

Confirmation Student Speeches

May 20, 2018 – 6 Sivan 5778

Andrew DeSignore

I am the first born of Beth and Glenn. You should know my mom is Jewish, and my dad is Catholic. While my parents chose to raise me Jewish, I celebrate holidays with both sides of my family, ranging from Passover to Easter, and Christmas to Rosh Hashana. Each side of my family loves and supports each other, and each side wants to learn and participate in the other's traditions.

For example, my dad's Catholic parents loved coming to my Bar Mitzvah service. They told me they couldn't wait for my sister becoming a Bat Mitzvah in the coming years. On my mother's side, both my Mom Mom and my Pop Pop enjoy participating in large scale holiday celebrations with my dad's side.

When I was younger, I felt like I was the only one with a mom and a dad who have almost polar opposite backgrounds and religion. After coming to Hebrew school for the past 8 years, I have learned that I'm not the only human on earth in this situation! Friends have asked what it meant to me that my parents weren't both Jewish. I have so much fun talking about this specific part of my life, and I have also talked about my upbringing with friends in Confirmation class on several occasions.

This year especially, I have heard other people's stories and situations, which has allowed me to look back on my own and think more about how I have been affected by this. We also watched an old Saturday Night Live skit about Chanukah Harry and Santa Claus in Confirmation class. I had to laugh, because when I was younger, I would go to my mom's best friends, Aunt Abby's house, and their "Grandpa" would dress up as Chanukah Harry and we would all sing and dance.

Although my parents aren't done influencing me yet, their respectful approach to intermarriage has made me think about my own future. I was never either "opposed to" or "for" marrying a member of the Jewish community, and my parents' relationship hasn't changed that thinking. The fact that they are not the same religion actually makes me feel fine about whatever choice I make later in life. I believe my mom would be happy if I married someone of Jewish descent, but she would not be opposed of me marrying someone of a different religion either – and I think my dad is in the same boat. He tells me that whatever I decide to do, he will back me. I know when my parents got married, they made the decision to raise us Jewish and also have us learn about and celebrate my dad's holidays, and I know this will be a decision I will also have to work out with whomever I marry. I know I am Jewish but will want to incorporate customs of both my parents into my children's lives too.

Although the Jewish population in the world is very small, I never feel alone or segregated. With the help of my family, friends, and this Confirmation class, I am reassured that I will never be alone or isolated. My parents are so supportive, and when a problem involving religion occurs, we have family talks in order to solve the crisis. I have surrounded myself with friends who understand my background, and they

constantly make me feel that I belong somewhere no matter the circumstances. Finally, this community at Shir Ami helps make me believe that I am wanted.

Some people believe that interfaith marriages are destined to fail. Other people believe that even if an interfaith marriage succeeds, the children and the parents won't see eye to eye. I feel lucky that neither of these are true for me. I have loving and supportive parents. Although my family is prospering in our situation, I understand that not all cases of interfaith marriages work out.

My parents decided to get married knowing that one was Jewish and the other was Catholic. They had two children, fully understanding that their individual beliefs would affect their children's lives. The fact that my parents are in an interfaith marriage has always been very fun and interesting to me, but it also teaches me that I will have to think more seriously about my life in the future and take what I have learned as I decide how it is going to guide the choices in my adult life.

Tori Dorfman

Scott Beigel, 35 years old, died on February 14th. This past year the tragedy of the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida has had a big impact in my life. Growing up, I heard about school shootings in the news and in school, but they have never had a personal impact until the day of the Parkland shooting. During last period of school, I got a text from my camp friends that Douglas High School, the school where my camp friends go and division leader teaches, was on lockdown for an active shooter. My stomach immediately dropped.

The friends I have at that school luckily survived, but my division leader, Scott Beigel, did not. One minute he was teaching geography to his class, and the next minute his life was ended. It is crazy how one single day can have such a strong impact on my life. The thought that Scott would not make it out that day did not even cross my mind as I worried about my friends. He was not fortunate enough to survive this tragedy, but he died protecting and saving his students' lives.

