



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Family Values”**  
**by Murray Rosenbaum**  
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Before I joined The City Congregation, or TCC for short, I didn't know much about Judaism. I didn't go to a synagogue or celebrate holidays in a Temple. The only thing I remember about our family and Judaism was my brother's Bar Mitzvah, which was in a more traditional congregation. So when I decided that I wanted a Bar Mitzvah I was looking for a different experience. TCC was perfect for my parents and me because Humanistic Judaism is just that, a human celebration of Judaism as opposed to a God centered observance.

For my Bar Mitzvah program, I wrote a series of papers, such as this examination of values, learning about my family's past on both my mother and father's side, and exploring my religious beliefs. I took the opportunity from the papers I had written, such as the family history paper, to explore my roots and learn about who I am and where I come from. I found that very fun and interesting. The purpose of this paper is to explore my values. While learning about my own values, I also saw the connections with older family members who had/have the same values. A person's values reflect the kind of person he or she is. Values are what help us make decisions in life; they help shape the kind of person one becomes. Values also define someone by their feelings and not just their physical appearance. Each set of values changes from person to person. Through this paper I learned that my family has many great values.

Music, or mooseeka, affects my life in many ways. Jazz makes me feel alive, while the blues make me feel sad and wondering why something happened that shouldn't have. Music is used all over the world for different purposes such as entertainment, religion, marriage, and for remembering a person after their death. Music is my favorite value. If I'm feeling sad or mad I turn on some jazz and just listen to some great improv from Louis Armstrong for a while. That always makes me feel better. When I marched for peace and nuclear disarmament in May of 2010, I felt like people were inspired and happy to see a twelve year-old coming out to play music that would have an impact on people's feelings and lives. While I was playing, some survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki came to me and either decorated my hat with origami, hugged me, or fanned me while I was marching. I was especially thankful for the fanning since it was ninety-five degrees that day! I felt that I had a connection to these people because they responded so strongly to my music. I felt like I made a difference that day.

Music has also been an important value in my family. Back in the 1950's when my grandfather, Alan, was in college and he and my Grandma Eileen were dating, they would go to the college football games together. Grandpa Alan would get excited, stand in the bleachers and play anything he could on his trumpet, the same trumpet I play today. He used music as an expression of happiness and joy. I wish I could have seen him play! I am just beginning my journey with music and it already has had a big impact on me.

Determination, Hecklehteyoot, is another value of mine. Because of my determination, I have started to shape my own life. It was my idea to clean off the cobwebs from Grandpa Alan's beat-up trumpet. My mom warned me away from touching it, "it's too dirty, gross, and it won't play," she cautioned. But I was determined and I played it immediately after cleaning it up. I had been in the school brass band playing the Cornet and Alto horn, so I had a pretty good idea that I could play this trumpet. But more importantly, it was calling to me from the shelf where my dad had placed it after Grandpa Alan died. I not only made it work, but I made real music come out of it! From there I was determined to keep playing and improve my musicianship. Since then I have played my trumpet in a march for peace, and I play improv with the people at jazz academy. What I have learned through this paper is that I am not the only determined person in my family. As I explored my family history on my mother's side, I learned about my great great great grandmother Fannie Crosswhite who fled from the Civil War in Tennessee on horseback when she was 14 years old. She must have been really scared, but she was determined to survive and she lived to marry my great great great grandfather Joseph Yoder 4 years later. I am here today because she had the determination to live to tell her tale and have a family.

Independence, atzmaoot, is one of my favorite values because at my age I enjoy having increasing independence. I have earned more independence. What if your parents were with you no matter where you went or made every decision for you? That would be very annoying to me because I wouldn't be able to make decisions for myself. Behaving independently allows me to feel more like an adult rather than a child. An example of how independence is important to me is when I decided to cut my hair. I had grown my hair very long, to my shoulders, and I decided I wanted to drastically cut it much shorter than I'm used to. My mom wasn't sure if I was serious about really shaving it all off to a buzz cut, and she could have said no, and she thought about it – but instead she discussed with me about how there were times in her life when she regretted cutting her own hair short. She knew I thought about my decision carefully and so she allowed me to do what I wanted. We went to the barber and they literally shaved my head. It was awesome! Just what I wanted! I really like my hair the way it is now.

