



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Family Values”  
by Ben Farber  
May 12, 2007**

From interviewing my family members, I have learned a lot about my family’s values. I notice that some values stay the same from generation to generation, while others change over time or become more important in a new generation. Some of the values that my grandparents’ families had and that they taught US were: courage, hard work, the importance of family, and keeping your culture.

The most important value that is illustrated by my grandparents’ stories is courage, in Hebrew *ometz lev*. Both my grandparents were from Hungarian families in the same town in western Romania, or Transylvania, called Timisoara. Both families had to leave their homes, everything they had, and everyone they knew.

My grandfather’s family stayed in Romania during the Nazi occupation. They were never sent to a concentration camp, unlike some people they knew. 50 miles to the north of Timisoara, in Hungary, all the Jews were taken away to the concentration camps. In Timisoara, the rail cars were already parked in the station waiting to take the Jews, but the Jewish community could bribe the Romanian government and so they delayed the deportations, and then the war ended.

Then the Russians came and saved the town from the Nazis. When they came, they took over all the private property, including the paint factory that my grandfather’s father, Eugene, owned and where he worked. One morning, Eugene went to work, and there was a guard at the door saying “you can’t come in”. He accused Eugene of “stealing money from the people,” and so he was sent to jail. In jail, he was beaten up and whacked on the soles of his feet, and he suffered a heart problem that he never recovered from.

Before his trial, he was released from jail, and grandpa’s mother, Baby, helped him escape from the country by hiding him under a wagon load of hay and asking farmers to take him over the border, to Hungary, at night. Then grandpa, his sister Judy, and their mother, left a few weeks later and walked over the border, illegally, at night. My Grandpa was twenty-two at the time. All he brought with him was two notebooks with the formulas for paints in them.

Then my Grandpa went to live in Israel, and worked on a kibbutz, as a chemist. While he was there, he met Bosci, who was my grandma’s aunt. She suggested that my Grandpa should meet my Grandma, who by then lived in the U.S. When Grandpa later came to New York, he met Grandma and her family, and they got married in 1953.

Grandma’s family was also courageous. She and her parents Nanny and Leslie, went from Romania to Nicaragua in 1938, when she was 2. They didn’t know anybody, and they had to start over. Grandma went to Catholic school and the nuns said she would burn in hell because she wasn’t Catholic. They made her stand in the corner while they were saying the morning prayer. The other kids made fun of her because she wasn’t like them, and said she had a big nose because she was a Jew. She wanted to blend in and be like the other kids. It took courage for her to go to that school and be different.

Then Grandma and her family moved to New York when she was eleven, and started all over a second time. She knew a little bit of English because she learned it in school, but her main language was Spanish, and she also understood Hungarian and some German.

It took a huge amount of courage for my family to escape Europe. It must have been very scary to have to go through what both my grandparents went through, with people who wanted to kill them, first because they were Jewish, then because they were property owners, and then because they were trying to escape. From when both of my grandparents were little kids, they had to face oppression and people not liking them because of who they were, and it took courage to last through it all. By taking a big risk that could have gotten them killed, they made themselves safer in the long run. They all stuck together, and helped each other, and it must have been very scary. It makes me proud to know that I have a family that would do such daring things to protect themselves and the future generations.

Hard work, *avodah*, is the second value that my grandparents' stories illustrate. Without hard work, our family would not have comfortable lives, safe homes, and good education. My grandparents had to work hard to be successful when they came to a new country and had to start over. Grandpa started his own company and built it up through hard work into something big. In the 1990's, he was able to buy his father's factory back from the government in Romania because the dictator, Ceausescu, was overthrown, and people could own property again. This shows that he had tremendous respect for his father, who had died in the 1950's. It was revenge in a good sort of way – it was making things right. He wanted to keep the factory in the family.

My mom always tells me that I have to do the best I can in everything, and that it will pay off in the end. People have many talents and abilities but without hard work they might not develop enough. It might not seem rewarding while you're doing it, but at the end you can step back and be proud of yourself. An example of hard work in my experience is researching and writing these papers. I have been working on them since February 2006, with a seemingly endless amount of corrections and edits.

The third value is family, *mishpachah*. Family is important, because you always have someone to look out for you when you need support. When Grandpa, his sister, Judy, and his mother, Baby, were going to flee from their home in Romania, they could have let my Great-Grandfather stay in prison. But they rescued him and they all escaped together. In my generation, even though we don't have to overcome the same hardships, my cousins, Zack, Nick and Shane, and I are close.