Scott was called a hero due to his selfless acts, but to me, Scott was a hero every day. I have not fully grasped the idea that when I get off the bus for camp this summer he will not be there. Scott Beigel was a role model for me, most especially during my last year at camp. Every day he met us with a smile on his face. I recall one night we sat and listened to him tell a 45-minute story about a clown, just so he could get to the funny punchline. He filled the room with laughter, as he did every day at camp with his witty sense of humor. I do not think I have ever laughed harder than that night. He was there for every Friday night service, and Judaism was an important part of his life as well.

Religion can help give us something to believe in, but I found myself questioning why God would allow such good people to die so tragically. I have not yet found an answer to this question, but I am choosing to focus on the celebration of his life and his heroism.

A few weeks after the shooting, Starlight, my camp, held a “Memorial Celebration of Life,” to honor Scott. Almost the entire camp attended in order to honor him. We shared stories, memories and sang songs.

The sixth commandment in Judaism reads, “You shall not murder.” Scott Beigel, who was a son, a friend, a teacher, a coach, a counselor, and a man soon-to-be married was murdered. I, along with anyone who knew Scott, was affected by this act. But in the end, we were able to come together as one community to honor his life. This shows me just how strong the bond of Judaism is for us. This is why I love to be Jewish. During the toughest of times, we can come together as one and find a little light.

Marisa Kalafer

Imagine having to leave your home with only a small suitcase, spending up to a month in cramped, dirty conditions, and arriving in a place where everything was impossible to understand. While my family and I now reside comfortably in Bucks County, the history of my paternal ancestors’ journey to America was paved with adversity. After deciding to leave the Austrian “old country,” where threatening pogroms and increasing Jewish persecution existed, for the opportunity of New York City, learning to adapt to a new way of life presented several challenges. The bustling city, English language, and lack of land forced them into an alien place. However, after settling in the Lower East Side, they found comfort in the Jewish community there and continued Jewish life by speaking Yiddish in the home and attending services regularly. Also, with the support of their communities, my grandfathers formed businesses for themselves; one of them worked as a tailor while the other ran his own candy store. Additionally, my grandparents Morty and Ruthy were able to meet in high school and later form a life together in Middle Village, where my father and aunt grew up. While once in a position of insecurity and newness, my ancestors’ passion to succeed in the opportunity of America and create prosperous futures for their children allowed them to thrive with the support of the Jewish community.

When visiting New York City with other members of the Confirmation class this April, the Jewish immigrant story we explored was reminiscent of my family’s story. First, when visiting the Eldridge Street Synagogue, informational exhibits of the history of the synagogue included remnants of conservative Jewish practice at the time, including prayer shawls, Kiddush cups, service programs, and board meeting minutes. Having grown up in the synagogue, these objects represented familiar sights and the exciting start of Jewish life in America. Also, touring the synagogue indicated its history due to the mixture of newer and older materials. A cohesiveness between the new and the old was especially felt in the main sanctuary where a contrast between the original floors, and the dazzling new stained glass window existed. After visiting the synagogue, our group moved onto a visit to the tenement museum. Here, we could interact as a Jewish family from Russia with an actress portraying a Sephardic Jewish immigrant from Greece in a restored tenement building. We spoke with the lady as she helped us to better understand the difficulties of immigrant life her family experienced as they

assimilated. The completely realistic set up of the tenement, cramped and scarce of comfort, transported our group into the different time period. This moment emphasized my gratefulness of my living conditions today and the hard work of my ancestors. I was finally able to picture and understand the struggles. Overall, the activities of the trip provided a connection to my family's experience.

Reflecting on my family's past history as Jewish immigrants after the trip, I was also aware of my family's present dedication to Judaism. I am glad to recognize this continuation and follow in the actions of my sisters, Stacy and Michele, who are both committed to Jewish life. Both became Bat Mitzvah and one continued onto Confirmation here at Shir Ami. Also, after marrying and having kids, they decided to introduce their children to Jewish life. Their effort to maintain Judaism in their lives demonstrated to me that my experience with Judaism does not have to end with Confirmation. Looking back on the experiences of my great-grandparents, I hope they would feel a sense of pride in accomplishment in my sisters and I after working so hard to imagine a better life for their family. I feel that our successes in life, combined with our commitment to Judaism would contribute to their fulfillment. Ultimately, the support of the Jewish community and my family's perseverance in coming to America has helped lead me to this point today.

