.

The first value is perseverance, **haht-mah-dah**. Both sides of my family came from humble backgrounds. My mother’s side were Irish peasants, my father’s side were Russian peasants. Both sides came to America because it was and still is the land of hope and opportunity. But my family understands that to succeed, it is necessary to work hard and persevere. My mother, who is in the film business, told me this story about persevering. In 1989, she was a Line Producer on a documentary about the life of famous music producer Quincy Jones. She had to film Quincy Jones in Mexico, which involved a commercial flight from New York to Los Angeles, and then two flights to the Southwestern coast of Mexico. It was necessary to transport all the camera, lighting, and sound equipment on these planes and to be ready for anything that happens when you follow a celebrity around for a week. However, there had been a misunderstanding between my mother and the equipment rental house. Late in the afternoon the day before the early morning flight, all the equipment was delivered to her office. The gear was packed in two huge wooden freight containers that would not be allowed on the planes. She ran to a luggage store and bought thirty padded duffle bags and packed everything so that nothing would break. When she was done, there were 100 pieces of luggage. Eighteen hours and three plane rides later, every piece of equipment except for one small screw for a lighting pole, reached its destination.

My father told me about how once when he was around ten years old; he and his family were eating dinner at a Chinese restaurant. Upon leaving, my Dad realized his retainer was missing. When they went back to the restaurant, he ran into a problem: the kitchen staff only spoke Spanish. The Chinese hostess explained to them in Spanish that they had accidentally thrown out my father’s retainer. Thus commenced the long part of the evening when my father’s parents dug through the trash outside the restaurant to find the retainer. My parents really nag me about this: if you make a mistake, it’s okay as long as you work your hardest to correct it (or have your parents do it).

Sometimes it is hard work to act with your values in mind. Honesty, **keh-noot**, is a tricky value to uphold *all* the time. Being honest is important in two ways: being honest to others and honest to ourselves. Honesty can be simply telling the truth, and for something so simple, it can get really complicated. Sometimes this is because the truth can hurt someone or because the truth can be embarrassing.

Once, my mother was at the big, crowded gym complex at Fairfield University with her family. She wanted to go in the Jacuzzi, but the jets were off. My mother did not have her glasses on, but she managed to see a large white lever near the tub. When she asked my Aunt Tina if it was the lever to turn on the Jacuzzi, Tina, only half-looking, said she thought so. My mother pulled the lever. It was the fire alarm. Hundreds of people were evacuated from all over the gym. My mother knew she had to tell the pool manager. Other people might have let it go, but not my mother. My parents have always taught me to do the right thing, even if it makes you look like an idiot.

It takes courage to admit mistakes (believe me, I know). Courage, **o-metz-lev**, can be doing what you feel is right, even if it goes against what society says. My maternal great-Grandmother had courage, even though some questioned and judged her. Back in 1915, the infant mortality rate was much higher, and the tragedy of babies dying was a relatively common thing. I had a grand uncle, Milton, who died when he was just two days old. My Great Grandmother, Mary Barry, was Catholic, and she raised her seven other children in the church. Milton, because he lived only two days, was not baptized. Mary's priest told her that Milton would spend eternity in purgatory. The unfairness of this idea so upset her, she left the church. Two years later, when she gave birth to my Grandfather Ted, she refused to raise him Catholic, even though everyone else around her was devout. It takes courage to stand up for what you believe in, especially when everyone else is against you.

Standing up for your beliefs and equal rights, **dibur b'kol ram**, is something both sides of my family have shown me. My Great Grand-Uncle Charles C. Moskowitz, was a very skilled basketball player. In 1913, he transferred from the City College of New York to New York University. He was invited to join a fraternity at NYU due to his athletic prowess. However, when he asked if several of his close Jewish friends could join, his request was denied. When he brought this up with his friends, they decided to form Alpha Epsilon Pi, known commonly as A E Pi, to be a fraternity for Jews. Today, A E Pi is the thirteenth largest fraternity in the United States and the largest in Canada. Its more famous alumni include CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, Jerry Lewis, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, and Gene Wilder. I'm proud of my Uncle Charlie - he worked for the right of everyone, no matter their race or color or creed, to get drunk and pull pranks. Of course, he also went on to become the president and treasurer of MGM Studios.

My next value is education, **chee-nuch**. My grandfather Irwin, never graduated from college because he had to work to support his family. I've been told one of the proudest days of Irwin's life was when my father received a law degree from Cornell University. He was even prouder when my dad got his first job with a respectable law firm.

Just like today, when my parents encourage me - I use that as a polite word - to work hard in school, Irwin wanted his son to know more and go farther than he did. This drive to learn comes from both sides of the family, as my other grandfather, Ted, started the Connecticut Community College system, because he wanted poor and working-class people to be able to have the opportunities that come only from a college education.

With a proper education, people can go on to do great things and better themselves, their families, their communities, and the world. This means improving the world, **tikkun olam**. Not only did Ted and Irwin try to do this, but my parents do this as well, by donating to charity and participating in anti-war and political protests. My father became a lawyer to help people, and my mother became a filmmaker so that she could teach people. I uphold this value today by doing community service such as tutoring children, which you'll hear more about later.

Bettering the world can be done with humor, **who-more**, and is almost as powerful a force as love to make people happy. Before my grandfather Ted died, he had been in failing health for a while. Once, my Aunt Tina took him to the doctor and was asked to name what he was suffering from. She listed congestive heart failure, diabetes, kidney failure – she went on and on. Ted looked at her and said, "Well, aren't you the cheery one!"

Both sides of my family showed great care and love during Ted and Irwin's final days. The difference between unhappy and happy final days is often the love of the people near you. And if love can ease a dying man's pain, it deserves to be my last, but certainly not least important, value. Love, **ahava**, is the glue that holds families together, because if a family does not have love, it falls apart. This happened in my mother's family, and now my parents are adamant about making a love-filled environment for me. How do they do this? About twice a month between October and March, my parents enjoy a certain kind of hell. Often getting up very early in the cold, cold morning, they shuttle me across frozen, depressing landscapes to get to an overheated, off-smelling, uncomfortable mini-arena, enduring hours upon hours of mind numbing boringness to watch me swim for approximately sixty seconds. Yes, my parents attend all my swim meets. There are, of course, only two explanations: they don't have anything better to do (and don't worry, they're not that depressing), or they love me enough to put up with this. And even though I repeatedly tell them that they don't have to put up with it anymore, they do because they want to see my stroke get better. Which is, undoubtedly, some kind of love.

It is not my job to say which of these values is the most important, for they are all equal. These values are special things, belonging to my family. They have been taught in my family for generations and I hope they will be as important 100 years from now as they were 100 years ago.