



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”  
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For my community service I did two different things. First, I went to work for three days at the International Center for Photography. At the ICP I helped with the early stages of an exhibition that is planned to mount images by the photographer Roman Vishniac. This community service was focused on supporting Jewish culture.

Roman Vishniac was a renowned Russian-American photographer who lived from the years 1897-1990. He won international acclaim for his pictures from the shtetl and Jewish ghettos, celebrity portraits and images of microscopic organisms. He is known for his book *A Vanished World* published in 1983. The Roman Vishniac Archive of more than three thousand prints was loaned to the ICP in 1992. I did two main activities at the ICP. I spent time listening to Roman Vishniac’s interviews and lectures; during this I was taking notes for ICP on what he was saying. I learned that Roman Vishniac was a very serious Zionist. Zionism is a Jewish political movement that originally supported the reestablishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. The other activity was to help digitize a massive collection of Vishniac photos. After a while some of the work began to get a bit tedious but overall it was an interesting experience.

To be honest, it is not easy to find work when you are twelve even when you are willing to work for free. However, the Roman Vishniac gallery ties into the work I was doing for my Bar Mitzvah in a couple of different ways. Working with these images gave me a chance to reflect on my family history. Many of my ancestors came from Jewish shtetls like the ones that Roman Vishniac photographed. In fact, the town where my great grandfather grew up, Piaseczno, is right next to Warsaw where Vishniac took many of his photos. When I looked at the pictures, I saw how hard life was for Jews and how much they struggled. I also saw their massive commitment to Judaism, spreading its teachings and following its rules. As you heard earlier my role models were Jan and Antonina Zabinski, and the people they were helping to escape were very similar to, if not the actual people, in the photos by Vishniac.

The other project I did was to deliver food to and “hang out” with the elderly right before Passover. I went to a ninety five year old woman’s house named Fannie. We delivered the food and spent about an hour talking with her and keeping her company. In doing this I was with a small group of other Bar Mitzvah students in my class.

I was scheduled to go to Fannie Bloom’s house, and I did not know what to expect. Was this going to be a cranky person who screeched every time you touched something or was this going to be someone who was accepting and welcomed you into his or her house? Luckily, for me, Fannie Bloom is a very nice woman who welcomed us with joy. After meeting her and talking for about an hour, I realized how lonely it could be for someone who has no family nearby and has been living alone for forty years. It is important for someone like Fannie to have a visitor come and talk with her and be nice to her even if it is only once a week.

Although both community services were important I think that the ICP experience gave me a greater sense of accomplishment. I spent more time and energy on it then the other project and there was a little bit more reward for me after it.

Overall, community service is a great thing to do. It's important to know who is suffering in your community and how you can help them. In both the Jewish tradition and the Buddhist tradition, it is important to be kind to your neighbor and your community. In this spirit I plan to donate some of my Bar Mitzvah gift money to an organization called Dorot. Dorot helps the lives of Jewish and other elderly in the greater New York metropolitan area through a partnership of volunteers, professionals, and elders.