

The Beth David Confirmation Class of 2010

Bios and Essays

Sarah Carlson Cassell has been writing, directing and acting in plays on the landing of her staircase since she was three. Many shows featured her dear friends Jenny Kaplan and Carmi Medoff (who was always the princess). Sarah will be living the dream this fall in the musical theater program at Syracuse University. Her biggest fans are parents Bill and Joann Cassell, sisters Anna and Christina, and brother-in-law Shane. Sarah is graduating from Greensboro Day School, where she was active in drama, chorus and various service organizations.

Confirmation Essay Sarah Cassell

This April, I made a promise to a woman, a Jew. I promised to remember her.

Those of you who have children who went on the March of the Living this year, or who simply felt compelled to read the blog we used to document the trip, may have read an entry I wrote at Majdanek, the Nazi death camp, an entry about a pair of red leather sandals, and the girl who wore them. I'd like to read you all what I wrote.

"A pair of shoes can seem insignificant, especially when you have many, as most of us do. But what if they're all that is left of you? The only clue I have about this Jewish girl who was killed in the Holocaust is a pair of red sandals. I noticed them because I myself would buy and wear them; red, woven leather sandals. I imagine a girl like me – she's young and lively and bright. Maybe she was beautiful, or funny, or smart. Maybe she loved to read, or dance, or draw. I imagine her laughing with friends back at home, recalling inside jokes and chasing boys, fighting with and forgiving her siblings and her parents. She was, simply put, a real person. She bought those red sandals because she liked them, the same way I like them. She could be sitting here speculating about me today, and I could be the one with the red sandals, my body reduced to ashes. Who decided it would be her and not me? Why am I the one alive? I will never know. I think I will buy myself a pair of red sandals. Every time I wear them, I will remember her."

I know that I'm not unique in mentioning the March of the Living in this speech. In fact, I can't imagine that anyone who went on the trip would leave it out. I have never been a very observant Jew – I don't keep Kosher, I don't go to services regularly, I don't even know if I believe in God. I didn't realize until the March how much of my identity is defined by Judaism, how at home I felt surrounded by Jews, how connected I was to the pain of the Holocaust and the joy of Israel. Before the March, I had never thought about what Judaism would be to me once I was leading my own life, once I was an adult and could make all my own decisions. It had never been a factor in my plans. I now realize the significance of staying in touch with Judaism and recognizing how fortunate I am to be part of a culture that is so filled with pride and fortitude. It's my responsibility to tell our story; it's my responsibility to remember.

I can't say how I feel about the religious aspect of Judaism because, at this point in my life, I honestly don't know. There is so much more to being Jewish than going to services and believing in God – it's about eating my Aunt Sara Lee's matzah ball soup, telling the story of Passover to my non-Jewish friends, giving tzadakah, decorating a sukkah, knowing the sh'mah, or going to Israel for the first time and feeling like I've come home.

I'm proud to say that I've kept my promise – I'm wearing my own pair of red sandals today. They symbolize my commitment to remember that I am a Jew and not take that fact for granted.

~

What Being Jewish Means to Me Benji Gray

Being Jewish doesn't simply mean knowing a bit of Hebrew and attending a service every so often. Yet, it also doesn't simply mean being fluent in Hebrew and attending every possible service and keeping Kosher. Judaism is obviously a religion, but to me it is an experience. I can go to Synagogue, chant Torah, and even learn Hebrew, but it may be meaningless if I don't know *why*. *Claiming* to be Jewish is easy; one must be a registered Jew, but is not required to know any Hebrew or pray at all. *Being* Jewish is an experience; one must understand why they pray in the way they do, why they go to Synagogue, and why Israel is their eternal homeland. I have not yet been to Israel, and until I go I still feel that I am not complete in being Jewish. I have many experiences and emotions left unfulfilled, like the ones felt by the many Jews that travel to the sites of past death camps. I have yet to find where I stand in Jewish life; I have yet to raise a Jewish family and have Seders of my own and teach my children and grandchildren the Torah. Being Jewish to me is not living as a Jew in the present, but completing a set of Jewish experiences throughout life, such as visiting Israel or leading a service or Seder, at one's own pace and will.