Jordana Leff

It's crazy to think that our lives can drastically change within minutes. One minute you are on your way to school like every other day, and then next you are on lock down hearing the screams of your classmates being shot in the next room. We hear about these kinds of awful tragedies, yet we never think it could happen to us. We stand by and let these awful things happen again and again. We wish thoughts and prayers upon the victims and their families, but then we forget about it until the next time something like it happens again. Although some people feel that prayer is ineffective, or simply not enough, there are certainly others who believe in the power of prayer. For those who are spiritual, and/or religious, prayer can help heal them, or even empower them to take action and make positive changes. Praying can be done alone at home, or in a group setting like a place of worship. Prayer can give people hope, and be an important part of moving forward after tragedy.

However, I also believe that it's time we take action and start standing up for a change. I personally have done this exact same thing. I hear about these awful tragedies in the news and I feel terrible, yet I never think further than that. But this time it was different. This time I was personally affected by the shooting in Parkland, Florida. Two of my camp friends who I am very close with go to Stoneman Douglas High School and were there during the shooting. Luckily, they both survived, one by hiding in a closet with her friend, and the other by running for her life out of the school. Although they survived, they had many close friends that died because of this terrible event that took place. I began to think about this more and more and how there had to be something that we, as students and as kids, could do to make sure something like this never happens again.

This is our generation and we have to take matters into our own hands. I participated in my school's walkout on March 14th, to not only honor the 17 innocent kids who died, but to protest gun laws in America and discuss a change in the second amendment of our constitution. I believe the walkout at Council Rock North sent a strong, important message and was so well-run by the passionate student government. It has been so amazing to watch so many kids come together in their belief and commitment to making a change in our society. We've showed that you can make a huge difference in this world, no matter your age. Kids have since taken it upon themselves to write emails and letters to our congressman with suggestions about how we can change our policies. They have done interviews about their experiences and spoken out in front of large groups of people to get the message across. We can no longer sit back and wish thoughts and prayers among the victims, but rather take action and be the change we wish to see in the world.

Shayna Pellen

When I was going into 9th grade, I was asked by a close friend to take a position on the SHAFTY board, which if you don't know is our synagogue's teen youth board. When I was asked I didn't know how to respond, but because I trusted my cross-country buddy, who was a SHAFTY board member, I agreed to take the position, not fully knowing what I had agreed to. As I walked into Shir Ami for my first SHAFTY meeting, I stood outside the youth lounge scared out of my mind and cried. Looking back, I'm not sure why I was so intimidated, but hey, it was a bunch of 10th and 11th graders, and I only knew one person in the room of 20. Now two short years later, I was elected as the SHAFTY President for the upcoming 2018-2019 year. Looking back at my 9th grade self, I chuckle a little. The thought of being scared to join a board which is now filled with some of my closest friends still shocks me. Being a part of the SHAFTY Board shaped me into a more confident person, while allowing me to experience Judaism in new ways.

In SHAFTY, we look for opportunities to give back in our local community through an assortment of social action activities. I was proud to be part of the "senior prom" we threw at The Birches. Working with the memory center was a great way to give back as a group and watching the residents' faces light up with joy during the game Headbanz was truly Tikkun Olam. I feel lucky my family values Judaism and our Jewish community, whether it's the Sukkah we build every year at my house, or the fact that five of my siblings and I have continuously spent our summers at Camp Harlam, I have been blessed to be part of multiple Kehillah Kedoshahs. The definition of community is being part something bigger than yourself and always having a place and people to fall back on. The Jewish community is exactly that.

