



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Kyra Zimmerman
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To identify my family values and beliefs for this essay, I gathered ideas by talking and writing to my family to see how my relatives values may have impacted me. I would like to thank them for all their help and I feel very lucky to have so many family members to learn from. I ended up getting so much information that I ended up with a huge mound of ideas. It was like a challenging math problem. I had multiplied two fractions without cross canceling first. So I had to reduce the big fraction, or mound of ideas. Frankly, I couldn't figure out what to do. I decided to start with a completely blank slate. I choose four very important values, from all the helpful information I gathered. My essential values, the ones I live by, are: family, creative expression, education or learning, and compassion.

Family, *mishpacha*, is value # 1 on my list. My family is so important to me because my family is always there for me, and I will always be there for them. I put them first 99% of the time. They also value family, and support each other. I have two stories that show how my family supports each other. My grandpa Max's brother, Sol, was 17 when their father died. Sol assumed the responsibilities of being the wage earner and care taker for Great Grandma Ida, and Grandpa Max and Uncle Arthur who were just 7 and 10 years old at the time. Uncle Sol supported them all. This really demonstrated the importance of family to them. And, throughout their lives they always cared about each other, even though they lived miles apart. But the true sign of Uncle Sol's commitment to his family was that he did all this, even though Max and Arthur were only his half brothers. But did this stop him? No!! Great Uncle Sol was there for them completely as if they were fully related.

My second story is about my father's side of the family. Its about my paternal great grandfather's death, His name was Sol too. When Great Grandpa Sol died, my Grandpa David had just started college and hoped to eventually attend medical school. Great Grandpa Sol's death put this dream in danger. You see, Grandpa David's mother, Regina, did not have enough money to support her family, from her job in the tailor shop. Would Grandpa David have to quit college and get a full time job to support His family, like Great Uncle Sol? No!!! When Great Great Uncle Dave heard about Great Grandpa Sol's death, Uncle Dave summoned my Grandpa and Great Grandma Regina to his office. Uncle Dave, who owned some hotels, was the most financially successful person in the family. He said he would make sure that Regina would receive an envelope every month to help support her, so that Grandpa David could stay in college and pursue his dream of being the first doctor in the family.

Grandpa David's approach to medicine is like his approach to all things in life. He listens carefully, thinks hard, and finds creative solutions. He does not quickly resort to medications and surgery. His caring and thoughtful approach to medicine is his way of expressing himself, what I call creative expression, *ytzeerahteeoot*. When I first heard of this value, at my friend Liana's bat mitzvah, I was not sure it fit me. But once I thought about it, I realized it is a significant part of me. I love to express myself creatively, whether it's painting, dancing, writing, decorating, or singing. I think it's so important to be able to express yourself in creative ways, especially in the arts.

In my family history, there were many people who were involved with creative expression. I can trace it back to my Great Aunt Rachel. Though she died when I was too young to know her well, I can tell she was definitely a creative spirit, from the beads, necklaces, and antiques she had. My mother told me that Rachel was not only a jewelry maker but “a dancer before her time.” She broke every mold and flew high. There are even pictures of her leaping in the air while dancing. In a lot of ways, it reminds me of me! (maybe that’s where I get it from). But, the creative juices come from everywhere. My grandma Carla’s grandfather played trumpet in the NY Philharmonic, and her father played cello in an orchestra, and all my cousins Stu, Dana, and Carly seems to have that bug too.

I think if you don’t have creative expression in your life, you are not complete. It can take many forms, writing songs, singing, painting, building things, cooking, caring for children, and even sports. Sometimes creative expression is found within your family culture, such as my mother’s Sephardic background. Because my maternal great grandmother’s family was from the small Greek town of Ionnaina, we follow the tradition of cooking hard boiled eggs for hours in onion skin filled water so the turn golden brown. Also, we still use the Greek phrases, *kukla*, which means doll and *sagapo*, which means “I love you,” and dance a Greek folk dance called the *Misilou*. These and all forms of creative expression make you unique, and it can help you to be a better person by connecting you to others.