The Jewish people are a community worldwide and I believe that each Jew of the world should have the opportunity to undergo these experiences.

To me personally, being Jewish means being part of an ever-closer worldwide community and fulfilling the Jewish duties that all Jews have to the best of one's abilities throughout a lifetime.

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Tal Havivi is the first born-Tarheel in the Havivi family! A B'nai Shalom ('06) and AHA ('10) graduate, he will attend UNC-CH in the Fall. Tal has served as captain of AHA's varsity Eagles Basketball team, competed for two years in the national Moot Beit Din, served on the AHA Va'ad HaKavod, travelled to Beltsy with the Greensboro Jewish Federation, participated in the March of the Living, and has been a veteran Ramahnik for the past 13 summers. He is looking forward to working as a madrich/ counselor at Ramah Darom this coming summer.

What Being Jewish Means To Me Tal Havivi

I love being Jewish but I can't tell you why. I wanted to say something funny in response to what being Jewish means to me. I wanted to say something like, "the kosher cooking" or "the long services" But I couldn't quite figure out how I can portray what being Jewish means to me through those paradigms. In fact, I couldn't wrap my finger around any one example that can define my Judaism.

I cannot give you, or myself, a satisfying answer with any one, two, three, or infinite instances—because for me, being Jewish is a lifestyle. It's not about the holidays, the services, the family, the extended family or the food. It's about all of those things—in relation to each other, and many more cases beyond that.

I love being Jewish but I can't tell you why. I grew up with Judaism surrounding me and it gives me a sense of comfort. Being Jewish gives me a passage to a network of Jews and people just like me. Being a member of the Jewish people binds me to more than two thousand years of Jewish history. I am immersed in Jewish culture, have true pride for the Jewish state, drool for the Jewish food, and beat to the drum of Jewish music.

But again, that's not what being Jewish means to me.

And I won't be able to ever give a sufficient answer. But at the same time, I don't have to explain to myself what being Jewish means to me. It is not an external "Judaism" that has meaning to me; it is me internally having Jewish pride, feelings, and connections. To me, being Jewish means continuing in the direction I am going. It means staying connected to my Judaism that I can't quite explain to you or myself. I love being Jewish but I can't tell you why.

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Jennifer Manning Kaplan is the daughter of Kathy Manning and Randall Kaplan, the granddaughter of Tobee and Leonard Kaplan and Elaine and Mervyn Manning and the sister of Elizabeth and Robert Kaplan. Jenny is a graduate of B'nai Shalom and will be graduating from the Greensboro Day School, where she is a member of the Cum Laude Society, the National Honors Society, the founder of the Students for Politics and Current Events Society (SPACE) and has been active in sports, music and drama. Jenny has won a variety of academic awards including the Dartmouth College Award for Leadership. Jenny has served as a counselor at the Greensboro Jewish Federation's Camp Delet in Moldova and will return to be a counselor again this summer. She recently returned from a meaningful trip to Poland and Israel on the March of the Living with many of her classmates. She will attend Brown University in the fall. Her parents will miss her terribly but wish her great success.

My Jewish Identity Jennifer Kaplan

On March 12, 1992, I was born a Jewish girl to two Jewish parents. My Judaism was a fact, a part of who I was in definition though perhaps not with meaning in my infantile state. However, this fact quickly turned into more than a technical distinction, becoming a serious part of my identity as an individual. My knowledge of Judaism and familiarity with traditions was solidified by my family background and education at B'nai Shalom. Upon graduating from B'nai Shalom, I was confident in who I was as a Jew—I knew the mitzvot, I spoke Hebrew pretty well, and I loved the philanthropic values of Jewish culture. In addition, my best friends from school and outside of school were Jewish and it seemed natural that we shared all of my favorite traditions and holidays as similar experiences.

