



**2021 Berkeley Hillel
Prize Essays**

This Year's Prompt

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself – וְאָמַבְךָ עַל־תְּבִהָאֵי

Leviticus 19:18 commands us to love your neighbor as yourself. Think about a memorable moment when you realized that you loved your 'neighbor' as yourself.

Write a personal essay (400-500 words) in which you write about this important personal event or time period in your life, and narrate this event or situation in a way that your reader can fully experience and understand what led you to this realization.

By Jackie Amendola

Losing a loved one is never easy. Losing two loved ones in 2 months is even harder. And losing both my grandmothers in one month was the hardest thing I've ever been through.

My grandmothers were the epitome of a "Jewish mom"; they were loud, opinionated and of course, amazing cooks. Besides my parents, they were the only other family I grew up with. Two of the most independent and inspiring women in the world, and I was lucky enough to call them both "grandma."

One taught me how to knit and make all the classic Jewish dishes. The other taught me how to play poker and told me stories that never got old. But if there's anything I could take from both of them and carry on in their legacy, it's how they treated every person they met. There were no better people to model the idea of "loving your neighbor like yourself" than them.

In the last few years of their life, they both lived in the same assisted living facility. I will never forget rushing there after school, playing bingo and having the most meaningful conversations about life with them. But if there was anywhere I learned to treat everyone with kindness, it was in the dining room of this assisted living facility at Sunday Brunch.

The buffet was vast and the room was packed with hungry and impatient elderly residents. As the doting granddaughter I was, I would always fill my 95-year-old grandmother's plates with everything they wanted before I even thought about filling my own. But by the time I brought their food back they would yell, "Jackie go get Margie a plate" or "Jackie, Kathy wants a bagel and shmear would you be a doll and get it for her?". And each time I returned with another person's food, the next order was up and I was back in the buffet lines getting the next resident's food.

But to my grandma's they weren't just residents or even neighbors — each of them was treated like family or an old friend. No one ever ate alone because they knew they were welcome at our table and of course, that I would be happy to get them whatever they wanted. After a while I just started eating before I came because I knew my time at brunch would be spent helping whoever I could get their food, making sure no one felt alone and ensuring that everyone was taken care of.

It hasn't even been a month since I've lost them, but it feels like a physical piece of my heart was buried with them. But if there is anything they taught me it's that you can always fill your own heart by caring for those around you, no matter who they are or what their background is. And I will always continue to do just that in honor of them — in honor of Rose and Thelma, of my Mimi and Nanny.

By Anonymous

At my high school in northern New Mexico, I excelled in my English classes. I loved reading novels, discussing rhetoric. When I came to Cal, I assumed I would be an English, or Comparative Literature, or perhaps a Rhetoric major. I took Literature of American Cultures, then English 17: Shakespeare. I thoroughly enjoyed them, but I wasn't ready to settle down yet. Somehow I felt there was more for me to discover. The fall of my sophomore year I took CS10: The Beauty and Joy of Computing, and had it not been for that whim enrollment decision, I might be graduating with a degree in English this May.

That introductory computer science class not only piqued my interest, changed the way I conceptualized problem solving and creativity, and altered my academic path- it alerted me. It set off an alarm in my head: Where was computer science previous to my 20th birthday? Why had I not only never taken a programming class, but scarcely heard of the thing before college? The answer has a lot to do with resources, bandwidth, and money- three powerful components, more of which New Mexico public schools desperately need. Fortunately, my home state has a lot of heart, and a lot of people who want to better our education system. I like to consider myself one of those people.

During the summers after my freshman, sophomore, and junior years of college, I made specific efforts to help increase STEM, specifically CS, educational resources in northern New Mexico. I helped launch the 2nd annual Los Alamos National Laboratory Summer Physics Camp for Young Women, and taught a Python programming module there in 2018. In 2019 I returned to the program to give a presentation on cognitive science, my major. This past summer I worked with the D.C. nonprofit, the Congressional App Challenge, a program that aims to further computer science education and engagement in all congressional districts of the United States. I took the opportunity to personally connect New Mexico U.S. congressional leadership, local STEM programs, and the resources of the organization. My contributions to these projects were small, but 15 year old girls from underserved backgrounds considering for the first time a career in computer science or physics, from a combination of hands-on exposure and female representation- that's life changing. Path altering.

Loving your neighbor as yourself, to me, means turning around and giving back to my communities. I loved myself enough not to settle- to seek more, to venture out into the academic unknown. And I don't feel the call to support New Mexico youth purely because those young girls could have been me eight years ago. Who knows, perhaps if I encountered programming in the 9th grade I would have hated it! What I care about is helping to offer these young people the option, the possibility, the opportunity to seek more, to dream bigger, to not settle. Love is powerful. I am proud to use it to serve my neighbor.

