



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Family Values”
by Ryan Kramer
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You would think that finding out your personal values would be one of the easiest parts of this whole project. I mean, who knows you better than yourself? Well, it’s not as easy as it sounds. Most of the time you don’t really think about what your values are. They’re just there, unimportant and undiscovered. I had to think really carefully about what my values are. Then I had to ask my parents to help, because your parents are hopefully a major part of your upbringing. They are always trying to impart good values.

My values weren’t the values of a very religious Jewish family, because my parents weren’t that focused on religion. They were more willing to let me see one idea from all angles instead of keeping me in one perspective and never letting me see things multiple ways. One of those multiple ways was what we call “confuse the neighbor season” where we’d have the menorah and the Christmas tree up at the same time. I never knew that it was a bit odd for someone to be Jewish and Christian. To be quite honest, even after I learned that it was unusual, I didn’t really care. I didn’t really think about the traditional and multicultural values that mom and dad were passing on to me until I started this paper. Because of this, I didn’t know much about my family history or any of the important multicultural aspects. Now that I stop and think about it though, I realize that there are people out there who will say that my beliefs are extremely strange, because I have both Christian and Jewish identities. That, coupled with my love for mythology, gives me a rather more colorful view on the world than most other people. I’m not complaining though, because I now have a view of all different kinds of people. That, I think, will come in handy later.

But as I said, getting the values out of my parents was only the beginning. Then I had to track down my grandparents, because your grandparents probably had to do with the values that your parents have now. This values paper was a lot harder than I ever thought it would be. But at least I got through it with reasonably good facts.

All together, I managed to boil down all the values in my head to eight different values. My first, and possibly greatest, value is Humor; *Humor*. As my friends will tell you, I’m usually talking, laughing or making jokes that don’t really make much sense. Mom says I got it from dad’s side of the family, and let’s face it, she’s right. Both my Uncle Gary and my Uncle Jeff have gone into the comedy business. They tell me that my dad was the smartest, because he went into computers. Apart from that, my place is usually a semi-nuthouse. We even make jokes during important Jewish holidays. The most famous one is in the holiday of Passover. There’s a part in the Haggadah where you’re supposed to say, “let us all say grace”. What we actually say is something along the lines of the following.

LEADER: Let us all say grace

ALL: Grace

The funny thing is that we do the same thing every year. It never gets old. Wherever I go, I always manage to find something to laugh about. Humor is one of the most important things in the world, because if you can't find something funny or amusing, life's gonna be pretty dull. It is necessary, therefore, to understand that humor is more than a fact of life. It's a past time that will make your days more enjoyable. And let's face it. Who'd want to live in a life without laughs?

My second value is Friendship; *Chaveyroot*. Friendship is central to the way I live my life. My friends are really important to me. We have fun together, and even though we sometimes get each other into trouble, we always know how to have a good time. There are times when we get a little short with each other. There are even times when we go a long while without speaking to one another. However, we always make up in the end. My dad always tells me to be nice to the new kid, if there is a new kid in class. Think about it. They just moved from their neighborhood that they knew so well, away from their best friends, and into a whole other world, where they don't know anyone or anything about the regular lifestyle. Dad was the new kid on several occasions. He started out in Connecticut, then moved to Pennsylvania, and then New Jersey, and then moved to Virginia after he was done with school. He left his friends behind three times. But he still had a lot of friends. That's why I try to be nice to the new kid. This is also why I usually try to invite the new kid into my group of friends.

My next value is the value of Hope; *Tikvah*. You may not have considered this before, but you hope for things for every day. For instance, for my birthday, I might hope to get a new toy I wanted. I hope that I can do better in karate. Heck, I even hope that this paper will be a success. Two of my great-great grandfathers died when my great grandfathers were still kids. They were the sole breadwinners of their families. Imagine your father dying when you're just a teen, and having to go to work to support your own family. It also means you can't go to college-- it sounds like a pretty hopeless situation, doesn't it? But guess what happened? Their families did pretty well. Not rich, but well enough to not be affected by it. Hope is what kept them going.