High school truly turned my Jewish identity upside down. Was I less Jewish? No. Did I feel less strongly about my beloved Jewish culture

and religion? No, or at least not technically. I thought that I felt exactly the same. It was only when I realized that I placed more value on my secular wants than my Jewish traditions that I began to feel that my identity was shifted. The summer after my sophomore year I spent a month in Israel along with my cousin, Lena, on an outdoorsy trip and began to explore once more the Jewish subjects that I had not really thought much about since my Eighth grade graduation. As a more mature person I contemplated the values of Judaism I thought were most important, my feelings toward Israel and the Diaspora, and even the existence God. My summer spent in Israel was a wake-up call reminding me not to forget about the strong Jewish identity that had been slightly dimmed by my expanding secular world.

After that trip I returned home, somewhat changed but thrown back into school for the academic rollercoaster that was Junior Year. Somehow my rejuvenated feelings and spiritual goals that I had set for myself during the summer were trampled by endless school tests, the SATs, the election, sports, and theater. It wasn't until this year while I was on the March of the Living that I put my stressful school life aside and truly and permanently found my Jewish identity—not my eighth grade Jewish identity but a more competent and fuller realization of the place of Judaism in my life. Religiously, I am a Jew. By tradition I am a Jew. But more than that, I choose Judaism. I choose it because I believe as a religion and culture it has a set of values that define who I am and the actions I choose to make. I choose it because I love the feeling of dancing the Horah at a Bar Mitzvah, singing the prayers I know by heart alongside my mother and sister at services, and speaking in Hebrew. I love being part of a worldwide community, a community that truly takes care of its needy members, being encouraged and expected to be educated and apply that education to something worthwhile, and being able to march through the streets of Jerusalem to the Kotel while maintaining a steady stream of classic Jewish camp songs. Put simply, I love being Jewish.

I am confident that the place of Judaism in my personal identity will evolve continually throughout my life, but while everything else in my life changes as I leave home and begin a new chapter of my life's story, I am comforted by the solidity of my Jewish identity. I have lived a Jewish life for 18 years thanks to my parents, my time at B'nai Shalom, and the strength of the Jewish Community of Greensboro, but over the past year I have realized that my relationship with Judaism does not merely spring from my environment, but is a part of who I am that I absolutely choose to value.

~

Confirmation Essay

Josh Katz

When I was younger, being Jewish meant having regular weekly rituals such as Friday evening services followed by Shabbat dinner. My family and I would always sit around the dinner table and sing the Shabbat prayers over the bread and the wine. My sisters and I learned to sing the same tunes that my father grew up singing around his Shabbat table. I would then fight to wake up early the next morning to attend the longer Saturday morning service. As time and Bar-Mitzvah preparations passed, these appearances in the synagogue were no longer as regular. Sadly, as I have grown older, other social or personal events have come before going to services like I used to. Even though I am not present in the synagogue as often, my Jewish identity remains with me daily. I try to exhibit the Jewish values that my parents have taught me like putting other people's needs before my own. I also incorporate my other Jewish values on the soccer field when I try to play hard, but fair. I try to accomplish my goals by working hard, but never at the expense of others.

My family and I have always had holiday sedars, lit the Hannukkah candles, and attended high-holiday services and I plan to continue these traditions for the rest of my life. Performing these rituals and living my life according to altruistic values is what being Jewish means to me. Last year while attending the March of the Living, I was able to witness some of the horrors of the Holocaust first hand. It was there that I wept and prayed for the millions of lives lost, yet I was able to celebrate the survival of our people. We have survived and continued to carry on our traditions. I will make certain that I value and exercise my freedom to practice my faith throughout my life and to pass it on to the next generation.

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Leah Anne Kouchel, daughter of Catherine and Stuart is graduating from Ragsdale High School in Jamestown. Leah attended Beth David Religious School, Camp Ramah Darom and has been a member of USY. Leah has been active in the Jamestown Community Orchestra and is currently Vice President of the Ragsdale Orchestra. Leah has tutored children of an immigrant family and currently works as a peer tutor. Leah is a member of National Honors Society and will be attending UNC-Greensboro in the fall.