But independence also means following your own mind, no matter what your age. I am discovering that as a young adult it is important that I assert my independence in thought and action. Not everyone believes the same things I do, nor would others always act as I do in situations. My Oma, Gabi, is an example of an independent person that I admire. When my mom was little, they lived in Hawaii where my grandfather was stationed in the Army. On one occasion, my mom, Uncle Roger and Oma were at the beach. As they were walking along Oma noticed a bunch of people all gathered around a metal barrel. She realized they had a baby shark stuffed in there and it was suffocating to death. Well, normally Oma was a mild-mannered person, but she knew what was happening was cruel and wrong, and she pushed the people out of the way, grabbed the shark by its tail and took it over to the water. She steadied it with her hands until it started to try to move on its own and then it swam straight out into the ocean. The people thought she was crazy to do that - but she knew she had done the right thing and didn't care what they thought. It is very important to me that people find their own voice and assert their independence when it means doing the right thing.

Courage, ometz lev is what helps me to take a chance, try something new, and be brave. I was courageous enough to go to a sleep away camp for 8 weeks in the summer and I'm glad I did. I made some great new friends, and got to try a lot of new things. Most importantly, I got to have a lot of independence. Sometimes you have to be courageous enough to take a step into the unknown. I have found that being courageous rather than fearful is a lot more interesting. I think my journey through this Bar Mitzvah process was courageous because it brought me here, speaking in front of my family and friends, and I am certainly glad to be here.

Courage runs in my family. On my father's side, a lot of family emigrated from Russia in the late 1800's, early 1900's. In 1914, at age 12, my great Grandmother Rose, came to the U.S. with her older sister Sophie, who was 13. They traveled alone except for Rose's little dog that she carried in a basket. The journey by train and boat would take two months. They must have been afraid. Sadly, along the way they lost the dog in Liverpool. Even after the loss of her beloved pet, great grandmother Rose still had the **courage** to carry on and I'm glad she did.

Compassion, Rachameem, is a value that I take with me no matter where I am. I know that I am a compassionate person. If someone is hurt, do you laugh about it or do you help them in any way you can? I know that I would help them and I would not laugh at them. My brother, Max, is also a compassionate person. There was one time when my brother's friend decided to take a dare and she dove into a pond. She hit her head really hard on a rock so my brother showed compassion and took her to the hospital even though everyone else said she was fine and to leave her be. By doing so he saved her life. Compassion is also a value that is important to other members of my family. A legendary story is about my Grandma Eileen's father, my great grandfather Saul. He had given a man money so that this man could pick up his chickens that had arrived COD or cash on delivery. The man said they would die of suffocation if he didn't get them soon. Well, that man had lied and he used the money for beer instead. Even after that, Saul was still willing to help others in need and he never held a grudge. He was known as a very compassionate man.

Memory, zeekaron, as a value to me is about the past helping to shape the future. I have studied history in school, I learned about ancient Greece and the Romans. I have learned stories about the Jews though KidSchool and our celebrations at home. I have explored our family memories, some which go back to the 1600's. What I have learned about from my family memories is that there was a lot of persecution, and many of my family members had to fight hard to have a better life. The Mennonite Yoders who fled Switzerland and settled in Pennsylvania, the Jewish ancestors who fled Russia to avoid the Czar, their lives and memories all combined to build this American family that came together with my mother and father. These pillars of courage, independence and determination still stand with my generation and I use the memory of them and their values to help guide me into the future.

All of these values have come to mean a lot to me. Before I started going to TCC I never really paid attention to my values and what I love, except for music, which has always been a value I favor. Even though I never got to meet my great grandmother Rose, I now know some of the values she had, such as courage and independence, and how her values have influenced my own. Because of TCC, I have learned more about myself and much more about my family history. This process has allowed me to define my values and recognize the influence my family has had on my development.