



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

LIFELINE

SPRING
2017

The Children Need You...

As we write, there are 100 more children in our Limudiah Intensive Education Program for Ethiopian-Israeli schoolchildren than we had last year.

And, at the same time, the Ministry of Education has been urging us to open more Limudiah programs for children in numerous locations. These Ethiopian-Israeli schoolchildren urgently need the specialized programming that NACOEJ provides, directly addressing the educational and cultural needs of this community.

But, despite their urging that we open in many more schools, the Ministry of Education has no funding forthcoming.

Which means NACOEJ must try to cover the costs with a budget already stretched beyond its capacity.

We need your partnership if we are to provide more children with the educational support they need, while they are young, when it makes all the difference to their future success.

This is not help that can wait.

It's help needed now or these children can end up at a continual disadvantage.

It is help that is needed to make Israel a stronger nation.

For as Benjamin Disraeli, the only British Prime Minister who was Jewish by birth, once said: "Upon



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Our Ruth Gruber: A Loving Remembrance

Barbara Ribakove



Ruth and me at a NACOEJ event years ago.

It seems impossible now, but the first time I spoke with Ruth Gruber, I had never heard of her. She was just a voice on the telephone, telling me she was a journalist who wanted to visit Jews in Ethiopia, and had heard about NACOEJ missions. Could she join one?

This was not long after Operation Moses (1984-85), the great Israeli airlift of Ethiopian Jews from Sudanese refugee camps.

NACOEJ was virtually alone then in insisting that there were still thousands of Jews suffering in Ethiopia. The then-Communist government of Ethiopia was not thrilled about welcoming us.

I was very wary of bringing journalists to Ethiopia because too much publicity could get Jews we met into trouble, and might get us banned from their villages.

But Ruth was persuasive. So I called my contact at the Israeli Consulate in Manhattan, and asked if she knew a Ruth Gruber, journalist, and could I trust her on a mission?

There was a pause, and then my Israeli contact said: "Well, Ruth was the only foreign journalist we trusted to see the Jews coming in in Operation Moses!"

So, of course, I called Ruth and signed her on.

In fact, our next mission was one in which we were banned from visiting Jewish villages because of publicity about Operation Moses. Five of us went anyway, because we got

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



The Children Need You...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the education of the people of this country, the fate of this country depends."

He referred to England, but his words are equally applicable to Israel.

Israel needs educated citizens, the children need the Limudiah, and we need you.

Please help make Israel stronger by helping these special little Israelis get the education that will enable them to become productive, contributing citizens in the future. Thank you.

A Thoughtful Fairy Godmother for the Limudiah

Everyone would like to have a really nice uncle – or aunt - or fairy godmother – who can be counted on to show up with presents.

The Limudiah in the Abir Yaakov School in Yavne has just such a thoughtful "relative".

On an Israel Good Deeds Day, representatives of the local branch

of Bank Hapoalim arrived at the old school building with supplies for activities with the Limudiah kids.

First, it was bright paint to repaint the school fence, plus seedlings to plant a garden of flowers and herbs. The bank staff and Limudiah staff worked along with the students on painting



Limudiah student Yonatan Belay and NACOEJ School Coordinator Debi Segev.

and gardening. Later they also sent sweets, masks, and decorations for Purim, and treats for Passover.

This school year, so far, the gifts have been ten brand-new computers, which the Limudiah children generously agreed to share with all their school mates.

The computers arrived with some special fanfare, accompanied not only by bank officials, but by a representative of the Mayor of Yavne.

◀ One of our Limudiah students, a third-grader, Yonatan Belay, along with NACOEJ School Coordinator Debi Segev, presented a certificate of thanks to the warm-hearted staff of the bank.

We'd like to add our own thanks to Debi, who initiated this special relationship.

And we want to give special thanks to you, our NACOEJ donors, whose contributions fund the Abir Yaakov Limudiah.