Education, *cheenuch*, my next value, is one of the biggest building blocks in life. It helps you exceed your limits as a person, and grow. Schoolwork is not always fun but it is important to exercise your brain. My parents have always stressed the importance of learning and education. They probably got this value from their parents. All 4 of my grandparents completed college. Grandpa David was the first in his family to go to college and then to get a medical degree. My grandmother, Nona, and Grandma Carla both got their degrees when my dad and mom were growing up. Quite a feat!! Watching their mothers in college and graduate school must have made a deep impression on each of my parents, which they have passed on to me. My parents have had such an influence on me about the importance of education, I have only missed five days of school my whole life!!! (I know that is crazy!!).

From the time I was three, I knew about prestigious schools that I called “Ivy Greens” instead of Ivy Leagues. Now everyone in my family, even Gabe, calls it that too. From a young age, I have watched my cousins Matthew, Jordan and Jesse attend great schools like Swarthmore, Haverford, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. My mother is thrilled when I talk about wanting to go to Brown or Yale. Gabe recently asked my mother if she dared him to get into MIT. She happily took the dare!!! Education is so deeply rooted in my blood, that I will automatically share its importance with my kids. You can reach so much farther in life, if you are educated. It is the truth!!!

I also believe that you can learn from being aware, beyond what you learn in school. People can learn from all experiences if they are thinking, and incorporate into their lives, all that they see, hear, feel and touch. My parents have encouraged learning in all different ways by choosing schools that do not focus on having the highest test scores, but ones that provide a diverse environment for me to learn in. They hoped that by gaining more than just “book smarts” I’d become a more compassionate, generous, person. And this happened. In my 4th and 5th grade class, one of my close friends was in foster care. He leads such a different life than me, but we were able to learn from each other. Maybe I shouldn’t be surprised that we became friends given that my parents work with foster care children every day at work.

The next value I would like to talk about is compassion, *rachamim*. When you are compassionate, you reach out and care about others. You are not just kind, you try to help people. When I think of someone in my family who is compassionate, I think of my paternal aunt, Sue. She is so compassionate, she does not just try to help people once in a while; she does it every day in the work she does. Sue is a teacher for children with special needs who are physically or emotionally challenged. Even at the toughest of times, with the most difficult kids, she tries hard to help in some way. She tells me stories in such detail and often they are very sad. One happy story was when some of the kids she worked with were taking the big city tests. In the middle of the test, one student called out and said “Mrs. Zimmerman, Mrs. Zimmerman, I know this!!” This made Aunt Sue smile, and it made ME smile too.

I try to be compassionate too. I try to always lend a helping hand. When I heard my dance teacher say that she was hoping to celebrate her 30th birthday in a quiet wooded area, I offered our family home in Otis, Massachusetts, without asking my parents, knowing they would agree, and they did. Their support helps me to know that they too believe being compassionate and generous are important. I listen to friends’ problems, give rides home to those in need, and give extra money for school trips to help those who can’t afford them. No wonder everyone loves me!! Just kidding, just kidding!

I am not just compassionate towards people but, like my aunt, I try to give a voice to those who don’t have a voice. I love animals and I think it’s important to care for them. I have been on a lifelong campaign, to get a dog!! For years, if something went wrong and I got upset, it would always, always go back to the fact that I didn’t have a dog!!

Another way I try and show my sensitivity is by being careful with the environment. I am concerned because people abuse it so much, and we cannot regain it. Cousin Karen Gruebel is involved in protecting the environment, through her work as a geologist. After getting her Ph.D she has used her education to better the world. I think if I got a dog, it would protect the environment and everything else.

Family, creative expression, education and compassion are my core values. But a core does not stand alone, it has other layers. These other layers are my other values: equality for all, honesty and flexibility, and the list goes on. You have heard references to many family members, and not too much about my own parents’ values. But I think that as you listen to this service, think of them. Their values and beliefs are reflected by my having this type of bat mitzvah service. This service demonstrates more who they are, and what they have passed on to me, than anything I could write or say.

We are made up of so much, from so many. And as we grow older, we can grow that much more. I have gotten so many things from my family and friends. This assignment has really helped me evaluate who I am now. And as I said in the beginning, who knew that for such an essay I might be doing math, especially reducing fractions.