***How or from whom did you learn about the school?***

In 2013 our family moved from Los Angeles to New York City, and decided to join the Temple Emanu-El community. Since then we have also attended programs at Emanu-El such as Mommy & Me (now Baby Bop) and Baby Shabbat where we met some great teachers (Hadar Orshalimy) and welcoming families, who have had nothing but wonderful things to say about the community and the Nursery School.

***What words would best describe your child?***

“Curious” and “vivacious” best describe our son Camden. Camden is bright, naturally inquisitive, and eager to learn how everything around him works. When faced with something new, be it a new toy, a class, or a new food – we see the wheels churning in his mind as he investigates what’s before him, and more excitingly to him, what adventures lie ahead. Camden constantly impresses us with his ongoing energy and enthusiasm. Whether he is attending a class or on a playdate with friends, he is the first to jump in and get the activities started. Camden is incredibly outgoing and is jokingly referred to as the “greeter” in our building, as he walks around every morning giving each employee a high-five and acknowledging them by name (or the toddler version of their name). Camden has an insatiable zeal for life and can light up a room with his smile, infectious laugh and playful personality.

***What is your favorite time of day to spend with your child and why?***

With all the hustle and bustle of living in New York City, mornings can be especially hectic for any family. Therefore, in order to set a positive rhythm for the day, we believe it is important to slow down the pace and develop a constructive and stimulating routine. Camden makes this easy for us: he wakes up with excitement in his eyes, an eagerness to start the day, and a desire to display his growing independence. He immediately springboards to a stand, leans over his baby brother’s crib and says “Morning Chasey! Wake up! Breakfast!” He then runs out of the room searching for our puppy: “Chloe! Breakfast!” - before running to the bathroom where he asks for help so he can “brush-a-teeth”. He then corrals the family (Chloe included) to the table, where he showcases what can only be described as his “inner foodie” as he conjures up an elaborate breakfast order. Breakfast with Camden doesn’t there. He also shares his agenda for the day: “I go park”, “I go class”, “I take nap”, coupled with whatever else he has dreamt up for the moment – most recently, he surprised us with “I go for coffee”. We also use this time as a way to teach Camden important lessons like sharing, since he always asks to “take a bite” of whatever Mommy and Daddy are eating. Finally, before we leave for work, he asks one of us to “read book” or “build towers”, and requests his favorite music to be played.

Spending our mornings with Camden has allowed us to focus on these little things, which in turn are really the big things. We allow ourselves to see him discovering for the first time everything we take for granted. He responds genuinely, with no filters or inhibitions, no irony or detachment. He allows us to stay in the present and in the moment, and enables us to see everything from a new, fresh perspective. We get to catch up on milestones that we might have missed the day before, such as realizing he can say a new word or that he’s mastered his ABC’s. Mornings with Camden, although full of high energy, provide us with this perfect ‘quiet’ before all the ‘noise’ this city tends to bring.

***What do you find to be the most enjoyable areas of parenting? Most stressful?***

Whether it is the giggle Camden makes when he cracks himself up, or the running hug he gives you when you walk through the door, being parents had taught us to find joy in the mundane, and happiness in the tiniest of details. Seeing the world through his eyes has fashioned everyday routines to become eventful, exciting and intriguing. It is the times that he gets excited about something as simple as the bubble machine in the park or the digger truck he saw on the street that reminds us that every day is a new adventure, and that the world is an unmapped territory waiting to be explored. Seeing Camden grow, develop, experiment and learn from his escapades and adventures continues to be a truly gratifying experience; his eyes light up with each new discovery, from realizing he can say a new word to mastering riding a scooter, everything is done with a sense of innocence and awe. Whatever his conquest or milestone be, when we see and feel his confidence grow or bear witness to him learning from his mistakes, we are filled with a tremendous sense of joy and pride.

We saw this first hand when Camden became a big brother. He was only 18 months old when Chase was born and was not able to fully comprehend the concept of a sibling. After seeing the baby lying on Mommy for the first time he immediately climbed up the bed to jump in Mommy’s arms. The next thing we heard was “no Chase”. Those same two words have taken on a new meaning over the past six months, and are now said with happiness and excitement. Today if you ask Camden “is Caroline your best friend?” he responds “no Chase!” There has been nothing more heartwarming than seeing Camden fall in love with his brother; and though he is still in diapers himself, he has taken on the role of big brother and protector, as he embraces the opportunity to help change his brother’s diaper, feed him applesauce and kiss him good night.