It's you who provide the wonderful program where Good Deeds happen every day for the Limudiah children. Thank you. ■



On Good Deeds Day at the Abir Yaakov School in Yavne, Limudiah children and teachers and bankers from Bank Hapoalim plant seedlings to start a fragrant garden of herbs and flowers.

**Our Ruth Gruber:
A Loving Remembrance**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a message from Ethiopian-Jewish religious leaders: "For G-d's sake, come to Ethiopia." They said, "Even if you can't go to any villages, everyone will know you came, and that they are not abandoned!"



Ruth and other NACOEJ Board members at my apartment. Left to right: Ruth (looking elegant), Peachy Levy, consultant Bob Meltzer, Middie Giesberg, Eleanor Selling, Ken Kaiserman. (Basket made by an Ethiopian-Jewish woman.)

One of the five of us who went was Ruth. We couldn't go to the villages, but Jews waited for us on the road from our hotel in Gondar. Some walked two days to find us in the market. Ruth took notes on everything. I asked her not to publish, and she didn't.

Later, when we were allowed to visit some villages again, Ruth came along for a second time. She was 74, which seemed to me a very advanced age for climbing hills and trekking over rocks – but Ruth was never daunted.

Ruth didn't write about that trip then, but she interviewed many Ethiopian Jews in Israel, studied their history, and later wrote a great book - "Rescue: The Exodus of the Ethiopian Jews". At my request, it barely mentioned NACOEJ – though by then she was on our Board.

It wasn't until she wrote "Witness" in 2007 (see reply card) that Ruth did include her Ethiopian experience with NACOEJ, and some of the photos she took.

By then, of course, the Ethiopian civil war had ended, a new government had taken charge, and anyone who wanted to leave Ethiopia could do so legally – but only if they had a place to go. For thousands of Ethiopian Jews, that place – which they called Jerusalem – was Israel. It still is.

Ruth and I had become friends. She

came to me for Shabbat and holiday dinners, and Passover Seders. We traveled together to England and to Holocaust sites in Europe.

Ruth walked a little more slowly in those latter days, but she never failed to get where she was going, to write about it, to photograph it, and to make sure people knew what needed to be done.

You may already know about Ruth's earlier life, in which she made courageous forays into danger, including a dangerous crossing of the Atlantic during World War II to help 1000 refugees, mostly Jews, reach America. She defied British guns to expose the mistreatment of Jews on the Exodus ship – and reported Israel's War of Independence from the front line.

You may also have noted that at age 84, she covered the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing – a hard, exhausting assignment. Ruth never stopped being amazing.

You may know as well that

A Little More about Ruth

Here is a note from Barbara Stern, whose late husband, Sid, was a dearly loved NACOEJ Board member:

Dear Barbara,

I saw Ruth Gruber's obituary in the NY Times earlier this week and was reminded of all the work she did in support of NACOEJ.

Although it was Sid who worked with her – educating and fundraising – I met her several times at NACOEJ functions and found her to be bright, charming and awesome in her support of Ethiopian Jews and Jews everywhere.

I know that she was dedicated to the work that NACOEJ is doing.

I also know that you and Ruth had a very strong connection going back many years. I want to offer my condolences both to the organization and to you.

Sincerely, Barbara Stern

Ruth also had a happy, fulfilled private life. She raised children and step-children, collected dolls and received endless awards for journalism, photojournalism, humanitarian efforts and more.

But I think I can add one thing you may not know. When Ruth and I were on our Holocaust journey, I asked why she had so much luggage.

"Well," she explained, "when I was packing, my assistant was helping me, and she kept putting out all these clothes. She said, 'After all, Ruth, you are an elegant lady!' So I took them."

Ruth Gruber was a woman whose life-work impacted people all over the world – she made history. And, yes – she was an elegant lady too! ■

Ruth's family has requested donations to NACOEJ in her memory to further the work that meant so much to her. Please see reply card.