Confirmation Essay

Leah Kouchel

Shabbat Shalom. Being raised in a Jewish household has taught me so much about our values and our way of life. It has shaped me spiritually, politically, and mentally. From Passover Seders to my Bat Mitzvah, and now to confirmation my life has been enriched with the ways of Judaism. Something that I have realized now is that it is up to me to continue practicing this way of life. This fall I will be out on my own, no longer under my parents wing. Because my parents are Jewish, I am Jewish. And it is now my time to become an independent Jew

in the world. Recently this confirmation class has been weighing some thoughts down on my mind. I've learned from the confirmation class that I still have a lot to learn and experience when it comes to Judaism.

There are many things I love about being Jewish. One thing I really love is this particular feeling I get when I'm around Jews; the deep spiritual connection I feel between other Jews and myself. Though I have felt this throughout my life, whether it was at Shabbat Seder, religious school, USY, or just at the synagogue, I felt it most profoundly when I spent a few summers at Camp Ramah Darom in the mountains of Georgia. When my parents introduced me to the idea of four weeks at camp, I was completely against it. I told them excuse after excuse of why I couldn't or didn't want to go. None of it really made a difference and before I knew it I was on my way to Clayton. I was a little anxious and really scared of what camp would be like. After about a week I was totally at home with some of the greatest people I've ever met. These campers, also known as Ramahniks, showed me exactly what I needed see, hear, smell, taste, and learn from Judaism. The unexplainable connection between myself and the friends I made transformed me as an individual and as a Jew. Most of you know this wonderful feeling of belonging; the feeling of shared ancestry and culture, values and commitment, between Jews all over the world. This powerful spiritual connectivity between Jews is what I love most about being Jewish.

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Daniel Benjamin Massey, son of David & Wendy Massey, is graduating from Grimsley High School where he is an honor student and varsity baseball player. Daniel received the CollegeBoard AP Scholar with Honor Award; he has also been recognized each year at Grimsley as a Scholar Athlete and as a student earning Academic Excellence with Special Honors. Daniel will be attending Brown University next year where he was recruited to play Division I baseball. He is thrilled to be playing American Legion Baseball this summer before matriculating into college. He is an older brother to Jacob and Zachary and is a former B'nai Shalom student.

Confirmation Essay Daniel Massey

To me, being Jewish means being part of a very close knit community. I feel that the Jewish community reaches out to other Jews, and have a much deeper initial connection than any other religion, race, gender, etc. Part of this community includes people who live outside our everyday community. Any Jew is allowed to pray at synagogue if they are in town, no questions asked, and the Jewish community is very welcoming to visiting Jews. On my first college visit I stayed with a player on the Yale baseball team who happened to be Jewish. Somehow this came up and we immediately felt a connection to each other even though we had known each other for only a few hours. My parents got along very well with him and he felt it easy to approach my parents just because we had the Jewish connection. I feel that other faiths are not as genuinely welcoming, but Judaism makes you feel part of a community solely based on being Jewish. To me, being Jewish will also help in the future because I will be able to integrate into any area that has a substantial Jewish population with ease. Being Jewish goes much deeper than reciting prayers and wearing tallit, it is a lifestyle and a way of coming together with other people who share similar beliefs. I believe that the communal aspect of Judaism defines being Jewish and is one of the most welcoming parts of the faith.

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Carmi Medoff

Number five out of six Silber/Medoff, Carmi's formal education began at Temple Emanuel Preschool (TEPS) followed by thirteen years at Greensboro Day School (GDS). After school, Carmi attended Beth David Religious School, inspired by her teachers, Boaz and Phil Sil. Carmi performed with Greensboro Ballet in multiple Nutcracker productions and at GDS in music and theatre. She also played tennis and soccer at the varsity and select levels.

Many summers were spent at Camp Modin, a private co-ed Jewish camp in Maine, followed by international service projects in Moldova, Costa Rica and Thailand. She participated in BBYO, was co-chair of Youth Leadership Greensboro and president of the senior class at GDS. She interned at Alvin Ailey I New York and is currently working at the International Civil Rights Museum for her senior project. Carmi's first trip to Israel was for her Bat Mitzvah with Grandma Gloria and Rabbi Guttman, returning with Rabbi Havivi on the March of the Living 2010.