Practicing Respect with Our Houseless Neighbors

By Elysa Dombro

If you live around Berkeley campus, you've likely noticed the houseless population. When I first moved here, walking past people who couldn't afford lunch while I was spending thousands on dining hall food—and complaining about its quality—made me feel horrible. Despite my feelings of guilt, it became easy for me to ignore the problem as I adjusted to Berkeley. Eventually, I stopped being able to push away the idea of countless people walking into stores without a second glance at the individuals sitting outside. How would I feel if that were me? The first time I bought a sandwich for a houseless person, I walked around inside Walgreens for ages, trying to decide what to get the houseless man who was sitting outside. When I finally chose a packaged turkey sandwich, I hurried outside to hand over the parcel and say “have a good day” before walking away quickly. I hardly even looked at him.

I was embarrassed that my guilt translated to so much nervous energy and that I didn't interact more with the man I met, but I still felt pretty good about myself until about a week later. In class, a classmate brought up how well-meaning individuals often take away houseless people's autonomy by buying them things they don't need—for instance, a sandwich that they might be allergic to, or even just don't like. Or, maybe, they keep kosher and it goes against their practice to eat a ham sandwich. If I was on the street, I would want someone to respect me enough to ask me what I would like to eat.

I grew up being told *v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*. I've been indoctrinated with the idea that as Jews and as people, we should treat others as we would like to be treated. But in practice, it's not always easy to translate this to people other than friends who you recognize as being able to reciprocate. Love your neighbor as yourself is about treating everyone the way you want to be treated, regardless of if they'll ever have the chance to pay it back. It's about considering everyone as your neighbor, even if they don't have a house.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it's become difficult for many people to feel safe going up to a houseless person. Sometimes this fear translates to not even making eye contact with others as you pass by them—I've found myself doing this. It's a more important time than ever to remember to love your neighbor as you love yourself. When I come across a houseless person, I make an effort to smile at them as I would any other person, even if I don't have time to stop. Just as I'm needing a little extra support from friends in this unprecedented time, I recognize that houseless people are feeling the same way. We could all use a little extra love right now.

When Neighbors Become Family

By Melanie Gorelik

I never imagined that one of my highlights of this year would be a simple dinner party with seven neighbors. It seems crazy considering that until mid-March, my “normal” involved taking picturesque walks to class through cobblestone streets and hopping on cheap Ryanair flights as often as I could to explore new cities. Something about a pandemic and the uncertainty that it brings naturally makes us all re-evaluate our priorities and what we choose to make of a situation. After a tumultuous few weeks following President Trump’s European travel ban, the number of exchange students at Lund University had dwindled to a few brave souls willing to stick it out. When it became clear that our new reality meant online classes and no travel outside of our region of Skåne, we decided to meet for a potluck dinner to keep our spirits high and retain some sense of community. We didn’t really know each other that well before aside from short interactions by the elevators or in the laundry room but our school-sponsored social activities were no longer an option. We didn’t have much in common when it came to age, program, or country of origin, but there’s something magical about the way that good food and a hard time can eventually bring even the most diverse group together.

Our last dinner together was the night before several of us were going home and I remember repeatedly begging the group to keep the sappiness to a minimum. Ultimately, we couldn’t help it and each went around the table describing what we were grateful for. By the end of our dinner, there wasn’t a dry eye in sight, even from the usually reserved Swedes. Unusual circumstances had brought us closer together than anyone could have predicted in a time where we all were apart from our loved ones at home. We’d come a long way from our awkward first dinner as we each eventually realized just how meaningful the past few months had been because of our community.

Months later, when I think of my time in Sweden, I’m instantly brought back to the smell of the cinnamon buns we made for one special birthday dinner, the commotion of chairs being shuffled between apartments to squeeze in extra guests, and the many beautiful sunsets we watched from the roof together. We all craved some kind of connection, especially during hard times, and there was truly no better place to look than right next door. Pulling out all the stops for our weekly gatherings became a labor of love and I grew to see cooking for the group as an expression of my appreciation for our friendship. We now know that our doors are always open for each other, despite the fact that we are scattered across three continents. The next time I find myself somewhere new, I know I’ll always reach out to my new neighbors in the hopes of creating a similar sense of community.

Love Your Neighbor

By Hannah Haas

Every day, my neighbor steals my dog. Technically, she doesn't steal her. She generously takes my dog for a walk around noon, since she is walking her dog, too. My dog's name is Sadie, a name my family gave her due to its appropriate Jewish origin and because it seemed to fit her personality. My neighbor's name is Lori. Lori is eighty years old, yet has more energy than anyone I know.

Before the stealing began, my family never talked to Lori, except for one day when my mom said "hi" and Lori ignored her, then proceeded to say that she chose not to speak to my mom. Let's just say that we haven't always been friends. Several years later, Lori bought a dog, which somewhat magically transformed her into a friendly, talkative neighbor who was eager to walk Sadie every day.

Through our mutual love and care for Sadie, my family has formed a relationship with Lori. Over the years, we have gotten to know each other and realized that we could not be more different. Lori is not one to hold back her true opinions about anything, including politics. Almost daily, my dad ends up talking to her about the news. She, an ardent Trump supporter, climate-change-denier, and pro-life advocate, rambles on and on about whatever it is she watched on Fox News the previous night. My dad, uncomfortable as ever, attempts to hold his tongue, but still manages to politely include some of his own beliefs in the conversation.