A "Bright Star"



We are very proud to announce that Hebrew University has named Shely Engedaw Vanda, who is sponsored by David and Aviva Rubin through the NACOEJ College Sponsorship Program, as one of their "Bright Stars", a student who stands out!

Shely, who was born in Ethiopia and now lives in Israel with her husband and two-year-old daughter, is working on her PhD, doing research on social workers who work with distressed Ethiopian-Israeli children.

Congratulations Shely, David and Aviva on a partnership that is bearing sweet fruit!

To sponsor a "Bright Star" yourself, call 212-233-5200 ext. 230, or Email education@nacoej.org. ■

Sigd in Jerusalem 2016



Shoshana, teaching in traditional white Ethiopian dress.

Sigd in Ethiopia in 2016

A note from a Jewish leader in Gondar, Ethiopia to NACOEJ:

On 30:11:2016 we celebrated the special holiday, "Hag Sigd" like the rest of the people who celebrated in Israel.

We leaders of the Jewish community would like to thank all donors for food.

Thanks to you, we distributed food to people who came to pray and people were very happy. It was important.

Thank you for helping us to distribute food to the community.

Ambanesh Tekeba ■

A Traditional Sigd Procession in Ethiopia in the 1980s ▶

Photo: Donald M. Robinson



In the NACOEJ Teaching Tent at the annual Sigd celebration in Jerusalem, our Israel Director, Shoshana Ben-Dor, explained the holiday liturgy to Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Israelis, as she does every year.

Shoshana can read Ge'ez, the ancient Semitic Ethiopian language of prayer.

She can also translate it into Hebrew for Israelis and, for tourists, into English – a unique set of skills. ■

Chanukah in the Limudiah in Israel



On Chanukah, first-grade Limudiah children at the Maapilim School in Lod (left) created their own adorable Chanukiot.

At the Rambam School in Lod (right), Limudiah children and teachers celebrated the first candle with chocolate-painted Chanukiot, sufganiyot (traditional Chanukah doughnuts), and very enthusiastic renditions of Israeli Chanukah songs. ■



Chanukah in Ethiopia



▲ *With awe and reverence, Jews in Ethiopia kindled Chanukiot in Gondar (above) and Addis Ababa.*



▲ *In both towns, a modest holiday meal was served to hundreds of families, featuring potatoes, bananas, fresh-baked rolls and – surprise! – sufganiyot/style Chanukah doughnuts.*



▲ *To the children, the doughnuts were a stunning, surprise, even bewildering, surprise. Some seemed unsure at first that they could eat them, but others greeted the treat with instant, delighted smiles.*



▲ *Men and women, as well as children, are learning Hebrew in Ethiopia in hopeful preparation for Aliyah.*

NACOEJ thanks our friends at Student Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jews for funding the Chanukah meals (especially the doughnuts!) in Addis Ababa and Gondar.



For a brief, heart-warming video of the Chanukah fun and games in Ethiopia, with songs and dancing taught by wonderful volunteers from Israel, please go to nacoej.org/llol-30 or scan this QR code. ■



The following is excerpted from an article in "The Times of Israel" which appeared on November 29, 2016.

Alas, it is still relevant to the pain of IDF soldiers and other Israelis whose families have been abandoned in Ethiopia. We are very grateful to "The Times of Israel" for permission to bring this version to you.

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

In Knesset, Ethiopian Israelis make emotional appeal for relatives left behind

Committee meeting on troops whose parents are barred from immigrating shifts gears when IDF forbids soldiers to attend

BY MARISSA NEWMAN November 29, 2016, 5:47 pm



In the Knesset, Ethiopian Israelis appeal to government to allow their relatives to immigrate. Yahallem Tadessa is pictured on the second right (Marissa Newman/The Times of Israel). (Committee Chair, MK Avraham Neguise, in white cap at desk.)

