



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Heroes and Role Models:
Remedy, Rebecca Reynolds, and John Beltzer”
by Jason Cheskis
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A hero is someone who makes life better for others through great achievements. They can be noble or courageous, but don't have to be. I view a hero's accomplishments to be more than what an average person would choose to do. Most people could be heroes if they put their laziness aside for a while. Being a hero is more related to effort than talent. Somebody who founds a school for the deaf or someone who puts out a major fire could be considered a hero.

A role model is someone who is looked up to, idolized, or someone you want to be like. You don't have to idolize someone to have them be your role model. Even if they have negative qualities, they can still be role models. If their positive qualities outweigh the negative ones, the person can be a role model. I believe that if someone inspires someone else to live a certain way, that person can be considered a role model. The person can, but does not have to be, famous.

My personal criteria for a role model are the following: Hope. You have to believe that you can make a difference. Humor. Everybody loves humor and it's important for people to have some fun in their lives. Music. Music relaxes people, slows down their lives, and helps them experience pleasure and beauty. It is a big part of my life, both playing it and listening to it. Respect. This quality is necessary for any successful interaction of any kind between people and even between people and animals. Love. Without love the human race would die. It is a basic requirement for life.

My first role model is Remedy, a Jewish rapper. My second role model is Rebecca Reynolds, a woman who goes to hospitals and other institutions with natural objects and animals. Last is John Beltzer, who is the founder of Songs of Love. He writes songs for kids who are very sick.

Remedy, the well-known Jewish rapper, is my role model because he is someone who cares about being Jewish. Also, I like rappers, and a Jewish one thrills me. Ross Filler was born in 1972 on Staten Island. His Hebrew name is Rueven ben Menachum. His parents had no idea he would become a well-known rapper.

When Ross got older, he went to New Dorp High, an interracial school. The main things everyone liked were football and rap. Ross went to school with a group of kids who would eventually become the Wu-Tang Clan, a famous American rap group.

Ross once said, “I used to talk to the plants when I was a young boy, and the plants would grow real fast, so I realized it must be something I'm saying. And then I couldn't really sing too well, but I had a good way of formulating my words together, so I just became an MC and started rapping.” After the group of kids from high school formed the Wu-Tang Clan, Ross became part of it, and his rap name became Remedy, also known as Remedy Ross.

Remedy wrote a song called Never Again. It's about the Holocaust and what happened to his ancestors. Before his 95 year old grandmother died, she revealed to him what happened to his relatives who died in the Holocaust. For example, his great uncle was shot in the back, and many other relatives were sent to camps, and didn't survive. He wrote this song to memorialize them. The song has very vivid descriptions about what people went through. Remedy puts it on all of his albums. After writing Never Again, he became more interested in Judaism. He explored Jewish culture, and loves singing about it. He feels proud to be Jewish.

Remedy is a courageous person, and is willing to express his feelings about Judaism. Some people don't think the Holocaust is something to be rapped about, because it is too serious a subject. By rapping about the Holocaust, he is educating people, kids especially, who might have never heard about it. For example, African-American kids, who listen to a lot of rap, are taught about slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, but might not have been taught about the Holocaust. Because Remedy is a successful rapper, a lot of African-American kids now know about the Holocaust.

By listening to Remedy's songs, people learn about discrimination. Hearing about the Holocaust and discrimination will help prevent it from ever happening again.

Remedy's view of himself is consistent with Humanistic Judaism. He thinks of humanity before Judaism. He says, "I'm here to spread the word—humanity. I happen to be Jewish, but I represent humanity."

He spreads the idea of humanity by going to college campuses and performing to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment. He's performed in Moscow, visited schools in New York City, and performed at a Holocaust survivors' dinner in Los Angeles.

Remedy's life and work represent many Jewish values. His actions are courageous, loving, caring, compassionate, musical, peaceful, respectful and truthful.

My second role model is Rebecca Reynolds. She runs an organization called Animals as Intermediaries (AAI). AAI goes to hospitals and other closed care institutions with animals, plants and other natural objects. She has programs for people of all ages and disabilities. According to Rebecca, "Animals As Intermediaries grew out of the belief that we are all connected through nature, that this connection can restore a sense of wholeness and a sense of place, and that this connection is both elemental and essential. Having knowledge of the natural cycles and seasons can give us the context we need to come through difficulty." Now I will tell you some stories describing Rebecca's visits.

One place she went to is an AIDS Chronic Care facility for young children. She brought autumn with her. To do this, she brought pumpkins, hollow logs, grapevines, ducks and rabbits. The children built an autumn meadow with the materials and played with the animals and other objects. Even though the children were very sick and didn't have long futures ahead of them, the objects from nature and the animals brought them joy, and stimulated their curiosity. Their lives in the hospital were boring and often unpleasant, and the visit, bringing nature to them, allowed them to experience something they never would have been able to otherwise.