She discusses her skepticism about global warming, the idea that all abortion is murder, and how the real culprit behind the storming of the capitol was ANTIFA. When I decided that I'd be attending Cal, she warned my dad that my mind would soon be corrupted by leftist propaganda. My dad, bewildered by her obscene conspiracies and their complete lack of any factual basis, somehow keeps his cool. This display of self restraint and respect always impresses me. He tells me that he has no chance of convincing an eighty year old woman with alt-right beliefs that climate change is, indeed, occurring and that our last president was actually responsible for much of America's democratic demise.

This ironic, and at times, agonizing, relationship has taught me a lot about what it means to love my neighbor as myself. Although I passionately and fundamentally disagree with Lori about essentially everything, we both deserve to be treated respectfully, with openness and kindness. Lori knows what my dad is thinking while she shares her thoughts on national politics, yet she continues to take Sadie for a walk every day and remains eager to converse. Similarly, my dad listens to her problematic viewpoints and is happy to share his own. On a continual basis, Lori shows me what it means to be a good neighbor. I have learned that loving my neighbor reaches far beyond any political party or ideal, and must always be unconditional, genuine, and kind.

Empathy's Impact on Social Activism

By Hannalee Lsaacs

Personally, “loving your neighbor as yourself” means supporting community members who lack the power to use their power and to work towards making our world a fairer place. With this in mind, I attended the American Civil Liberties Union’s Advocacy Institute in Washington, D.C. to increase my effectiveness as an advocate for vulnerable communities. The program emphasized the importance of relating personal stories to convey our message in support of the DREAM Act. Hearing this, I felt stuck. While I was prepared to make a strong argument for granting citizenship to immigrant children to remove the risks of deportation, I did not feel personally connected to the issue. I was sixteen years old and had no idea what it was like to have your home taken away and to have your life turned upside down in a heartbeat. That all changed a couple of months later.

In October of 2018, Hurricane Michael descended on parts of the East Coast, including my state of North Carolina. Having been hit by Hurricane Florence only two weeks prior, the ground was still soaked, which loosened the roots of two huge trees adjacent to my home. Once the wind picked up, the trees fell like dominos. That event left our home in shambles for six months, during which time my family moved frequently.

Despite the stress of being displaced, I always felt safe. As the only family in the neighborhood affected by the storm, we had our community supporting us. From the event, I realized the strong sense of belonging I had with my hometown community and the power of empathy which spurred others to help my family.

For as long as I can recall, I have been enraged by injustice and have actively tried to make the world more fair. Now, I felt it even more necessary to support those who are not in a position to speak for themselves. After the storm, I wrote and published essays on social justice issues I cared about, volunteered during the midterm elections, and established a club to promote inclusion and understanding among students from differing backgrounds.

Of all my experiences during my time from home, though, the most significant was returning to DC to lobby once more for immigrant families, this time of my own volition. With the knowledge I had gained from my first lobbying experience, coupled with my personal reflections after Hurricane Michael, I was able to speak with conviction to five House representatives about the effects of separating families at the border and the potential consequences of discontinuing the DREAM Act.

Hurricane Michael changed the way I approach life and deepened my appreciation for community engagement. After the hurricane, I realized that while fighting injustice is not always easy, advocating for others is essential. At its root, social justice work and advocacy requires loving your neighbor as yourself. My empathy for disadvantaged community members drives me to fight for justice for DREAMers and all those who cannot fight their battles alone.

By Daryanna Lancet

For me, this summer was a process of reckoning with my identities as a working-class, white American daughter of a Russian/Polish Jewish father, and Irish Catholic mother. I began asking each of my grandparents more about my family's history. I learned about my Grandma Theresa's life growing up in a newly post-colonial Ireland. I learned about my great-grandfather Sam's escape from the pogroms in Russia, and Grandma Lenny's flight from Poland, as a baby, in the 1940's—the only member of her family to make it out alive.

Amidst these stories, surges of the Covid-19 pandemic, and Black Lives Matter Protests, I came to deeply affirm that in 2021, in the United States of America, assimilation had worked its power. The half-Irish, half-Jewish girl (me) is white, and about to graduate the number one university in the world. Unlike my ancestors, I have a lot of power.

With my ancestors in mind though, the idea of “loving my neighbor as I love myself” becomes the only clear, sensible course of action. History repeats, but not by itself—only if those privileged in oppressive systems do not listen to those oppressed, and actively work to leverage their power and privilege for a more just future. During the long days of heartbreak, fear, and anger that shaped May and June of 2020, the question became—with the identities I hold, and skillsets I have as an English and Theater major, how can I tangibly support grassroots justice movements in the United States right now?

After weeks of wrestling with this, feeling angry and directionless, I came up with an organization run via Instagram, CREATE4relief. At its core, CREATE4relief offers people a way to donate money to organizations supporting racial, environmental, economic, and gender justice through making and receiving art. Since July, we have hosted and advertised everything from vocal workshops, to visual art sales to staged play readings—with ten to fifty people in attendance each time. All the donations go towards grassroots justice organizations such as the Black Trans Arts Collective, Hopi/Navajo Family Relief Fund, People's Breakfast Collective, East Oakland Collective, and the California Wildfire Relief Fund. Cumulatively, we have raised over \$2,000.

