



2014 Degrees OF Success

The NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein
Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program



You Can Be an Ambassador

We're happy to bring you the seventh issue of Degrees of Success, a newsletter just for AAS Sponsors.

We're very proud of our students and what they've achieved with your invaluable help. Without your sponsorships, many could not complete their degrees. Please feel very good about your role in their success.

If you have news to share about your own student/s, please call Karen Gens, our Coordinator of High School and College Sponsorship Programs, at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email Karen at education@nacoej.org.

And please pass our material on to your family and friends who might want to help a deserving Ethiopian college student in Israel. Remember: you are an ambassador for these young adults. Your endorsement can go a long way. Thank you so much. (If you would like more copies of Degrees of Success, just let Karen know.)

In Spite of the Rockets...

Marilyn Estreicher, who sponsors art student Michal Mengistu in the Bezalel College of Hebrew University through our AAS program, was in Israel in July, while the country was being bombarded by rockets from Gaza.

While she was in Tel Aviv, on the phone with Yehudit Abramson, our Israel AAS Coordinator in Jerusalem, no less than nine rockets screamed through the skies over Tel Aviv.

Marilyn told Yehudit that she was not going to leave Israel. She wanted to stay and offer moral support to the Israeli people.

Yes, She Would Come...

And, yes, she would be coming to Jerusalem, then also under attack, to visit her sponsored student. Which she did. The two met and Marilyn's visit gave comfort to Michal, who was very worried about three of her brothers who were fighting in Gaza at the time.

Michal, who lost her mother in 1999 and became, as she called it, a "little mommy" to her siblings, wrote in a letter to Marilyn that: "I wanted to thank you for helping me fulfill the beginning of my dream. Your help is very important...I hope that in a few years I will be able to fulfill the dream of someone else..."



This photo (taken by Yehudit Abramson) shows the comforting warmth and closeness of the relationship between these two women, something very special about the NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program.

AAS Sponsors Give Ethiopian-Israeli Students a Key to Success

Since 1987, the NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student Program – now sponsored by Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein – has given Ethiopian-Israeli students the financial support they need to complete their degrees.

While the Israeli government covers tuition for most Ethiopian college students, all must pay for their living expenses, including rent, food, transportation, textbooks and much more.

Most Ethiopian-Israeli families can't help, so too often, financial burdens force Ethiopian students to drop out and take unskilled jobs with no future. An AAS sponsorship provides a modest living stipend, enabling your student to stay in school, earn a degree, enter a profession, and break out of poverty.

A Double Sponsorship, a Marriage Proposal and Excitement at Its Peak...

Yaakov Tessema, a bright, engaging young man, is a student at the Technion. He is sponsored through the AAS Program by Halley S. and Ruth Anne Faust, who are also sponsoring Yaakov's sister Shushi, a talented young woman who served in the Army and is now majoring in Asian Studies at Haifa University.

AAS Sponsorships Made their Dreams Come True

Just out of high school, Yaakov took a pre-university course at the Technion, and studied law for a while. Then he did his army service, became a combat soldier in the famed Givati Brigade, rose to become a new recruit Commander – and then returned to the Technion with his heart set on Biotechnology and Food Engineering as his major.

It was the AAS sponsorships by the



Yaakov Tessema and his sister Shushi

Fausts that have made Yaakov's and Shushi's dreams come true – and their parents' dreams as well.

Their father is a factory worker and their mother is a cleaner in a school. They have six children to look after, and special attention to give a little son who is severely autistic. But they have always encouraged their children to seek higher education.

Recently there was good news. Yaakov

joyfully wrote the Fausts that he had proposed to his girlfriend and she had accepted – and that his older brother was also getting married. Excitement in his family home, he said, "is at its peak!"

Double Sponsorship Deeply Appreciated

Yaakov not only appreciates everything the Fausts are doing for him and for Shushi in their double sponsorship, but takes pleasure in sharing his life and his family in Israel with his adoptive family in America.

This is the classic immigrant dream – that children of poor immigrants can obtain higher education and become successful citizens in their new homeland. And in this case, it is the Fausts' AAS sponsorships that are helping to make the dreams come true.

He Found his Father!

Shego Bayana, who is sponsored by Alan Sieroty through the AAS program, has a remarkable and heart-wrenching story.

When he was three years old, he and his mother and grandmother fled Ethiopia for Israel. His father had been drafted into the Ethiopian army during an endless civil war, and the family knew there was little hope of ever seeing him again.

A Dangerous Journey

Their journey to Israel via Sudan took a dangerous, difficult year and a half, during which Shego's mother died. Finally, Shego, his grandmother, and an uncle reached Israel. But when Shego turned 12, his world was shaken again when his grandmother passed away. Shego went to live with an aunt.

Despite these upheavals, Shego did so well in school that he was accepted into an engineering program at the Technion, the MIT of



Shego Bayana and his father

Israel. He also completed an officer's course in the Israel Defense Forces and rose to the rank of Lieutenant. But all the time, since he was a little boy, he longed to find the lost father he could only dream about.

His Chance Finally Came

Shego's chance finally came last spring when Micha Feldman, an Israeli expert on Ethiopia, located his father, Tesfahun, alive, living in a remote Ethiopian village without communication facilities.