My fourth value is Courage; *Ometz Lev*. There are many reasons why courage is one of my values. One of them is what happens to me at school. You might not consider this, but it takes a lot of courage to stand up to a bully. Believe me, I know. I was never seriously affected by bullying, although there were times when I might have been hurt by what bullies did. Whatever bullies threw at me, I either shrugged it off, or threw it back at them. It was my idea to start an anti-bullying club, which I am still a leading member of today. Bullying isn't the only reason why courage is in my list of values. The Kramers were originally from Germany. It took a lot of courage for my family to pack up, leave all the familiar things in life, and move to a totally new world. Not only that, but also this world happens to be a world where you don't have any money, any job, and don't even speak the same language. Think about doing that. Seem easy to you? Courage was also a major factor in mom's life. She was a lead role in many school plays. Do you think that you could muster the courage to get up in front of a lot of people and sing and perform? Or do you think you could muster the courage to march around on stage in your long johns (which by the way did happen to me in my 5th grade play)? It took a lot of courage for mom to perform, but I have her to thank for those gifts.

The fifth one is Concern for the Suffering of Animals; *Tzaar Baalei Hayim*. I've been concerned about animal suffering for a long time. My friend and I used to talk about doing activities to raise money for these different ideas. They seem really lame now, but back then they sounded really cool. I have three dogs currently, and I've had dogs all my life. Even as I type this, the dog that we hope to get certified as a therapy dog is staring at me (no joke, he probably wonders what I'm saying about him). I'm not the only person in my family who wants to help suffering animals. Both my Uncle Adam, and Aunt Autumn are veterinarians, and they have their own practice in Maryland. My cousin Meredith

owns a number of horses, as well as other animals, where she lives down in Florida. Even my Grandma Joyce wanted to be a vet. Her mother told her that that wasn't what girls did. I don't know how she got away with that, but she did.

My next values are the values of Repairing the World; *Tikkun Olam*, and Guarding the Earth; *Shmirat HaAdama*. Again, there are many reasons why they are on my list of values. Think, for a moment, about how many bad things are going on: racism, sexism, bullying and a whole bunch of other stuff. And that's only what's going on between people. There are also all the environmental problems we have to fix; for instance, global warming, air pollution, the hole in the ozone layer, the destruction of natural habitats for animals that might soon become endangered. Polar bears are one of the largest land predators on earth. With all the global warming going on, their homes out on the ice are being destroyed. As the temperature gets higher and higher, the source of the polar bear's food will move further and further away. Instead of making it harder for them to live, we should start trying to limit the amount of greenhouse gas that we create. You can do your bit by conserving energy any way you can. Animals aren't the only ones in trouble. There are several places in the world with their own issues. I know. I have been to several places outside of the U.S., and I know that each individual country, city, and state has its own problems, both environmental and economic. My mom and dad try to help those countries, because some of them are quite nice. We went to Dominica a while back, and we saw the wonders of it. The island may be poor, but the views of it are simply fabulous. Its one of the things mom and dad have in common and passed on to me. We need to protect those places, and make sure they can be seen by others.

But that isn't the only reason. I'm not the first person in my family to try to repair the world. My grandma did her bit. She taught at an inner city public school. She created a program that would teach pregnant teens and teen moms to be the best parents they could be while staying in school. She tried to get the school to create a daycare center for the babies, so their moms could go to class and not worry. Unfortunately, the school cut her funding, making it impossible to complete. However, eventually another school agency was able to complete her work, and opened a daycare program, dedicated to the teen parents, across the street from the high school.

My eighth value is the value of baseball. We couldn't find the Hebrew word for baseball, so I can't give one. I'm a huge Yankees fan. I'm not the only one who's crazy about baseball. My grandfather on dad's side moved from Chicago to New York in the late 1940's, when the Yankees were going through one of their big dynasties. He was a great Cubs fan, and then was a big Cubs/Yankees fan. He tried to get my Uncle Jeff's first words to be "Mickey Mantel". His first words were actually "Pocket Book". Well, you can't have everything in life.

All in all, these values in your life are sort of like baseball. These values are the rules that guide your life. You don't fully understand them all, just like no one understands the Balk rule. Sometimes you hit home runs. Sometimes you strikeout. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. Every game is different, from one game to the next. Rules don't dictate the game, but they do guide it. At any given moment, anything can happen. You'd better keep your eyes on the ball.