This semester, I have started CREATE4relief Artists Collective, a group of artists who will continually produce new work to raise funds for justice organizations. I want to pay these artists for their work. I am applying for this scholarship because I believe that with funding, CREATE4relief can and will expand their ability to provide mental and emotional relief to people through art-making, and raise quadruple the amount given in funds for grassroots justice organizations.

CREATE4relief is a sustainable framework for people to provide relief for themselves and their neighbors, near and far—through making and/or receiving art and donating the proceeds. To know your history, in this deeply interconnected and turbulent world, is to understand that actively loving, supporting, and providing relief to your neighbor is one and the same as caring for yourself. Moving forward into this uncertain future, I feel it is vitally important to grow and nurture this new system of caring.

By Teo Lin-Bianco

Our story begins with Pinterest, as most of my stories do. My brother and I found a photo of a tree with a sweater. Yes, a tree sweater. While this photo was initially confusing, I couldn't help but smile; it was lively and fun. My brother and I exchanged glances and both understood that we needed one, so we got right to work. A few weeks and thousands of stitches later, we arrived at the foot of a tree on our street with three rectangles of yarn. We spent the next hour desperately trying to find the least awkward angles to sew sweaters onto tree branches as passerby's looked on in utter confusion. In the end, we had done it, three pieces on three branches. The result was: underwhelming. While the overall project looked cute, a closer eye revealed poor sewing skills and awkward color coordination (earth tones don't really "pop" against trees). My brother and I walked away defeated. The next morning, I stood outside waiting for my carpool, per usual, but noticed someone taking a photo next to the newly decorated tree. I thought this was a happy fluke. On my return home, though, I was approached by a mother and her kids. She asked if I hung up the sweaters and I enthusiastically replied that I had. She went on to say that her kids loved the idea and that it made the street "just a little bit brighter and a lot better." I was beyond touched. Since then, my brother and I have received a handful of compliments on our project. Though it likely went unrecognized by many, the few who did care to notice couldn't help but smile, and those smiles made the neighborhood a little brighter, and a whole lot better. There are probably a few dozen other people we'll never meet who appreciated the work my brother and I did that day too, but the more I think about that small act of kindness, the more I realize that spreading loving does not require a personal relationship. Whether they laughed at a tree in a sweater or took a moment to admire our color schemes, my brother and I contributed, just a little bit, to building a tight-knit community (pun intended). Looking back, I realise that this moment fundamentally changed the meaning of neighbor for me: we are all living next to each other in one way or another; our actions intertwine with those around us in ways we can't even imagine. As neighbors, the connections we make, both implicit and explicit, fundamentally spread the unifying truth in the human spirit and reveal the way in which we are all tied together by a complex web of yarn.

**Love Your Neighbor as Yourself – רֹמֵם כָּמוֹךָ אֶת־רֵעִי
By Hallie McRae**

V'ahavta l'reacha kamocho— "love your neighbor as yourself." A proverb so true that it extends across all walks of religious and spiritual life, we are called on and expected to treat those near to us as our own. From childhood, we have been raised among cliches and philosophies pushing to extend ourselves to others and to treat people how we want to be treated: with a sense of true care for one another. Such values are those with which my mother raised me, from as early as I can remember. A fierce advocate for establishing connections and bridging gaps between even the most seemingly unlike people, my mom lived by *v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*. From birth and until the age of 18, my Los Angeles home was host to neighbors in the form of international students from across the globe: Japan, Sweden, Denmark, France, China, Brazil... In my home, living under one roof, I formed relationships with people who I would have never met otherwise. When I woke up in the mornings, my breakfast circle multiplied. Coming home after school, I was greeted by the conversation of hybrid English and native languages, hearing the progression of proficiency over the months they spent with us. Before going to bed, there were flurries of "goodnight!" and "sleep well!" and "see you tomorrow!" unlike the conventional nature of any household I have been in outside my own. As a shy kid, someone who never spoke unless prompted and who didn't enjoy branching out to new people, these experiences put me in situations where I was forced to build relationships with strangers. Looking back to my childhood, remembering the connections I made from elementary school until now, I am able to see the progression in the nature of these relationships. No matter the level of connectivity— whether a two-month stay when I was younger, leaving me with a connection in another country, or an eight-month stay as I got older, giving me a new sibling to consider part of my own— my family grew, and grew, and grew. I was able to meet more of my worldwide "neighbors" and build a global community that continues to make the world seem a little less wide, continuously opening my mind, home, and heart to spread my love.

I now have neighbors spreading across several countries around the world. These formerly unknown neighbors have become my family, people I love as much as I love myself. While not defined by a single moment or point in time, it was years in the making that allowed me to realize the importance of the Hebrew proverb that has been ingrained inside of me my entire life.