Another visit was to a hospital school. Rebecca brought two animals with her, Willie the old chinchilla, and Otis the screech owl with a permanent wing injury. There are two boys, Ben and Jay, who are interested. Because Otis had a permanent wing injury, Ben could especially relate to the owl. He was born with Cerebral Palsy and used an electric wheelchair. Ben talked to Otis about what it's like to be hurt. Ben knew what it was like to have a "broken" body and comforted the owl.

Jay, who had a hook for a right hand and a left curved arm with no hand at all, played with Willie. Unlike many humans, Willie didn't mind the hook and snuggled on Jay's lap. Jay was happy to be with someone who didn't mind his hook and he had a lot of fun with Willie. Both boys, who experienced a lot of shame about their bodies, were able to accept themselves as the animals accepted them. The animals acted as a bridge to help the boys deal with their disabilities and feel good about themselves.

An example of an older person is Simon, an eighty year old man who was blind and nearly deaf. He didn't like talking to people at the nursing home because it was hard to converse with them. He disliked all the programs the hospital set up, feeling that his life was hopeless. He lived in "Simon's World." He wasn't interested in Rebecca's program, but when he felt a horse's harness that was being passed around, he started putting it together. He said "I'd know this anywhere! I don't need my eyes to tell you what this is—I used to drive the ice wagons in New York City!"

Suddenly, he started telling everyone his stories from when he was an ice wagon driver. Everyone listened as he talked. Then when he was done, everyone else started sharing their memories. A critical quality missing from Simon's life was a sense of community. He needed to have people to talk to, and Rebecca's harness helped that to happen. Her objects broadened "Simon's World" beyond the boundaries of the nursing home.

Rebecca helps kids face fears and conquer them. The objects she uses bring peace to the kids. She helps kids remember their pasts. I chose Rebecca as my role model because I love animals, and she does too. I feel happy when I hold one of my gerbils, or pet a dog. Animals can be very comforting, and I love being around them.

Some of Rebecca's values are compassion, love, peace, respect, and care. She certainly does deeds of loving kindness. She helps sick kids feel better about themselves. Maybe someday I'll help sick people with animals, like Rebecca.

My third role model is John Beltzer, a musician. I had a chance to speak to him and he answered many of my questions about his work. He was born in Brazil. In 1984 his twin brother wrote a song called Songs of Love. A few weeks later, the brother died. While walking down the street in 1996, John had a brilliant idea. He thought of his brother's song, and created the organization Songs of Love. He works with many other musicians to make personalized songs for very sick kids. He started off with some of his friends, and was eventually interviewed on TV, and other musicians who saw him or read about him started to volunteer. So far, over 5,000 songs have been recorded.

When a child or young adult is very sick, family members or hospital staff can contact Songs of Love. They provide information about their sick relative or patient. It includes details about hobbies, favorite people, pets, friends, and family. Then, John gets a few artists together and they record a song about the person who is sick. It is sent to the person, and he/she gets to listen to it, and keep it.

Many people have received songs. They feel overjoyed, and love listening over and over again. Why would someone be so happy about a song? It means a lot. It shows that people care for him/her. It shows that many people went to a lot of effort to get the song made. In one of the stories I read, a girl who had leukemia cried every time she had a blood test or procedure, which was all the time. Once she received her song she listened to it during her procedures and stopped crying. Her parents were thrilled and felt very grateful to Songs of Love. John has been getting great feedback from parents and kids. Sometimes, parents will tell him the kid has been listening every day for a year!

A doctor from Harvard Medical School's Institute for Music and Brain Science said, "It's no coincidence that Apollo was the god of both music and medicine in Ancient Greece. Today, we have empirical evidence that music is often a useful adjunct in the treatment of numerous disease states, and we have angels from Songs of Love to bring music to suffering children and adults one-by-one."

When I interviewed John, he said that everyone would feel good to have a song written about them. The song can take kids' minds off of their pain. He said that it can lift their spirits, act as a distraction, and help them cope with the illness. Also, he says anything that encourages a good feeling helps the healing process. Being psychologically down hurts the healing process so encouraging optimism and hope is important.

I know someone in my school who got a song of love. I asked her some questions about her experience. She said that she loved the song, and it made her feel happy and proud. She said it was a very good description of her, and she plays it all the time with her family and friends.

John's values are music, love, respect, compassion, hope and care. Having talked to John and my schoolmate, I know a lot more about how music can be healing. I know how good I feel when I listen to music. It's a big part of my life. Now I might be able to create songs on my saxophone for kids too.

After telling you about my role models, you now know about three great people who care about others. I even got to speak with one of them! The values these people have are caring ones, and lead them to think of other people, not only themselves. I believe a lot of these values are important. I chose these people at first just because I like music and animals. Then I learned what great things can be accomplished with music and animals. I came to greatly respect the contributions my role models made to the world.