In addition to SHAFTY board, I have held multiple positions on NFTY-PAR's general board, which is the National Federation of Temple Youth in the Pennsylvania region. This year, I am the Ruach Chair. My involvement in these Jewish Teen groups

has helped me learn more about myself and grow together with my peers – we have created a unique Jewish community of our own.

Learning with other Reform teens through NFTY Par has taught me no matter which branch of Judaism someone is from, or how many times someone has attended services, does not define how “Jewish” someone is. This is important, because when we are in college we may not always celebrate every holiday or feel as obligated to attend services, however knowing the Jewish community is always there to support you is paramount.

I have found multiple Jewish communities with an array of different friends and experiences, all which have enriched my life and made a huge impact. Everyone’s experiences with being Jewish and what kind of Jewish life they will live is unique. However, everyone should always remember the words of a song I’ve sang a million times at camp, “wherever you go there is always someone Jewish.”

Noah Petroski

Writing a speech with absolutely no guidelines, boundaries, or prompts is unusually harder than is expected. Without any rules, any rubric, any agenda or any thesis, the list of interesting topics of ideas becomes seemingly endless. The thought of being wrong, the fear of sounding stupid in front of an entire congregation, becomes simply treacherous. Our entire childhood lives we have been told what to do, what to write about, and what to believe. Coming up with the best Confirmation speech topic seemed to leave me under so much pressure it became unbearable.

Do I write about my passion for healing poverty in the world? Do I talk about ways to create a “Greener” Earth? Do I talk about where I see myself in the future? Or maybe my passion for equal rights for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people? The list became endless. The hardest part became the fact that I, Noah Petroski, had to choose what I want to talk about. I was left completely independent with no guidance. The hardest part became the fact that I was completely on my own and had to talk about my own interests and my own opinions.

And then I realized something. Since kindergarten at Temple Shalom and coming here in fourth grade, I have attended Sunday School, Hebrew School, Confirmation, whatever you want to call it. It has been every Wednesday and Sunday for 10 years. My friends would continuously say “Why do you still go to Temple? Didn’t you already have a Bar Mitzvah?” My response, every time, would be, “My parents are making me.” Every year since 1st grade I was told what to do. I was told what to believe in, and I was told who to believe in. Not only who to believe in, but exactly what it was that I was to believe about Him. We were told that God did this, and that God created the world and that He knows what we are doing, even if He won’t like it. Every year was the same story of Passover, the same story of what God did and different renditions of why Hanukkah lasts for 8 nights. It became repetitive. We were told the stories in the Torah, and we were told the stories that we, as Jews, are supposed to live our lives by. Never did

anyone ask me what I thought of Judaism or if I believed in God. It wasn't until this past year, our Confirmation year, that we really were forced to think for ourselves.

Every one of us was challenged to form our OWN opinions of what God we believe in and what, in our eyes, makes a "Good Jew." We focused on these questions in one of our activities that we called God shopping. We were asked these questions that we have been told the answer to, and we were given choices. For questions like, "Did god create the world" and "does God know everything?" we were given choices that ranged from yes to no and everything in between. Instead of being given the answer, we could decide what we thought. The most amazing part about this is that no matter how different our answers were, no matter how diverse our opinions became, we were ALL right. This year as a Confirmation student made me become so unbelievably proud of my religion and of being a Jew, because no matter what, no matter how we choose to practice this religion, it was all okay and accepted.

And learning about God made me truly contemplate what I believe in for the first time. Judaism to me isn't a set of rules to obey. It's not following a book word for word. I create my own Judaism by taking the values that apply to me. My Judaism doesn't necessarily have to include a God; my Judaism is about accepting others for who they are; my Judaism is about living the best life you can on this earth because you want to, not because God said so, not because you're hoping for salvation. It's not that I don't believe in God, but God shopping made me question everything I have been told in the past. If what I was told is the truth, then why do so many of the ideas I thought between these yes and no options we were given disagree? My Judaism is about questioning my heritage freely without judgement. I cannot tell you exactly what role God plays in my life and what exactly I believe. What I can tell you is that God is a symbol to me of strength and courage. This year in confirmation I realized I was thankful that my mother pushed me forward with my Jewish education because I learned that part of being a Jew is to always question my beliefs and to always seek knowledge.

