



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Family Values”**  
by **Sophie Silverstein**  
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I've been shaping by personal values since the age of five, when my mother and I joined the City Congregation and I first started attending KidSchool, which emphasized Jewish values. In preparing for my bat mitzvah, I've looked at my world, who I am and what's important to me, and I revisited my values, highlighting the ones by which I live my life, values such as determination, education, friendship, loyalty, and pursuing my dreams. I've always lived by these beliefs, but for the first time, I looked at them closely, where they came from, why I make certain choices. I looked at how they were shaped by my parents, their history, and how these beliefs have become my instincts.

Many of my values are connected to being a performer. I see performing as more than just an activity, as a passion that I plan to pursue throughout my life. Being aware of my values and their roots will help me make decisions as I move up in the acting world, as well as in the wider world.

Determination – *n'chee-shoot* -- runs deep for me, since I come from a long line of immigrants who came to this country with little and, by their own hands, crafted good lives for themselves and their families. Abraham Winick, my maternal great-great grandfather, saved enough money in Russia to come to America, then saved up enough here to bring over his son Benjamin -- my mother's grandfather. They then saved enough to bring the rest of their family over. Ben Winick came to the U.S. at the age of 13 with a third grade education, determined to create a better life. He went from street peddler to being one of the first to sell his wares from the back of a car in 1916. He later built a successful Venetian blinds business. His company even had its own forest in Texas. During World War II, he sold the cords made from the trees to the government for use in parachutes.

My mother's grandmother also came from Russia determined to have a better life. She used her talents as a seamstress when she arrived in 1920 at age 20, working hard to help provide for herself and her siblings. She married Ben and together they created a good life for their children, who grew into an extended family, many of them here today.

Then there's the determination of my paternal grandfather, Stanley Silverstein, who survived the Holocaust. His remarkable will -- and good instincts -- got him through six years of unfathomable conditions, from the Lodz Ghetto to Auschwitz to the forced march through winter to concentration camp in Austria, where he was liberated at the age of 17. Even after liberation, he traveled in secret, much of it by foot, from the southern tip of Italy to northernmost Germany to re-unite with his sole surviving sister. After first immigrating to the newly formed state of Israel, he came to the U.S., where he worked in a factory and as a building superintendant. He provided for his family, put all three of his children through college and graduate school or medical school, and saved enough to retire to Florida.

Grandma Leah and almost all of her family survived the Holocaust thanks to her father's foresight in fleeing to Russia. There, they had to survive exile to central Asia and their post-war escape through the Iron Curtain before settling in Israel, America, Germany, and elsewhere. Grandma had planned to travel here today to celebrate my bat mitzvah with me. But Grandpa Stanley passed away three days ago at the age of 81, unable to fight off yet another of the heart attacks that plagued him for

almost 25 years. His passing is sad, but even in death, his strength was evident, his doctor having told us for the past ten years that it was only through his sheer will and his love of life that he was able to live long past the time his heart should have failed him.

My parents were determined to be successful in their careers too. They worked hard and fulfilled their dreams. My dad achieved success by being part of the first generation of personal computer programmers and as a businessman. My mom decided in college she wanted to be a newspaper reporter, put in the hard work and achieved it. Then she was successful in her second career in public relations. They both worked hard, faced rejection and competition, got what they wanted and are proud of their accomplishments. I know I'm willing to work hard, face rejection -- as I already have experienced -- and appreciate success. I will try not to lose sight of my dream and my belief in myself. I am determined to move on to the next audition and the next, and do my best.

Another important value passed down from both sides of my family is education -- *chee-nooch*. Both of my parents and their siblings, as well as many other relatives, took advantage of the opportunity to get a good education, an option not available for earlier generations. Ben Winick, as I said, came here with only a 3rd grade education. His wife had even less, since Russian girls were not sent to school. My father's parents were surviving the holocaust during what would have been their high school years and never had the luxury of making up for it afterwards.

But subsequent generations were given the love of learning. My mother's Uncle Herman is a physicist at Stanford known for his cyclotrons (whatever that is). My dad's sister, my Aunt Helena, has a PhD in political science and is a college professor. Both my Uncle David and my cousin David are doctors. And my dad has his all-but-dissertation PhD in economics. My mom and many others in our family strove to get the best education they could too. I believe in education too and plan to carry on that tradition.

From the age of two, I've wanted to be a performer. I've been getting theater training ever since. I have also been academically diligent. I chose a high school based not only on its theater program but its academic strength too. It will help me think critically and deeply. If my acting career does not take off, a good education will help me excel in other fields.

Loyalty -- *ne-he-ma-noot* -- has been valued by my family for many generations. Loyalty is knowing at least person will always stand by you during good times as well as difficult times, in an emergency and even when nothing much is going on. Loyalty is connected to trust. When someone is loyal to you, you can be open and not feel judged; you can get love and help. Loyalty helps you know you are not alone in the world.

One's first loyalty is often to family -- the Winicks sacrificing to bring each other to this country, one by one, to make a better life together; Grandpa Stanley sticking with his sisters in concentration camp and surviving together with his sister Gutcha, who died just a few years ago. There is also loyalty to "landsmen," people from the old country, people Ben Winick helped throughout his life, and fellow survivors Stanley and Leah are friends with to this day. Loyalty to friends, and their belief in them, help my grandparents them believe in themselves -- a tradition that is carried on by me with my friends and family.

I also count being loyal to myself as an important value, especially in the world of theater. It's easy to be full of doubt and fear when I audition against my competition. But staying loyal to my belief that I can do it carries me through.

Then there is friendship -- *cha-vay-root* -- one of my most important values. A vital aspect of our lives is our interdependence, our reliance on family and on others. "Others" mostly means friends, in

my book -- like a second family, except that they're your age and often are going through the same things you are. They can relate, they are an outlet for heart-to-heart conversations, they can appreciate jokes your parents would not. I consider myself lucky to have good friends from school, camp, the Poconos and the children of my parents' friends. I treasure every one of them. I don't know where I would be without them. True friends also support one's dreams -- cheering the successes, giving encouragement when things go wrong. My friends have supported my theater aspirations. They've understood when I am not available after school because I have rehearsal or class. And many come to see my shows.

My mom learned the importance of friendship from her mother and grandmother, who kept their many friends throughout their lives. So has she, with friends from as early as elementary school. My mom has passed this value to me -- I try to make and keep friends, have relationships as warm and supportive as she has. Although my dad is more reserved, he too has many friends, from as far back as high school to people he met at the last Ranger game.

These are the values I consider important, that I try to live by. Many were passed down from generation to generation in my family, *l'dor v'dor*. I will develop others as I grow up, as I gain the greater understanding that experience brings, but I don't expect to lose these particular beliefs. These are also the ones that connect me most as an actor. I believe that if I stay true to these values, my performing career and my life as a whole will be meaningful and enjoyable.