While watching Camden mature has made us incredibly proud, the process getting here wasn’t easy. This all-consuming love for our children is what creates the challenges of parenting, yet makes it all meaningful. We worry about our kids, try to figure out what’s best for them, and constantly focus on keeping them healthy and safe. It takes some time to learn that you can’t control everything, you can’t always make it right, and that discipline doesn’t make you a bad parent.

With Camden, although he communicates well and is able to generally express his ideas, wants and needs, he is still learning to cope with strong feelings, particularly those of his recent realization that he is a separate individual from Mommy and Daddy. He tries hard to assert himself, to communicate his preferences, and to act (as much as he can) independently. This can sometimes lead to frustration as he takes you on the emotional, toddler rollercoaster – yelling at you one minute and smiling at you the next. We look forward to him attending nursery school where he will develop even better language skills and have more experience working with his peers, handling disappointment and following rules. While this can be difficult for us, we are learning that this is a phase every parent goes through, and despite the challenges, the moments that make us smile make these tough parts totally worthwhile. Parenting, after all, is a guessing game, and a second-guessing game. Despite contrary opinions, there simply isn’t a manual or roadmap to follow. Parenting is, in many ways, experiential; and as so many of us try to figure it out in hopes of avoiding big mistakes, we struggle to find the balance between being the type of parents we want to be and the type of parents we know we should be.

***Please share a brief anecdote that tells us something about your family***

As full-time, working parents, we are deeply entrenched in the manic energy for which Manhattan is notorious. Practically speaking, this means our high energy mornings are followed by high energy days. But regardless of whether the markets went up, down, or sideways that day, our family takes a quick 1-hour “time out” just before bedtime where we press pause on the frenetic world around us. This time is devoid of all the technological distractions we keep in our pockets or wear on our wrists. It is just Mommy, Daddy, Camden, and baby brother Chase, creating the memories that bind us as a family.

During this time, we ask Camden about his day, read stories, and sing songs. We then go to “Club Moolani”, where “DJ Daddy” puts on fun music and everyone dances, jumps up and down, and acts silly. Sometimes Camden can even get our dog to join the party and she howls along. When the ”club” closes, Camden asks for ”mommy hugs”, ”daddy hugs”, and sometimes ”2 more minute hugs”, before whispering “I love you” and asking us to tuck him in to his ”big boy bed”.

Now, we might look ridiculous to those on the outside if they caught a glimpse of our nightly party and unorthodox bedtime routine, but we crave this time and hold these moments close. We both know that with the blink of an eye, Camden will grow up, and the hugs around our necks or kisses on our cheeks will be replaced with a quick goodbye as he rushes out the door. For now though, whether it’s the third night in a row singing “Twinkle Twinkle” or the 100th time doing “The Elmo Slide,” these are the moments that pick us up and give us the energy to power through whatever the next day may bring.

***Is there something that you would like to share that would help us better understand your child/family?***

The merger of two separate individuals into a single family is a complex task, even if both partners come from the same cultural or religious background. Being an interfaith family, adds another layer of complexity.

Although our boys are being raised Jewish, our approach to parenting has been to focus, not on the differences in Mommy’s and Daddy’s religion, but on the common values that bind us together as an interfaith couple, and to encourage these values in our children.

Despite the rapid rate of intermarriage among people of different faiths, there are still many days where we feel alone or as though we are charting uncommon, interfaith territory. Knowing we are part of a community at Emanu-El that embraces interfaith marriage and that views diversity as a treasure (which enriches us all), has helped make this journey just a little bit easier.

As parents, we have a sense of confidence knowing that when our boys leave the house and enter the classroom that the values we instill in them will be reflected in their education.

***What language other than English is regularly spoken at home?***

As Camden’s parents, we speak to him exclusively in English. However, Camden’s caregiver also speaks to him in French throughout the day, and tries to incorporate a second language into his vocabulary. Even though Camden communicates with his family and friends in English, from time to time, he will interchange both the English and French words when relating to his caregiver. For example, when she is making dinner, Camden says “the oven is very chaud, very hot, très chaud”, or when she leaves the house he says “Bye, au revoir!”