It was hard to turn down Princeton, but she was raised to be "true blue." Having received the B.N. Duke Merit Scholarship, Carmi Medoff selected Duke University to attend this fall.

Confirmation Essay Carmi Medoff

When I think of two of my most defining Jewish experiences, the first thing that comes to mind is thick, wet mud. The kind that sticks between your toes, seeps through your pant legs, and colors your skin a dirty brown. Maybe not the most positive image at first but let me explain the beautiful role that mud has played in defining my Jewish identity.

From 3rd to 9th grade, Camp Modin was the place I called home during the month of July. Located in Belgrade, Maine, Modin is a pluralistic

Jewish sleep away camp that blends typical camp life with a rich Jewish heritage and culture. Now most of the time, Maine weather was beautiful and we would spend every daylight hour playing sports, laying on the grass, and going camping. However, when rain would strike, all activities would be cancelled and the whole camp would transform into a swampy mud pit that took no pity on those who ventured outside. Spending entire afternoons stuck in a bunk playing jacks, making up lip-synch routines, or indulging in the secret candy stash, I found that muddy days brought me closer to the 31 other girls in my bunk than any sunny day could. In one particular case, on a camping trip the thunderstorms were so intense that we were forced to squeeze into a van...you can imagine how that night went. It's impossible to think of the slippery mud that covered camp without reminiscing about the lifelong friendships I developed with Jews from across the country, the energy and electricity of Friday night singing, or the peace and serenity of Shabbat services overlooking a pristine lake. I always knew that I was Jewish, but I give credit to the mud for cementing my love of Judaism.

When people warn you that Poland in April is cold, rainy, and gray...they're putting it nicely. It seems fitting that on the March of the Living, we visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in 35 degree weather and freezing rain. Besides an excess of mud there were actually a few other similarities between summer camp and the concentration camp we visited that I was able to see: dirty bunks, cold showers, less than edible food, lice, and line-up. The similarities end there. Camp Modin was my heaven on earth while Auschwitz was as close to hell as I can imagine. Walking on the menacing train tracks, seeing the infamous block 24, or crowding around the gallows, I was so unbelievably overwhelmed that my first reaction was to shut down and numb my emotions. It wasn't until I stepped into a large, muddy puddle on my way into a hidden room that my switch was turned back on. What started as a complaint quickly escalated into an inconsolable sob. Here I was at first upset about my shoes, then slowly processing the information that I was standing in my first gas chamber. The March of the Living was by far the most intense and challenging peer experience I have ever taken part in. However, it took me a couple days to fully appreciate the purpose of the trip. For the day or two, I observed as a detached visitor, avoiding the puddles, not willing to accept the stories or facts. It took that one misstep at Auschwitz to snap me into reality, step into someone else's shoes, and confront the filthy truth. I realized first in Poland and later in Israel that despite some seemingly daunting challenges, Judaism is my mud hole that will give me a slap and a reminder to value the truly important things in life.

Just like mud is a combination of water, soil, silt, and clay, my love of Judaism is a blended mixture of friends, history, family, and tradition. At this point, my beliefs are as murky as any roadside pool, yet my intentions are crystal clear. Thanks to my formative years as a Modinite, a life-changing two weeks with 10,000 kids just like me, and the common ingredient of messy, goeey mud, I have all the building blocks I need to fortify my true Jewish identity.

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What Being Jewish Means to Me Willie Mendelson

While mulling over what to say in my confirmation essay, a quote by Elie Wiesel came to mind. "The Jewish people. Their best characteristic is their desire to remember. No other people has such an obsession with memory." I had just reread his Holocaust memoir, *Night*, and it started me thinking about my Jewish memories. Ancestors like Wiesel who recounted their stories and traditions shaped who I am as a Jew today.