"You filled out the wrong form." That was the brutal response an Immigration Authority official gave at a meeting in the Knesset on Tuesday, as an Ethiopian Israeli former soldier described how his father has been stuck in Addis Ababa for 18 years, bedridden due to a car accident six years ago and barred from immigrating to Israel.

Dozens of Ethiopian-Israelis gathered

in the Knesset on Tuesday to appeal to the government to allow their relatives — children, a sister sick with cancer and her four children, ailing grandparents, a wife left behind — to immigrate to the Jewish state.

"His condition is not good," Mano Mankanto, the former soldier who moved to Israel in 1998, said of his father. Mankanto told the Knesset's Immigration, Absorption and

Diaspora Affairs Committee he had appealed to the Interior Ministry on behalf of his father, to no avail.

Teddy Pakada, an official from the Immigration Authority — which works under the Interior Ministry — insisted that Israeli soldiers regardless of religion or citizenship may request their parents be granted permission to move to Israel, once they've completed one year of service.

But Pakada told Mankanto that he had not issued a request as a soldier, but merely had lodged the general immigration request after his army service. "Did he turn to us on time? He didn't," said the official of Mankanto, referring to the period before he ended his military service. "We don't know from the [general immigration] forms who is a soldier, who isn't a soldier," he added.

"It's your job to ask," Zionist Union MK Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin shot back furiously.

The committee meeting on Tuesday was scheduled to focus on Israeli soldiers whose parents were not allowed to immigrate from Ethiopia — but the military would not give the soldiers permission to attend. Instead, a number of discharged Ethiopian Israeli troops present at the meeting and numerous others told their stories and complained about bureaucratic hurdles and mixed messages.

The Jews left behind in Ethiopia are classified as Falashmura, a term for Ethiopian Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity, often under duress, generations ago. Falashmura are not considered eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, which requires at least one Jewish grandparent and disqualifies someone who has converted to another religion, even if the conversion happened a long time ago.

There are approximately 9,000 members of the Falashmura still living in Ethiopia who have not been allowed to immigrate to Israel because the Interior Ministry has determined they were not Jewish. Ethiopian Jews counter that the decades-old process to determine Jewish identity was poorly executed and inaccurate, dividing families. At least 80% of the Jews in Ethiopia have first-degree relatives living in Israel.

A government plan to bring the

9,000 Jews to Israel was approved in November 2015 but was not implemented because there was no budget for the program. Following protests, the Finance Ministry allocated a budget that enabled 1,300 Ethiopians to move to Israel over the next year. The first planeload carrying 63 immigrants arrived in October.

When Yahallem Tadessa immigrated to Israel, the single father, who says his wife was estranged, was not allowed to bring his two children — then aged 9 and 11 — with him.

"I got to Israel. Every day I fill out forms," the Orthodox Israeli told the Knesset panel. Tadessa was initially told by the Interior Ministry that his children would only be permitted to immigrate when they reached the age of 18. So he waited.

But when both children came of age, the Interior Ministry cast doubt on his paternity. Tadessa proceeded to go to the Tel HaShomer Medical Center for a paternity test, ultimately proving he was their biological father. The ministry then told him that because there was no government resolution to resume immigration for the Falashmura, the children — now 22 and 24 — must remain in Ethiopia. He's still waiting.

The committee meeting gave a platform to over a dozen Israelis who described cases of sisters, parents, and even spouses and children left behind, while other relatives received immigration approval.

But the officials from the Interior Ministry and the Immigration Authority insisted the government policy was to keep spouses and children together.

"We don't know and aren't aware [of such cases]," an official from the Interior Ministry said. "Let them contact us and it will be checked."

Responding to a suggestion by Likud MK Abraham Neguise that

the government may have issued immigration approvals in 2013 but failed to update the information since, Teddy Pakada of the Immigration Authority said the office receives the information from the government, computerizes it "and works with the computer."

He also contended that all the forms were accessible online at absorption centers and the directives were clear, earning catcalls and cries of "there is no explanation or anything," and "it's all lies" from hecklers.

