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Hi! My name is Aly Pomerantz. Last year I was the president of SRFY (the Santa Cruz Reform Federation of Youth) and currently am the communications vice president for NFTY-CWR (or North American Federation of Temple Youth). These are fancy acronyms and jumbles of initials, and I'm simply trying to say that I am an avid youth group participant. I am honored to be invited to share my thoughts on community with you all on this important day.

Take a moment to remember being a kid. (PAUSE)

What did you think about?

How did you feel?

Were you apart of a community that was a safe place?

Did you participate in engaging activities? This temple offers all of this and much more.

I started attending temple school in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I didn't feel very connected that year and opted out for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. My parents' philosophy was not to require Bar or Bat Mitzvah but rather to offer it as a choice. I watched my brother become Bar Mitzvah, and that's when I decided I really wanted to be a bat mitzvah, to have a similar lifecycle experience, so in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I rejoined my class.

On my first day back, a friend told me, "I waited through half of the year and then figured you weren't coming back. I'm glad you changed your mind." From that moment on, I felt that I belonged, that I was valued and appreciated the sense of community here at Temple Beth El. That girl has become one of my best friends.

After my Bat Mitzvah I took a different route than my brothers, I went on to be confirmed. While planning our service for Confirmation the decision for the theme was unanimous: **Community**. We all looked at ourselves, where we were when we met, and examined who we had become. We had had fun together as well as sad and stressful periods but we helped each other through those times and it was as if our hearts had grown into one. We could now be open and honest with one other.

NFTY and SRFY are legitimately the strongest communities I've ever experienced. They are a second home and more importantly a safe place for me to be who I really am. They offer teens a chance to make lasting friendships and practice Jewish traditions such as tzedakah and service to those in need. They are extra chances to learn more about one's self and our Jewish heritage.

I urge you to take advantage of the opportunities this congregation offers. Temple Beth El has played a huge role in who I am today. I am here as an elected official as well as a member of the youth community, I am here to spread knowledge of how community can affect us, and how the love and support of friends and family is an inspiration, provides motivation and even a refuge.

In this temple the youth community represents the past the present and the future. The **past** is having those early childhood memories which provide the foundation to our place and action in this world. We grew up learning to think for ourselves while holding on to the traditions that you have passed on. Life long friendships and deep self-awareness move us forward. We are the **present**: growing, learning, testing (oh, yes, always testing), and experiencing everyday within this structure and context by going to SRFY or NFTY events furthering bonds with our own community. And finally, we are the **future**: the fate of this congregation and

others across the country are in the hands of the youth. No pressure, right?. What we learn and experience will be passed onto generations to come.

Please help me and the other youth of this congregation continue our learning, loving and experiencing Judaism. Encourage your children or grandchildren to participate. Be a role model and find something in our Temple community that speaks to you and get involved. Join me in continuing to perpetuate our Temple community for years to come.

L'shanah Tova to all of you!