In middle school, our eighth grade class went to Israel for two weeks. For me, the most meaningful part of the trip was our hike up to Masada. It wasn't the beautiful sunrise or the excitement of being with my closest friends that moved me, but the history behind where I stood. My people had fought on that very plateau for their religion and their history. After over two thousand years, I still remember what happened at Masada and for years to come, my descendants will remember. The handing down of our history is an integral part of being Jewish and a tradition I hold in the highest esteem.

One of the fondest memories I have from my time at B'nai Shalom is wrapping Tefillin. After our Bar Mitzvah's, we were technically men; but that didn't mean much when you're only 13. Tefillin on the other hand was a rite of passage which I thought was pretty cool. All the guys would get together in the back, wrap up our arms and pray. Among many other symbolisms, it meant we had achieved a level of respect and were capable of following the footsteps of our forefathers. We wrapped our Tefillin the same way our ancestors did, and we prayed the same way our ancestors did over two thousand years ago. This tradition helped to bind my commitment to Judaism.

Every year for as long as I can remember, we have had a family Passover. It was one of the few times the whole Mendelson clan could get together and be a family. Being the oldest of the children, I was always the first cousin taught to read a passage, say a prayer, or ask the four questions. As my cousins grew up, they began to learn these roles I had been in charge of previously. Year after year, cousin after cousin, my spotlight slowly passed on to the younger generations. This past Passover was truly meaningful for me. Not only would it be my last Passover in High School, but it was also my baby cousin Sam's first Passover. My family had taught me its traditions, and so too would I teach them to little Sam. My memories and the collective memories of the Jewish people will be passed down to Sam, and every generation to come. This is what being Jewish means to me.

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Bret Harris Segall-Abrams is graduating from Grimsley Senior High School, where he has excelled academically earning special honors, and distinguished as a scholar athlete. He participated in his love, and passion for sports by making the JV football team his freshman and sophomore years, the freshman basketball team and the JV basketball team his sophomore year, the varsity football team his junior and senior year and was one of the senior rotating captains, he played intramural basketball both his junior and senior years and made the tennis team his senior year. In addition, Bret continues to play golf and is an ardent fisherman.

While being involved in sports and maintaining high academic achievements, Bret was involved with BBYO, and participated in services many times throughout the past four years. During the summer he worked to earn money toward his college education, and conditioned for football by attending practice everyday during the summer. Bret will be attending The University of North Carolina in Wilmington this fall. Bret is the son of Sharon Segall and Corey Abrams and the brother of Gavin.

Confirmation Essay Bret Segal Abrams

When I was first asked to write an essay about what being Jewish means to me? I didn't know how to answer it.... And I still don't know how to answer it. I don't think that this question can be answered in your first 18 years of your life. I believe it takes an entire lifetime to truly answer and understand what being Jewish means to you. Throughout our lives we learn and experience Judaism everyday. In the first 18 years of mine I have had many experiences that have defined me as a Jew.

When I was thirteen I had my bar-mitzvah. Never once did it cross my mind to not have my bar-mitzvah because it was my duty as a Jew to be bar-mitzvah. And on that day I felt like I had been accepted not just as a man but a Jewish man, and to me that was the most important part of that day. A year later after my Bar-mitzvah I traveled to the state of Israel with my 8th grade class. The funny thing about Israel is that I felt like I had already been there...like I was already apart of it I had this sense of pride because I had never been around so many Jews before and it showed me that we are not as alone in this world as I thought we were.. Going to Israel is something that I believe every Jew should do because it is a key experience to in finding yourself as a Jew.

About a month ago I went on the March of the Living and it was the greatest experience of my life. I had read the books, I had seen the pictures, and had seen the movies. But seeing it first hand was an experience like no other. It opened my eyes up to a world that I didn't want to believe existed, and seeing that it actually happened is hard to completely understand. Never in a million years did I think that this trip would have such a big impact on me.

Through all of these experiences I have learned,...I have laughed,...and I have cried. And not only have I been changed as a man but more importantly I have changed as a Jew.

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Michael Shadrin, son of Kate and Igor Vapne, is graduating from American Hebrew Academy. He is an outstanding student, active member of AHA swim and track team. He has been a volunteer for Greensboro Jewish Federation and regular Torah reader. He plans to attend UNC at Chapel Hill.

