



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Heroes and Role Models:
Jill Abusch”**

**by Emily Dyke
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A role model is defined as a person whose behaviors serve as a good example to others and whom other people might try to emulate. A hero is someone who is admired for amazing qualities or outstanding achievements. To my way of thinking, a role model is someone whose life or actions are inspiring to another person in a realistic way. The person who is inspired is likely to try to follow the role model's example. A hero is someone who many people may wish they could be like, but whose accomplishments are often too extreme or fantastic to follow.

Although a person may have flaws or make mistakes he or she can still be a role model. Flaws can often teach lessons or enhance the uniqueness of a person. In fact, having made mistakes or having a few flaws is important to me when thinking about my role model. It is not the flaws themselves that inspire me, but rather the ability to overcome them or work with them that I admire. Being able to eliminate or even embrace one's own flaws is an amazing capability. I also embrace flaws in another person because they make a person more 'real' to me. Heroes can sometimes appear to be perfect because of their seeming flawlessness. It seems fake and unrealistic that a person would not have flaws. For me, a role model would be a person I could relate to, not just admire. For this reason, I have chosen a role model rather than a hero and someone whose characteristics and values are possible for me to emulate. Because I share many of my parents' values, it is not surprising that our heroes/role models have similar traits and values as each other's.

My mother's hero was a woman named Bertha Pappenheim who lived during the 1800's. She became mute in her life and was diagnosed with a disorder known at the time as hysteria. She was treated by a psychoanalyst named Breuer. Eventually, due to the complicated nature of their work and relationship, Breuer abruptly stopped his treatment with Bertha. Having been "abandoned" by her analyst, Bertha deteriorated psychologically and was hospitalized. Eventually she recovered and became involved with the women's movement of the time. She was an early feminist and became a prominent feminist social worker, intellectual and organizer. Some of her accomplishments include directing an orphanage for girls, founding a feminist organization for Jewish women, and campaigning all over Europe against the sexual exploitation of women and children. My mother chose her as a hero because of her resilience, strength of character, ability to overcome incredible adversity, and her capacity to use her painful experiences as motivation to help others who were oppressed and powerless. She was a remarkable woman who shares the values of generosity of spirit and open arms with my role model.

My father's role model is his dad, John Rand Dyke. He died in 1981 at the age of 64. I wish I could have known him. He sounds like an amazing man and I'm sure he would be a great grandfather. My father, Jeff, was 22 when he passed away. He has held on to the values and lessons his father taught him ever since. Papa John had tremendous integrity, intelligence, and authenticity which are a few of the qualities that my father strives for. He taught my dad many things such as modesty, humility, and the

value of education and passion above the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. My dad's dad was a very down-to-earth man and, though he was well to do, he was humble and attracted to a simple lifestyle connected to nature and non-elitism. Most, if not all, of his friends were down to earth, genuine people who were chosen on the basis of their personalities, not their social status. Though Papa John was open to befriending everyone, he still believed that you should not suffer fools, meaning that if someone has nothing of value to offer, you should not waste your time associating with him. Papa John was an inspiring, good-hearted man. Based on my father's description of his personality and belief system, I believe he shares the values of friendship and authenticity with my role model.

Jill Abusch is my role model. She is one of the owners of the acting program that I attend called the Play Group Theatre (PGT). She was born in 1971 in Brooklyn to a couple named Burt and Sheila Lipshie. According to Jill, Burt is generous, expressive, charming and sentimental. He also enjoys acting and has been involved with theater. Sheila is quieter than Burt but just as generous. She is outdoorsy, sporty, supportive, loving, and affectionate. Both of Jill's parents are intelligent. Jill lived in Brooklyn for her first six months, and then moved to Long Island. She never really dreamed of being an actress or having a job relating to it, but once she experienced acting she realized that she loved it. After high school she attended Tisch College, a school at NYU devoted to the arts. Jill also studied at the Stella Adler conservatory and classical studio. When she completed her training at Tisch, she moved to White Plains with her boyfriend, Steven, whom she eventually married. They moved there because it was close to Jill's parents and to New York City. It was in 1995 that they started the Play Group Theatre, a training program for children from the ages of 7 to 18. About a year after they opened PGT, they had their first child, Aviva. Five years after that they had another daughter, Ilana. Jill and Steven still run the Play Group Theatre and enjoy directing and helping out with all of the plays and productions. Jill is happy to be doing what she's doing and hopes her life continues just as it is in the future.

One of the reasons people choose the role models that they do is because of the values that they share with that person. Jill's life choices embody many of my values. She exemplifies authenticity, friendship, humor, empathy and compassion, and passionate commitment. Regarding authenticity, she is an honest person though she is always kind and polite at the same time. If I can improve on something having to do with acting, I can always count on her to tell me so and help me progress. If I need advice from her I know that she will tell me, truthfully, what her opinion is. For example, whenever I need help with character development, or a song, or a scene, she is always there to give me feedback, both positive and negative.

One of Jill's values is love of others. She emanates love. This enables her to establish many friendships. She relates well to teens and children as well as to other adults. Therefore, she has friendships with many different people across all ages. She is one of the greatest friends because she is so trustworthy, loving, and helpful. She can always make you feel better when you're feeling bad. And she is amazingly generous of spirit. No matter how busy she is she is always willing to give a friend some time and is always welcoming.

Jill epitomizes empathy and compassion in her ability to help others. She always listens to you and finds a way to make you feel better, whether it be by using humor or relating something in her life to you. Humor is another value that Jill exhibits. Before callbacks she says: "The funnier you are, the more we like you." She loves telling jokes and she appreciates witty people.

A quality of hers that I value is how open she is. Her home is an open space where friends and family are welcome at any time, and usually all the time. Jill exemplifies passionate commitment in her career choices. What she loves is reflected by how she spends her time, both personally and professionally.

One reason I admire Jill is because she is not perfect, I mean in a flawless sort of way. The “perfect” person to me has flaws. Jill may have flaws, as we all do, but she accepts them and likes herself; therefore she is able to embrace and accept other people for who they are as well. She creates a safe place where others can be themselves and take risks. She teaches them to understand that it’s okay if they make mistakes and that, in fact, mistakes help us grow and improve.

I have known Jill since I started Play Group Theater when I was seven years old. Jill is one of the people who has changed my life. She has helped me grow and improve as a person and an actress. Though the Play Group Theater is really intended to teach children acting skills, I also learned how to be a good friend and human being there. I have also learned about respecting, learning from, and befriending others, no matter how young or old they are. Jill, and Steven, create a comfortable place where everyone is kind, understanding, and never judgmental. The Play Group Theater is one of the few places that feel like home to me. I have never not been in the mood to go to rehearsal. We work hard but somehow it always feels very casual and easy. It is not only me who Jill has had an impact on, I believe everyone at PGT feels this way about her. She, and her family, have created another very close family at PGT. Jill really is an extraordinary woman.