By Nadav Mendoza

I see myself in order in many distinct ways. In how I communicate, in how I treat others, and feel others in sympathy. In order to accomplish this, I have to accept myself as I am and take care of myself. By being kind to myself, taking care of myself, and self sooth myself I can have the comprehension in order to do so with others. Even if I do not have the catering to myself, I would have at least tried acting benevolently towards others because it is the way I want to be furnished. By listening and observing others, especially, nearby loved ones we can have a previous or at least develop a sense of sympathy and empathy. I realised this when I had my first partner and especially being around my parents primarily with my younger brother. Also just going through life. I am much older than the average undergraduate student body and I feel a sense of what life can throw at you in experience. You start catching weird feelings, people coming and going in your life, experiences we are able to control and not able to control like unfortunate pandemics and the weather. With all this exposure to events and circumstances you start to notice a pattern in life and how to handle it. In order to feel sympathy and empathy you must go through being vulnerable at first in order to comprehend the gloomy disturbing feeling of emotions. Pretty much after being put into a mental hospital, being homeless, cruel breakups that one does not get the chance to explain oneself or be misunderstood can all contribute on how you treat and perceive others. In order to understand others, I have to understand myself first and scrutinise my past and how I felt. Once I am in a balanced point there with myself, I can move ahead and have the grasp towards others that I know how it feels to be hurt or go through a rough point in their lives that almost no one sees. This is where my interest in psychology comes in and the attempt to repair the world bit by bit. I first have the self-love I need to bring light unto others. Attempting to protect others from feeling like they hit rock bottom is a duty of mine that I start off with my younger brother of currently ten years old. My experiences and learning how to deal with them mentally and process them in my body is one of the hardest things I've done and one of the best feelings to feel is to help others and love them because we only see a glimpse of peoples' lives from not just my eyes but everyone else's. I am here to better myself while improving other beings as well.

By Moideen Moidunny

Sarah and I sat on a hill and watched the magenta line tracing the Himalayan mountaintops collapse under the dark indigo sky. It was at that moment she first grabbed her abdomen after experiencing a sharp current of pain, which she dismissed as a stomach ache. Sarah and I were yoga students in rural Himachal Pradesh. We stayed behind near our academy when our class left for the city that weekend.

The following morning, I found Sarah in her room crying while clutching her stomach. She said that she wanted to go back home to North Carolina and started booking her ticket. I understood then that she would need support getting appropriate medical attention, especially given the serious state of her physical and psychological competence.

Despite being an ex-Muslim, I retained the positive humanistic values core to Islam, a religion that claimed to be the successor to the great and ancient religion of Judaism. The Islamic equivalent of Leviticus 19:18 is in Chapter 49, verse 13 of the Qur'an, "O mankind! We created you from a single(pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other)." This Judeo-Islamic precept has profoundly impacted my sense of morality and obligation to my fellow human being, those who I should cherish as my own 'neighbor'. In my case, this ethical Abrahamic perspective traverses beyond the confines of basic dogma and religious conviction.

As she lay in the fetal position on her bed, I epiphanically realized that we were both 'strangers' in this land; Sarah and I were one of the only ones who shared an American identity. Having keenly and passionately studied Jewish theology and history in an academic and leisurely capacity since I was a young teenager compelled me to think about the perennial rabbinic injunction to always be mindful that the Israelites were once 'strangers' in a foreign land and therefore one ought to be mindful that the stranger among you must be loved as yourself. In retrospect, I think Rashi and Akiva would have encouraged me to see Sarah as an extension of myself (despite having only known her for a week), as per God's pentateuchal commandment. So I did.

She objected to my defiant request to see a physician at a hospital. Despite her objections, I assumed a supervisory role, hailed a cab and carried Sarah inside to set off through the mountainside for the nearest, though underfunded, government hospital. Sarah moaned as I carried her in my arms while navigating through the dense crowds of sick people. As Sarah was probably the only white person in the hospital, the staff summoned a doctor quickly. I tried to recall all the remedial Hindi from Bollywood movies from childhood to ask the octogenarian doctor what ailed her. He diagnosed her with an 'inflamed gangrenous appendicitis' (which he said in English). He exclaimed, "6 hours!", then gesticulated an explosion.

My feet grew heavy and I gulped when he requested my permission to perform an immediate appendectomy on her. Although my ancestors were not strangers in the land of Egypt, my head swelled with the understanding that this compelling circumstance called for me to love Sarah, my neighbor, as myself and help her in any way I could. Sarah reluctantly relented to my persuasive plea to have the surgery to remove her appendix. I had forgone some of my important yoga training to care for Sarah as she recovered for almost 10 days. Sarah's scars have healed up now, but I dread to guess what would have happened if I had not received in my heart this strong ethical tradition and loved Sarah as my fellow 'stranger' as my own 'neighbor'.

By Ella Plotkin-Oren

If you asked me a month ago what the most important thing to me was, I would quickly answer, “family”. If you ask me the same question today, I would answer the same way, but with a different feeling behind my answer. I am lucky enough to come from a huge family and am very close to my extended family. A month ago my cousin Josh was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer and it had already spread to his bones. Hearing this news about anyone is shocking. Josh is 41, a father to three young children, my cousin Sarah’s husband, and the liveliest person I know. Josh is also a brilliant oncologist. His diagnosis is heartbreaking.