Confirmation Essay Michael Shadrin

Judaism has always been prevalent in my daily life; after all I am going to a Jewish boarding school which stresses every aspect of my religion. To me, it is this identity and pride that makes me Jewish. Our people have a long and rich history that no one can deny and I intend to remember the lessons our past teaches us. Whether it is staying strong when people try to diminish your beliefs or keeping Jewish teachings close to heart, I will hold these values close as I move into an important transition stage in my life.

Over the past 4 years I have really been able to establish a clear and lucid perspective on Judaism. Before high school it was just a religion to me, I was Jewish and that was that. But then I got to experience and explore it firsthand and this had a profound effect on me especially after my visit to Israel. The spirit and vibrancy of the people there was nothing like I had ever seen, and they were all extremely proud of their Judaism. Everyone spoke Hebrew not just in prayer, but in everyday language. I remember that this was the hardest thing for me to do there, to try to keep conversation with the bit of Hebrew I knew. But, I wouldn't trade any of the time I had there for anything, I made great friends and I found a connection to my past I never knew I had.

It is my goal to be able to boast my Judaism as proudly as they do in Israel. During my next few years in college I hope to meet more people that share my ideals perhaps through my college Hillel or their local Jewish community to help me keep a strong tie with my Judaism wherever I end up in life.

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Michael Ryan Tuck, son of Leslye and Marshall Tuck and grandson of Sylvia and Norman Samet, is graduating from Greensboro Day School, where he has attended since kindergarten. In his high school years there, Michael has consistently been on the Headmaster's List, he was Captain of the Varsity Basketball team and the Varsity Lacrosse team, is a member of National Honor Society and was a founding member and vice-president of the Diversity Club, among other things. He earned his Boy Scout Eagle Award last summer. This fall, he will be attending UNC-Chapel Hill, where he has aspired to go since he fell in love with Carolina basketball at the age of six.

Confirmation Essay

Michael Tuck

When I think about my childhood there are not many things that I can accurately recall off the top of my head. I remember every fifth birthday party I had, learning to ride a bike, and when my siblings were born. However, I can recall with ease the times spent at my Grandparents house for Sedar dinners or break fast and all the times that my family would gather around the table and discuss any topic. These memories and traditions that I have with my family is what being Jewish means to me.

Although I do not attend synagogue often, I feel that the traditions instilled in me by my family makeup my Jewish identity and enable me to carry my Jewish values and beliefs with me wherever I go. I know it is my responsibility as a young Jewish adult to carry these Jewish values with me to College and as I grow. I can specifically remember when I was quite young and I wanted to eat chicken nuggets for the first night of Passover. We were eating dinner at my grandparent's house and my grandfather would have nothing of it. I sat outside at a wooden table eating my un-kosher for Passover chicken nuggets. This made me realize that no matter what your age, you are supposed to follow the traditions that were followed by your ancestors and that it is important to teach your own children to follow these traditions. I have grown to enjoy this family time and look forward to when my cousins come into town and we spend the entire afternoon at my grandparent's house, dozing off after a large meal and enjoying each other's company. I know that every year we will go around in a clockwise circle reading in turn, the kids will always fight over who has found the afikoman, and the youngest grandchild will cry about having to read the Four Questions in front of everyone. Although I know that these things will happen every time I get together with my family, I also feel that it is important to teach other's about being Jewish. Many people only know that Jewish people do not believe in Jesus and I find it fun and interesting to teach others about what being Jewish is; something that has come from my own personal Jewish identity. I remember going to camp Barney-Medintz in Georgia and explaining that I was going to an all Jewish camp was very surprising to my friends but I did not care because I truly felt at home with kids that had the same memories of growing up that I did.

I have not visited Israel yet and I hope to soon, but I know that when I do it will deepen my connection with all the Jewish people who have visited or lived in Israel before. Through these interactions and travels I hope that I can one day teach my kids as my parents and grandparents have taught me.

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