



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Yoela Koplow
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Some of my values include humor, music, concern for the suffering of animals, compassion, love, equality/justice, and friendship. After interviewing members of my family about their values, I found that my personal values are very similar to many of my family members’ values.

I will give you some background information on each family member I interviewed. First, there’s my grandma, whose name is Esther. She lives in Cleveland. Originally, she was married to my Grandpa Jimmy, and now she’s married to my Grandpa Paul. She enjoys taking pictures of me when I first wake up if I’m staying at her house. She works as an English tutor at a college. Then we have my Grandpa Jimmy. My Grandpa Jimmy is married to my Grandma Arline and lives in Cleveland as well. He works as a lawyer like his father did. We like to see the Indians play when I’m in Cleveland. My Grandma Arline is an artist and likes to paint and make pottery. My Grandpa Paul is a consultant to businesses that need help. My Grandpa Paul and I like to goof off a lot and we have intense Uno competitions. My Uncle Bruce is a musician and lives here in New York. On Saturday, we like to hang out and see movies or visit some of our friends. My mom, of course, lives with me in New York. She is a teacher and a therapist and an author and likes to make collages. We love watching the Mets and getting mani/pedis. My mom loves making memories and looking back on her favorite memories of taking care of me! For instance, we love looking at photo albums and remembering what we did and where we were.

Now that I have introduced my family, I will tell you about my values and give you a sense of how my values and my family’s values come together.

Humor: Humor: I feel humor is important because life would be very sad with out laughing! I use my sense of humor to cheer up my friends and family when they need it. Humor is a big part of my Grandpa Jimmy’s life. He always jokes around and makes people laugh. He has a very serious job as a lawyer but he always manages to sneak in some humor whether in or out of the courtroom. Some of the funny things that he does are acting like my cats are really dogs, and calling my cat Timothy by the name “Murray” and my cat TeaCup, by the name “TeaPot“.

Music: Musika: I have always had music in my life. (My mom reminds me that as a baby I would point to things that I saw and say, “sing”, and then my mom had to sing a song about whatever I pointed to.) Since my Uncle Bruce is a musician, he taught me a lot about music, The Beatles especially. He says it was no accident that so many well- known musicians, comedians and actors are Jewish. He thinks self expression and making people laugh have been valued by Jews throughout our history, maybe because they have had so many hard times. I think music is important to people because it is a way of expressing your feelings and your personal experiences. I listen to and perform music for recreational purposes. I sing in the chorus and in the rock band at my school.

Concern for the Suffering of Animals: Tzaar Baalei Hayim: I am the animal activist of the family and I have done lots of research on animal testing. I have always had 2 cats for as long as I can remember. I think it is important to protect animals because they can't defend themselves against humans. I want to help end the cruelty of animal testing, the fur trade, and other forms of animal cruelty. Because I am concerned about the torment of animals, I feel that it is my responsibility to not buy or wear fur coats, boots, or anything with fur or skin. My Grandpa Paul also has a lot of respect for animals. He has a bird feeder outside of his house and refills it everyday in the winter. When the squirrels try to steal the food, he goes out there and scares them away. He'll do that even in the bitter cold.

Compassion: Rachamim: (Yiddish) Rachmonis: I am very caring and if I have a friend who's hurt, I will stay with her until she feels better. It's important to me to be a caring person because otherwise the whole world would turn against each other. (They kind of already did!) My Mom talked a lot about the value of Tikkun Olam, or Repair of the World, which is about caring for others. She is a social worker and a teacher. She teaches teachers about what kids need and how they need to be treated. One time I was with my mom at her office, and I heard her have a phone conversation with a principal. My mom told the principal that this kid needed special attention and what to do. She also writes books about how schools can help kids heal and express their feelings and troubles. (I once went to a book signing with her, and I actually got to sign some books.) My grandmothers also talked about caring for others. My Grandma Esther values consideration. She told me that when she was a kid, her parents told her that she needed to be considerate of her downstairs neighbors, and not to make too much noise. (I live next to and under 2 neighbors who should have been taught that lesson when they were kids.) My Grandma Arline thinks it is important to share our good fortune with others who are not fortunate. She shows that value by doing volunteer work in her community, at schools and homeless shelters. My Uncle Bruce talked about the value of harmony. He thinks that harmony is an important part of his life because without it people wouldn't be able to work together. For my uncle, spirituality and harmony are an important part of taking care of the world.

Love: Ahava: I have a very loving family and very loving friends. I value love because without it, no family would be able to hold together. Love is the glue that holds a family together. I use love to stay connected with my friends and family. I have a loving, nurturing side that I use when someone I know gets hurt, emotionally or physically.

Without love and determination, my mom would never have been able to adopt me! My Mom said she has learned a lot about love from raising me. My Grandma Esther has learned a lot about love and compassion in her life by having two kids of her own, and now having a totally awesome grandkid, me! She is one of the most loving Grandmas in the world. I love her, and she loves me so much. My Grandpa Paul had some family drama when he was a child. He took comfort in his grandmother's love and support. All of the love that he got from his grandmother taught him to be a terrific grandpa to me. He is really a loving person and knows when to be funny and nice, and when to be serious. I love him for that reason.

Equality and Justice: Tzedek: I feel that everyone has the right to be whoever they want to be regardless of their skin color, ethnicity, gender or abilities. This is an important value to me because I know it is right. I show that I value equality by having friends of all different religions, colors, and genders. One of my community service projects this year has been to raise money to train puppies to become seeing eye dogs for people who are blind. The dogs give blind people an equal opportunity to be mobile and independent. I also joined a group at school last year that raised money for The Bank Street School Of Cambodia. I decided to do this because we saw how the people in Cambodia live. They are very poor and don't have enough money to build schools, yet, they have an equal right to education. My

family members have fought for justice and equality in their own ways. My mom has worked in mental health clinics that gave excellent care to families in poverty. Being a lawyer, my Grandpa Jimmy's biggest value when he's working is justice. If you are a lawyer, you have to make very good calls and make sure that fairness is achieved for your client and also for your opponent.

Friendship: Chaverut: And finally, I value friendship. I have some friends that I have known for 8 years, and some not even for a year. I value friendship because if you don't have any friends, your world would be lonely and who could you hang out with?! I try to be the kind of friend that will be there when my friends need me. Many of my family members have had friends that have been true friends over the years, and have become like part of our family. I hope my friendships will be strong and lasting. In my Havurah class that I went to before coming to The City Congregation, each session ended with a song called "Shalom Chaverim", Good-bye Friends. But after that line the Hebrew translated to mean "Til we meet again", showing the Jewish value of ongoing friendship. This value is important to me as a teenager.

In conclusion, these Jewish values have come to be mine through my own personal choices and through the values handed down from my family. I feel strongly that these values are an important part of my life because without them, my life would be off balance. I think that one of the ways that my values keep me grounded is by actually believing in them. If I didn't believe in these values I would have my head in the clouds and not be able to focus on anything that I think is important.