My cousin Sarah is my mom’s first cousin, making her my second cousin. Growing up, my family drove down to Southern California often to visit my mom’s Aunt Janet, Uncle Allan, and cousins Anzac, Sarah, and Jesse. I built strong relationships with them although they were far from my age. I remember when Sarah got married, it was so fun. She married a guy named Josh, who happens to be cousin Jesse’s childhood best friend and is now my cousin Josh. My sisters and I were the flower girls, and as a first grader, it was the coolest thing ever.

The relationship between my second cousins and me grew when Sarah and Josh had kids. The kids are the sweetest and my relationship with them is one I hold close to my heart. When I got the news about Josh, my heart broke for Sarah and the kids, and the worldwide pandemic is only making it harder. If it was any other time, the community would do anything they could to help Sarah, but that can’t happen right now. All I wanted was to try to help in any way I could. So that next week, I drove down to Southern California and stayed with their family to help with the kids and be there for them.

During the week and a half I spent with them, I was able to go through the ups and downs of one of the hardest weeks in Josh’s cancer journey so far. When there was good news the house was filled with laughter and smiles again, and when there were the unavoidable bad days, I was there to provide comfort and smiles in any way I could. Thinking about if I were in Sarah’s shoes I would hope that someone would be able to help me in the ways that I was able to help them.

In times like this, my subconscious takes over and all I can think about is how I can help relieve some of the pain and stress from the hurting. I think of my neighbor as myself, just as Leviticus 19:18 commands us to do. Throughout this horrible mess the importance of being there for others and loving someone as you want to be loved has become crystal clear.

By Philippa Steinberg

It is easy to love the people you have always known, whose smiles you can see, and whose values you share. Showing someone you love them usually relies on verbal or physical cues. We sympathize with others when we exchange soft-hearted words in a common language. We empathize with family as we mirror their pain in their facial expressions. We comfort friends through compassionate touch to let them know we support them.

But I have never met some of my closest friends, some live as far as 4500 miles away. Over the last five years, I have made internet friends by sharing my art on Instagram. Some people see the internet as a space that reduces sympathy, empathy, and compassion into material 'likes'. They say you can pretend to be someone you are not, selectively share about yourself as the other person will never get to experience your real life. But I see the internet as the chance to make genuine connections with people you would have otherwise never met.

My first conversation with another young artist was a response to one of my drawings. We bonded over the simple fact that we were both left-handed. I began to continuously encourage her through comments on her work and to validate her aspirations. Privately, we began to open up about who we were. Usually, me first, because I knew my vulnerability helped her feel comfortable in opening up to me. Cautiously, she confided in me with personal struggles. I would attentively listen and try my best to be there for her. At this point, I still did not know what she looked like. However, the anonymity did not feel like a deceitful front to me. It was a means to circumvent preconceptions and allowed me to focus on who she was emotionally.

When I moved across the ocean for college, I left behind my home. But my virtual friendship, already dislocated in time and space, continued to grow. Over time, the distinction between online and real-life friendship blurred. Every time I called her, her little brother rushes to the phone to say. I was humbled by her mother thanking me for making her daughter happy with the art I sent in the mail.

I wished her happy Eid, she wished me happy Hanukkah, I wished her happy Mental Health Awareness Day, she wished me a happy Coming Out Day. Five years go by and we are still friends.

In the digital age, your neighbor could live thousands of miles away. Loving someone like you would love yourself means a judgment-free, attentive, and respectful love. I was able to form a genuine friendship with someone I used to only know by a username. It taught me to eradicate prejudices, how to find ways to speak with others when our backgrounds or languages differ, to sense when someone is sad without seeing their demeanor, to show someone I care for them without being able to give them a hug.

By Haley Stober

The summer before I started my first year at Berkeley, my friends and I went on a pre-college trip to Washington, D.C. After seeing a show, we went to a sports bar for dinner. When we sat down, we saw an intoxicated woman at the bar start to throw up. Rather than help her, the bar owner threw her and her friends (who were also intoxicated) out. My friends and I ran outside to help. We put her on her side so she wouldn't choke and called for an ambulance. By the time the ambulance came, the woman's leg was spastically kicking and she was crying in pain. While the experience was stressful, it taught me important lessons. I learned how to be calm in an emergency and what to do in cases of alcohol poisoning. Most importantly, I learned the importance of helping and loving my neighbor, even when that neighbor was a stranger. I realized that if I were in her situation, I would want someone to do the same thing for me.

My experience in D.C. inspired me to get involved with alcohol safety when I came to Berkeley. I wanted to help when my friends were in need and be someone they could trust. When elections in my sorority came around my sophomore year, I jumped at the opportunity to be my house's risk manager, a position that encompasses hazing prevention and alcohol education and safety. In my position, I facilitated presentations about alcohol and coronavirus safety, hazing, and SVSH, helped plan safe events (prior to Covid), and took care of someone when she had alcohol poisoning. My position allowed me to show that I loved my neighbor as myself because I was able to prevent harm and address issues as they arose within my chapter. I value my time as my chapter's risk manager because it taught me how to be compassionate when members needed help and how to be a resource to my peers.