Joshua Rosenthal

The first time that I had to question my commitment to Israel occurred at the beginning of this year, when award-winning musician Lorde, hot on the heels of her Melodrama World Tour, announced that she was pulling her show in Tel Aviv, specifically due to Israel's occupation of the West Bank. A musician cancelling a concert is usually something not too worrisome, but these cancellations are often not for political reasons; Lorde's cancellation was directly due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, one that has been ongoing since the State of Israel was created in 1948. So why was I surprised by this news? Given that I love Lorde just as much as I love Israel, I felt conflicted; if I was an Israeli teen who was excited to see my favorite artist, how would I feel if that opportunity was taken away from me due to the politics of my country? That's when I asked myself the following question: is there a difference between supporting a country *and* supporting a country's politics, or can the two exist apart from each other?

To preface, I appreciate Israel with all my heart and soul. As a Jewish teenager, Israel is like a second home to me; it's a place where I feel safe, welcomed, and free. When I went to Israel in the winter of 2016 with some of my fellow confirmands, I found out so much about myself that I did not know before, especially when it came to how deeply entwined I actually was with the Jewish faith. I loved standing up against the Western Wall, or climbing Mount Masada, or even walking through the Jerusalem Forest. Israel made me realize how much I loved being Jewish, and that it wasn't something that I should ever be ashamed of.

When I was growing up, I never questioned my commitment to Israel, the same way in which I never questioned my commitment to America. I went through the years holding my hand over my heart and saying the Pledge of Allegiance the same way I stood in services and sang Hatikvah; I never did it because I *had* to do it, but I did it because I thought it was the right thing to do. So as a Jewish youth, was I supposed to be furious that Lorde was cancelling her show in Israel? A lot of people that I talked to found her move to be anti-Semitic, which I still think is far from her true intention. Because of this, I started thinking, and I decided to do some research. I had never really looked into the Israel-Palestinian conflict before the Lorde story broke, so I wanted to find out why it was such a problematic issue.

To keep it simple, I can't condone every single thing that Israel does toward the Palestinians, and I can't be blind towards the oppression of the Palestinian people, but even in light of what I learned, I still stand by Israel. Israel *is* the land of the Jewish people, and even if I don't agree with the current policies in place within the country, I will always be fond of what Israel stands for. Even in its darkest times, Israel is a symbol of hope, of freedom, of promises that the future holds. If Israel is not in its brightest moment now, I, as a Jewish teenager, can help to see change in the country's future. I want to be proud of Israel, for I am proud of Israel, and I believe that it can and will be returned to its former glory, but only through understanding, unity, and equality.

I am Jewish; that is something I'm not ashamed of. Before I went to Israel, I always thought that being Jewish made me different, as compared to all my friends and peers. Israel opened my eyes to how beautiful and wonderful being Jewish truly is, and I am so grateful that I got the opportunity to travel to the homeland of the Jews. As a Jewish teenager, I stand behind Lorde's decision to cancel her show, for it's an act of powerful defiance; it is a resistance towards something that is great, but has room to improve, and be better. Israel can be better, and it will be better, but not without time and persistence.

As I stand here, I am slightly wary about what the future holds. I will have to forge my own path in a world that is often times big and terrifying, and make decisions on my own. It's scary, but I know that I'll always have three essential things to rely on: my family, my friends, and my faith. My Judaism will always be a part of me, from this Confirmation service to the rest of my life. As Lorde said in her song "Ribs", "...it feels so scary, getting old", and I agree wholeheartedly, but I know, deep down, that I will always have my Judaism to depend on.

Jake Rubin

About six months ago, I was over my friend Josh's house, and we were walking on the street at 3:00 in the morning. I stress the "three am" part because I find that my brain functions a lot faster and ideas flow better at this time of day. I asked Josh, "Do you believe in God?" He said, "I honestly can't tell you if God is real or not, because I've never seen God." At first, I thought, "that's reasonable," but then I realized -- wait a second... I could make up anything and no one would have the option to deny it based on this logic.