With a grant from an organization that helps soldiers in need, Shego

headed for Ethiopia and managed to get word to his father. Tesfahun walked more than 24 hours to meet Shego in Gondar.

A Very Emotional Meeting

The meeting was very emotional. For Shego, it provided answers "to all the burning questions I have had over the years." It also introduced him to two sisters he didn't know he had, and to other relatives.

This exceptional young man has shown great persistence and determination to achieve his goals and make a success of himself, and he is well on his way!



Shego Bayana and his new-found sisters



In the News! Sara Gavri Bartukan, who is working on a Master’s degree in Social Work at Ben-Gurion University, told her sponsors, Barney and Rachel Gottstein, that an article had appeared in an Israeli newspaper about her volunteering to read books to preschool children in an absorption center, through the Barney’s Books program which the Gottsteins sponsor (see above).

She was very excited, praised the importance of Barney’s Books, and also wanted the Gottsteins to know that this had been “...an opportunity for the children to be famous in the newspaper which...adds to their self-esteem and makes them realize that they are capable of many things”.

“Even after I graduate from my studies you will always have a part in my success...”

These words come from a letter Hanna Yitzchak wrote to her college sponsor, Lawrence Brant, a loyal donor to NACOEJ since 1997.

Five years ago, Mr. Brant heard NACOEJ Executive Director, Barbara Ribakove Gordon, speak in Boca Raton, Florida. He said he was “touched by the hard lives of Ethiopian Jews” and wanted to help.

From that experience evolved the idea to set up the Shirley Brant Educational Fund for Students – in the AAS Program – in memory of his first wife.

Mr. Brant felt that Shirley would be

very happy with this decision. His special interest is assisting young women who are in the “helping professions”-- teachers, nurses, social workers. But he included liberal arts as well.



A Large, Close Family in Safed

Hanna Yitzchak, who comes from a large, close family, lives in Safed. She was born in Ethiopia in 1989, two years before her parents decided to make aliyah with their family. She says that despite the difficulties of absorption into such a different life,

her parents “...are thankful and bless the day they arrived to the Holy Land.

For them it is a dream that came true...”

Her Dreams for the Future

Hanna’s major combines Consulting, Human Development, and Education. Hanna dreams of “better days in which the Ethiopian community in Israel will be a full and complete part of the Israeli nation and culture...I truly believe through education there will be a real change for the future generations.

“...thank you for who you are and for choosing to help me,” she wrote to Mr. Brant, “...everything that you do will remain for generations, even after I graduate from my studies you will always have a part in my success, as I suppose you are part of the success of many other people in the world, so thank you...!”

A Traumatic Journey A Wonderful Outcome



Alemnesh Etti Tadla's journey to Israel years ago was a traumatic one.

Her older brother was already in Israel and came back to rescue his family. He rented an apartment in Addis Ababa and gradually got Alemnesh and another brother, and their parents, settled in it.

But after six difficult months of waiting for permission to leave for Israel, only Alemnesh's parents were allowed to go. Her eldest brother tried to persuade the authorities to allow Alemnesh and her other brother to immigrate too, but with no luck. The parents had no choice but to go ahead, and the family split up amid tears and great fear.

Hope was Almost Gone

Some time after the parents left, and when everyone had almost given up hope, Alemnesh and her brother were told to be at the airport early one morning to fly to Israel. But when they arrived, they were not allowed to board the plane to Israel and fled back to the apartment.

A week later, there was another flight, and this time they managed to get aboard. But they didn't believe they were really going to Israel until they were in their seats and the plane took off.

The Happiest Moment of their Lives

When they finally reached Israel, Alemnesh said, it was "the happiest moment of our lives". The family was reunited amid tears that this time were tears of joy. They stayed

with their brother until space opened up at an absorption center. Two years later the family moved to Rehovot.

Today Alemnesh is finishing her studies in Early Childhood Education at Achava College with the help of her NACOEJ AAS sponsors, Mark and Analee Reutlinger.

A few months ago she wrote a beautiful thank-you poem to the Reutlingers, describing what sponsorships mean to Ethiopian-Israeli college students.

*I wanted to express to you my full gratitude
And give my words of thanks and blessings:
Thank you for the generosity and kindness,
For the understanding and kind attitude,
For helping every month with the studies expenses,
For the general sensitivity and generosity,
With the one goal being:
Giving and helping people who can't reach where
they want to be.
Thank you for being trustworthy people,
People who know how to help and support at any
situation.
I always told you about the feelings of my heart,
The good, the progress, and the difficulties,
You always gave good support and wisdom.
There is no doubt that there is no one like you on
earth.
But may there be more people like you because as
people we all need to be like you.*

Just the Facts

In the 2013-2014 school year...

- **124** AAS sponsorships helped support **369** students in **6** universities and **26** academic colleges, including **13** nursing schools and **6** engineering schools.
- **103** sponsored students finished their coursework and graduated in their fields of study.
- **35** sponsored students were studying for advanced degrees.
- **13** sponsored students received Masters degrees.

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Since 1982, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) has been providing humanitarian and educational aid to the Ethiopian-Jewish community in Ethiopia and Israel. NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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UJA-Federation of New York

UJA Federation
of New York

for sponsoring 19 students
this year.