Loving my neighbor as myself is an ongoing, permanent lesson. It was an important factor in my experiences in D.C. and in college, and it is particularly prominent today. As the coronavirus ravages the United States, millions of essential workers- doctors, nurses, firemen, janitors, and more- risk their health and show up to work every day to provide for society. They make a huge difference in the lives of people they do not know. Their work has been inspiring, and as a pre-medical student, I hope one day to use my education for good too. Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated to me what happens when we all love our neighbors as ourselves. Small contributions from everyone, such as getting tested, wearing a mask, and social distancing, have proven to be the keys to containing the virus. I realize that through actions both big and small we can all demonstrate that we love our neighbors and make the world a kinder place.

By Rachel Tokofsky

In 1945, at seventeen, my bubbe won a gold medal in a Providence Rhode Island city-wide school contest for her essay entitled “What I Would Teach a German Youth”. Her premise was that she would not teach, but would show how she lived, including what she learned at school:

“I learn that my neighbor is my equal: that he has the right to think the way he does, to read the books he chooses, to say the things he believes.”

My bubbe was a first-generation American, the first in her family to speak English, and the first to go to college. Two generations later, growing up on the other side of the country, I fully embrace her words as both the best of American and Jewish values.

For me, living in Los Angeles means constantly moving through a collection of neighborhoods. I love how each neighborhood has its own particular combination of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. I experience the city as a collective of distinct minicultures, sewn together by boulevards and freeways. As I move through Los Angeles, I ask myself: if I love all these spaces, do I also love all my neighbors?

I can't love- or understand -my neighbor if I don't know my neighbor.

At 17, I began a project that has shaped the way I think about my neighbors to this day. I was particularly intrigued with the neighborhood of Boyle Heights, a community six minutes from my home. In the early nineteenth century, because of redlining, Boyle Heights was home to a vibrant working-class community of Jewish, African-American, Japanese, and Mexican-American neighbors. This history fascinated me, contradicting the current Boyle Heights which, although still working class, is 90% Hispanic. Unfortunately, despite our diversity, segregated neighborhoods and neighbors have become the norm in Los Angeles. Though we share the city, many of us now occupy entirely separate worlds.

I received a grant to pursue a photojournalism project to learn more about the experiences of my Boyle Heights neighbors, past and present. I spoke with community leaders, attended community events, historical society meetings, and visited sites of cultural relevance. I got to know my neighbor's stories, seeing how they all connected to one another, and to me. Had my bubbe lived in Los Angeles, this is likely where she would have grown up and seen her neighbors change around her. I thought it was incredible that in the 10 years spanning the 1930s to 1940s, Boyle Heights saw the establishment of the first Canter's Deli, and the birth of the Chicano Movement.

At 17, my bubbe had a profound understanding of what it means to love your neighbor: to know and value that he may read, think, speak, and exist differently than you. When our neighborhoods become echo-chambers of our own identities we lose distinctions that strengthen our ability to appreciate, to love. My project has taught me that neighbors and neighborhoods shift, move, and overlap. When the dust settles it's all too often in arrangements of disappointing homogeneity. I refuse to believe these spaces are stagnant, that we aren't connected. I refuse to view only those geographically adjacent or culturally similar as my neighbors. I want to know my neighbors across the city: what they think, read, and believe. I want to share the spaces we're in, where we've come from, and where we're going. That way, we move from the personal and into the communal, able to love our neighbors as our collective selves.

By Roni Touboul

See something, say something. It's repeated to us when we are growing up by parents, teachers, and adults. It is pounded into our brain during college orientation. However once college actually starts and we begin to interact with more and more people who drink the line between "they are drunk" and "they need help" gets substantially blurrier and confusing.

On my first Saturday night of sophomore year my friends and I were walking to a party when we saw a student laying in the middle of an intersection. When we approached the crowd was big enough for us to keep walking. However, the nagging feeling of uncertainty lingered as we crossed the street. Did someone in the crowd already call an ambulance? Are they too scared? Do you think they are wondering if it is necessary to call? Is it none of my business? I hope he is okay. I turned around in the middle of the crosswalk to see if I could help and shake the feeling. It was a classic case of bystander effect; every person thought the other was helping. There was a student lying in the street, unable to talk, presumably drunk, with about a dozen people around him and no one wanted to take responsibility in case they got in trouble during the 911 call. All the times I had heard "see something, say something" prepared me for this moment, so I called an ambulance and found an emergency contact in his phone, his sister.

I thought at the moment he was the one I was helping because I would want someone to ensure my safety if I was ever in that situation.

It wasn't until the words "I get it, I also have a brother" absent-mindedly floated out of my mouth that I realized that although it was the boy's physical safety I tended to, his sister was in fact the neighbor I loved as myself. We belonged to a community of caring and worried sisters. So when she asked me to repeat all the facts for the fourth time and stay on the phone with her as she drove to the hospital despite missing my party and my friends being angry at me, I did, because knowing my brother is safe would be my top priority.