The fourth value is keeping and honoring your culture, *kee-bood ha-y'roo shah*. As far back as anyone can remember, everyone in the family was a secular Jew. They thought it was important to preserve the culture and history of Jews, but they were not religious. When Grandpa was a teenager, he wanted to be religious but his parents didn't want him to – they said he was being “too Jewish.” He wanted to show that he was Jewish because he didn't want to be intimidated by the Nazis. The Nazis made the Jews go to special schools and the Romanians beat them up and spit at them in the streets. Those incidents made him want to be Jewish even more. Now, Grandpa and Grandma are secular Jews, and in fact they are members of The City Congregation.

My Mom has not been faced with the kinds of challenges that my grandparents had, but she also values keeping your culture, courage, hard work and family. She was the co-President of The City Congregation and is still on the Board because she thinks it is important to preserve and teach about Jewish culture and values. That is partly because she knows what her parents went through. Other important values for her are social justice, *tze-dek*, and equality, *shiv-yon*. She believes that everybody should have equal opportunities no matter what their circumstances are. Because she values these things, she was a Legal Aid lawyer for many years and helped low-income people keep their homes when they were being evicted.

Mom's partner, Cynthia, keeps her culture and her religion. She identifies as an Episcopalian, and occasionally goes to church. She also values education, *chee-nuch*, and diversity, *rav-go-nee-yote*, and works as a director of multicultural affairs in a school because she thinks it is important to help everyone learn together. Another value for her is optimism and hope, *tik-vah*, or looking on the bright side. This is because her mother grew up in segregated Washington D.C., and had to sit at the back of the bus or in the balcony at movie theaters. Cynthia was taught to believe that the future would be better.

Some values that Mom and I share include giving your time and money to people who need it, *tzedakah*, and concern for animals, *tza-ar ba-ah-ley hy-eem*. Giving charity was a value in earlier generations in my family. My great grandparents, Nanny and Leslie, donated money and art works frequently to various organizations. It makes me feel really good to give charity, and do community service. Every year, Mom, Cynthia and I donate some farm animals to people who need them through an organization called Heifer International. I will talk more about that later.

The reason why we choose to donate animals is because we really like farm animals and we know how important they are. Our family has a farm in upstate New York and Mom and her sisters and brother grew up going up there with their family as often as they could, and working on the farm. Now my cousins and I and our entire family go there and get together. And my Aunt Debby has a smaller farm on Martha's Vineyard, which she runs with my Uncle Al. I love going there. I feed the animals, brush them, play with them, take care of them and collect the eggs from the chicken coops.

I have had many pets, including my orange feline wrecking ball, Busky. My Uncle Michael is a veterinarian, and I admire his work. Although I do not like to be around sick animals, because it makes me scared, I have lots of respect for my uncle, because he saves lives of animals.

My personal values include music, humor, sportsmanship, and friendship. Music, *musika*, is extremely important to me. I play the drums, and I like to perform with other kids. I like lots of different kinds of music. My Aunt Dia works at Sony Music and she gives me CDs. I used to like classical music when I was really little, and I was fascinated by all the instruments in the orchestra.

Humor, *hoo-mor*, makes me happy and makes me forget about my problems. There are many comedians whom I admire. Humor is a Jewish value because when people experience hatred or prejudice, humor is a way to be happy for a short time. This is probably also one of the reasons why there are also a lot of Black humorists.

Sportsmanship, *mees-hock*, which literally translates into fair play, means the ability to accept victory OR defeat with dignity. Everybody knows that you can't be a sore loser, and you can't get all upset after you lose. But in addition to accepting loss with dignity, you have to be able to accept victory with dignity, which means not going crazy and rubbing it in the other person's face and bragging. You can be happy but you shouldn't make an excessive show out of it.

The last value that I'll mention is friendship, *chaveyrut*. I have many friends, and I do not know where I would be without them. Having a friend makes me feel liked and accepted, and really happy to have someone who shares my interests. It makes me feel important when a friend asks me for advice. When a friend is having a problem, I try to help him or her. When I have a problem I go to a friend who understands and has something to say about it.

I have learned a lot about my family and about myself from interviewing my family members and writing this paper. The shared values that I have talked about are important because they are part of what helps us keep our identity and our culture, and makes us feel like a family. My personal values help define me as an individual.