At Confirmation, we did an activity where we organized our thoughts about God's existence. Before this class, I always thought about God as either all-powerful by the Torah's guidelines, or non-existent. Jacob, one of the patriarchs of the Israelites received the name Israel, and this later came to be the name of our country in the middle east. As most of you probably know, Israel means to wrestle with God, meaning that we do not need to listen to the Torah, or the "words of God" exactly as they're written. One of the reasons I think Judaism is great is that it can be okay for people to not follow along with the exact words of our book of worship.

The topic often pondered is the question of how the universe was created. No matter how far back in time you go, you can always question what came before that. As humans, we tend to ask more questions than we have answers to. I don't think we should worry about the beginning of the universe or the end of our lives as much as we do. What happens after death doesn't matter - don't worry about that; we should, however, live in the present and think about right now while we're alive.

My ideologies about God have changed over the past year. I now believe that God created the universe and then let it be, but in that case, I could just as easily say "who created God?" For this reason, my perception of God is dynamic and might change based off an event or even my mood. Our understanding of a deity, or deities, or any supernatural being, does not need to be constant. Nothing will happen if you believe in God one day and not the next. Tomorrow, I might believe something else --this is part of the fun of life, that we don't always need to know the truth. If we did know precisely what God is, it would likely take away some purpose in life. Thinking about that night now, I wonder, was God there watching me, maybe putting that question in my head? I don't know. But I will continue to keep living my life, content with the realization that I don't know the answer. My hope is that you go home and think about this and also struggle with God's existence. Don't just blindly follow what someone else tells you. Form your own opinions and allow them to change whenever you want.

Abagael Shaffer

The American Jew. To you it probably sounds so simple. But to me, the idea of being a Jew in America has changed throughout my life. When I lived in Chicago, it was normal to be Jewish. It seemed like everyone in Highland Park was Jewish, it was the norm, and I didn't think about it much. Every Wednesday you'd leave school and see at

least half of your peers at Hebrew school. Then I moved to Newtown. Not much was different: I was closer to family, and I could meet new people. But then I started to talk to my new classmates. I learned that none of them were Jewish, none of them were close with anyone Jewish. I'd talk about becoming Bat Mitzvah, and everyone would be confused, but at least all that explaining improved my story telling abilities. I knew one girl who was Jewish, but she wasn't very observant, and she had been questioning her beliefs at that time. As I became more isolated, I started to look more into my faith. I started religious school here, so I finally had people who somewhat understood what I was saying, but then I'd go back to school with no one who got it.

And now here I am, two years later. Now being a Jewish American means not being as observant as my counterparts in other countries. It means being part of a marginalized group. It means constantly being aware of where I can and can't visit for the purpose of safety. It means sticking with a small group of Jewish friends because - hey, power in numbers, right? I feel like it's my duty to not only be involved with American news, but also with Jewish news. I try to participate in as much activism as I can, like following Jewish news sources to stay updated on everything going on around the world and within the community, while also trying to educate my peers. This should be a country I feel comfortable in, but why do I always worry when someone learns of my faith? When I caught wind of the swastikas and other anti-Semitic paraphernalia drawn in the bathrooms at my school, I felt like any safety I had in Newtown was gone. I'm still trying to build that comfort back up. Every day, my confidence in my identity grows, just to be pushed back down with the release of every document about an anti-Semitic event. As much as I joke about the Jews being a hated people, all these issues plague me and cause me to worry about my future. I believe that I should be able to fall asleep each night without worrying about being the victim of the next big hate crime. I hope that we as Americans can work on not only being more welcoming and kind to Jews, but also to other marginalized groups. I mean America's supposed to be the land of the free, right? While I feel we may not be there yet, we definitely are the home of the brave. It takes so much to walk outside and be confident in who you are while knowing that anyone could sling dozens of derogatory terms and put downs without hesitation, and for that I'm extremely proud.