A few days later she texted me to let me know her brother was doing fine and thank me one last time. And even though the name of my faceless neighbor has long since faded from my memory, our interaction continuously reminds that to truly love my neighbor as myself, I have to put aside my own personal stipulations and calculations. It is easy to show kindness to one another up until the instance it impedes on our own wants and desires, but to show the type of love G-d talks about in Leviticus we must momentarily forget about these things and instead remember to practice compassion and empathy towards the person in front of us.

Loaves of Love

By Cait Ushpol

Born free in post-Apartheid South Africa, I was fattened on Ubuntu by Beauty Sibisi, my illiterate, Zulu caregiver and other-mother. Beauty was one of the countless black South Africans denied the opportunity, under Nationalist rule, to be educated in a formal, academic setting. But Beauty's wisdom lay in her moral vocabulary, based on the caring spirit of Ubuntu. This enduring African ethos of humanity, "I am, because we are – Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu - ״וְאֵינִי אֲנִי בְּלִי אֲחֵרִים״" fueled my games and informed my fun. In my simple world, by putting 'my neighbors' at my core, Beauty taught me to share by consistently showing empathy, respect, and generosity towards others. Mandela harnessed the same traditional philosophy to transform monochrome SA into the Rainbow Nation, an infant democracy where all were valued and included. And then, out of the blue, I was forced to pack up my African roots and remake my world.

Sixteen years later, as a new American, I cast my vote for unity in Georgia's run-off election – in a state flattened by the pandemic and ravaged by deep social and political divisions. A Black-Jewish coalition helped elect Reverend Raphael Warnock—the pastor from MLK's Ebenezer Baptist Church—as the first black Senator to represent Georgia, as well as Jon Ossoff—the only senator with serious Tik-Tok game—as the first Jewish senator in state history. Ossoff was sworn in holding a Pentateuch that belonged to the late Atlanta Rabbi Jacob Rothschild. Following the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Rabbi Rothschild delivered the eulogy and called for America to become "a land where a man does not lift up sword against his neighbor, but where each sits under his own vine and under his own fig tree and there is none to make him afraid" (RawStory).

My 'messengers of peace'—Beauty, Mandela, Warnock, Ossoff, Rothschild, and King—have taught me that there is much justice and healing work to do in our world until we all love our neighbors as ourselves. Yet each one of us has the opportunity to engage in the traditions of tzedakah and tikkun olam. As the US confronted institutional and interactional prejudice in Summer 2020, I had the chance to help develop and execute the Atlanta Fulton Library Foundation's new strategic plan. For the Foundation, The Library is not a mere book repository: it is a community hub providing access, promoting literacy, addressing the digital divide, and engaging with the neighborhood. By working to manage this community engagement space ethically and equitably, I am, in my own small way, realizing the command of Leviticus 19:18. At Cal, I love my neighbors through my work with Challah for Hunger (CfH). As I braid loaves of love every Thursday, I think about CfH's mission to address food insecurity on campus and beyond. It is our imperative as Jews to break bread with those around us, sharing our time-honored rituals with neighbors and strangers alike, while providing the emotional nourishment of comfort and community.

By Sara Vandenburg

During my freshman year at UC Berkeley, Matthew and I were assigned as one-on-one Best Buddies based on one commonality, basketball. Best Buddies at UC Berkeley is an international organization that works to foster one on one connections with disabled members of the Berkeley community. After meeting Matthew, I realized that while I play on an able-bodied team, Matthew plays in a wheelchair league. I was not sure how we could take advantage of this shared interest with our difference in play. However, after many scrimmages, Matthew taught me that it didn't matter how we individually played the game. What mattered was that we were playing the same one. Different does not mean divided.

My friendship with Matthew continued to grow the following year. However, as president, it became difficult to juggle my commitment to the club and my friendship with Matthew. I felt overwhelmed as I was now responsible for setting up and running club events for over 50 members, rather than serving as a friend to Matthew during activities. After reflecting on my options, I began thinking of the first lesson I learned from Matthew; different is not divided. This prompted me to structure the club in a different manner, while not minimizing my commitment to either our members or Matthew.

I began hosting weekly leadership team meetings to define responsibilities between members. To learn how to effectively manage my time as a leader, I contacted the chapter presidents of both University of San Francisco and St. Mary's College. In addition, I made weekly meeting agendas and a shared calendar of all club information.

As a result of these changes, we increased our average attendance by 15 individuals and our events ran much smoother than before. Delegation and increased planning allowed me to spend more time with Matthew. Embracing Matthew's message prompted me to create a different club structure that did not divide us, but rather, allowed us to continue growing as friends and club participants.

It has been four years since Matthew and I first met, and I recently asked him if he ever shared my same initial concerns. Matthew kindly responded that my patience and commitment to foster our friendship assured him that our difference in play would never be an issue. I realized from his response that I was eager to make time for Matthew because I hoped to provide the same level of unconditional friendship as I have been fortunate enough to experience throughout my lifetime. As I prepare to graduate, I will once again have to find a new way to stay in touch with Matthew however, I know that we will manage to stay connected despite our differences. Matthew was once a stranger, now a close friend and always someone whom I have cared for as much as I care for myself.