Jeremy Siegel

I grew up in a home that had a passion for the game of hockey. My older cousin, Chad, played, and he got me into it. My family loved hockey, so they encouraged me to work hard to get good at the sport. We watched hockey on TV as a family, and they took me to professional games as often as possible. You might even say I inherited my passion for hockey – I always thought it would be so cool to play in the big leagues. As a kid, I lived for playing hockey, and there was no doubt in my head that I would ever stop loving the sport. Whether or not I would play in my future years was the only question that needed to be answered. At that age, and even today, there was never a thought about quitting.

Just like hockey, I have been passionate about my religion since a young age. My family always took me along to holiday services and Jewish community events. My parents will tell you, I used to want to be a rabbi when I was younger because of how “cool” it looked. I enjoyed learning about my religion almost as much as I enjoyed stepping out on the ice. I grew up observing all the Jewish holidays, with a special fondness for Hanukkah!

Like hockey, I inherited my passion for Judaism. Then, there were no thoughts of quitting Hebrew school. When it came to practicing for my Bar Mitzvah service, I never complained; I enjoyed learning Hebrew and willingly jumped into the car each week for lessons. After my Bar Mitzvah, people in my family expected that I would go on and be confirmed 3 years later. Truth is, I had no idea if that would happen at all. After all, among all of my other activities, I was busy playing hockey.

I remember in my 8th grade year, there were about 30 kids in my Hebrew school class. By 9th grade year, that number had been cut in half. My friends had quit right after the Israel trip. They did not want to get confirmed, and them quitting got me thinking. In my head, I thought “Why not? I’ve come so far, and I want to be a part of a special tradition.”

I decided to get confirmed because it really does mean a lot to my family and also to me that I continue to be Jewish. What I have figured out through Confirmation this year is that I never want to end my Jewish learning. At some point, I know that I might have to end my hockey career. I never have to end being Jewish.

Noah Stein

All my life, I have identified with two things: America and Judaism. Through my Confirmation studies this year, I have concluded that the two are not so different. The American Constitution and the Torah were made for a similar purpose: to outline the laws and moral standards of a people. I think that the two documents align with one another in their core elements, and that being a good Jew and a good American are compatible things.

This is demonstrated in the similarities in the ideologies of America and Israel. Both encourage social justice, human dignity, and improving the world in which we live. In class, we discussed guidelines from the Torah regarding warfare and general rules for how we should live our lives in various situations. I drew parallels from that text to our own American ideals. For example, almost all parts of the Ten Commandments manifest in some aspect of American law.

Sometimes, I like to think about what I would do if Israel and America went to war. Of course, I would be conflicted about who I would stand with, but thankfully, I don’t think I’ll ever be faced with that decision. In my daily life, I am not faced with having to choose between being a good Jew and a good American, which is something that I am very grateful for.

Sarah Vitcov

When the question from my parents came, asking if I wanted to do Confirmation, I admit it was a tough choice. I was torn and didn't know what I wanted to do... in a way I wanted to do it because I didn't want to disappoint my parents, but then I felt apprehensive because I thought it would be extremely cliquish. I thought back to all the past years and realized it hadn't been like that at all at Shir Ami, so the question came to my mind, "what makes this year any different from all the other years? NOTHING!" Finally, I came to the decision that I would go ahead and become confirmed.

The second night of Confirmation, we were asked to meet at a local escape room. It seemed like a fun activity, but of course the fear of not having anyone to hang with came to mind. I faced my fear, and ended up going to the escape room – and we had a blast! We were split up into two rooms and we had all different clues that we had to solve with our team in order to get the "key" before the other group. The first team to escape was the winner –and we did.

After that event, my whole perspective of Confirmation changed. Also, something else that made coming to Confirmation fun for me is when we went to the first-grade class and got to work with the young students and be a part of their Consecration. That was really fun because the little kids looked up to us, and being a part of their special service brought back memories of being in first grade. I remember having a high school helper in my class way back then, and thinking to myself, "I really wish I could do that when I am in high school."

Today, I stand here getting confirmed, and I feel so accomplished. It wasn't easy getting here, but I am happy I decided to push through and continue in my Jewish learning.