"Our community does not use the internet," responded Neguise, demanding the ministry make the guidelines more accessible and suggesting the directions be placed in Amharic and Hebrew ads on television and the radio, for example.

"It's very sad" the army would not let soldiers with immediate family in Ethiopia attend, mused Neguise, the sole Ethiopian Israeli lawmaker in the Knesset, who ran the committee meeting.

An army representative present at the meeting said the military has no facts and figures on the number of soldiers with relatives in Ethiopia. "This issue is not under the responsibility of the IDF," she said. ■

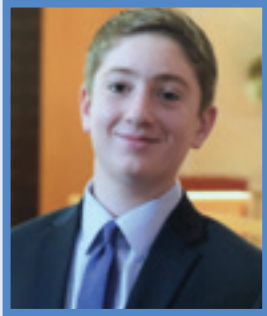
Article excerpted with permission of the "The Times of Israel".
www.timesofisrael.com

UPDATE FROM NACOEJ:

It now seems that the Aliyah of the 1300 immigrants scheduled to arrive, will take two years, not one, and that the 63 Ethiopian Jews who arrived last October were from a previous Aliyah, not this one. The agony on both sides of the Red Sea continues.



Three Generations Committed to Ethiopian Jews



Leo Susi just celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. His grandparents, Naomi and Jerome Klosner, suggested that he give a specific amount from his Bar Mitzvah money to charitable causes.

Leo spent a long time thinking about it and researching various organizations. His

grandfather suggested NACOEJ among a list of Jewish groups.

Leo's grandfather, Jerome Klosner, has been a partner with NACOEJ since 1988 – 29 years!

After doing his research, Leo decided one of the organizations he would donate to was NACOEJ.

Here are his own words when we contacted him to ask him and his parents for permission to include this article and his photo (above) in Lifeline:

“I gave the gift because when I heard what your organization does, I wanted to help those people who most desperately are in need, and because there is a lot of prejudice against them.

“I didn't expect to (or want to) get recognized for my donation, and thank you for that.

“Sincerely, Leo Susi”

Leo has clearly learned the importance of tzedakah from his parents and grandparents – a lesson that will benefit his whole life, as he benefits others.

Thank you Leo, thank you parents Darren and Lise, and thank you grandparents Jerome and Naomi – three generations who care deeply about Ethiopian Jews. ■

HAPPY 35TH ANNIVERSARY TO ALL OF US!

2017 marks NACOEJ's 35th anniversary.

From our humble beginnings in Barbara Ribakove's living room in New York in 1982, we have grown to become a major source of support and assistance to Ethiopian Jews.

And the only way this has been possible – from the very beginning – is because we have had the dedicated partnership of you, our dear friends.

So together we can celebrate 35 years of achievement – 35 years of saving lives, 35 years of providing food and education, love and caring.

As we look forward, we still have a great deal of work to be done.

We pray that you will stay the course with us as we continue to fulfill our mission of caring for Ethiopian Jews.

Your generous support today will continue to make a great difference in the lives and futures of Ethiopian Jews.

Congratulations to...

Yehudit Abramson, Israel Coordinator of our College Adopt-A-Student Program, and husband Yitzhak, on becoming grandparents! Baby girl Shahar arrived on January 27, 2017 at 12:50 pm. Mazel Tov to parents Ori and Rinat.

Aviva Oune, Israel NACOEJ Educational Assistant, and husband Assaf on the arrival of their fourth child born during Chanukah. His timely name is Yehuda HaMaccabi. Mazel Tov to big brother Tal Chaim and big sisters Yisca and Adi.

Interested in learning more about Ethiopian Jews?

Then sign up to receive monthly e-newsletters and special notices from NACOEJ, in addition to your print Lifeline. Email Caroline at communications@nacoelj.org. Include: "Please enter me into your email list." in your message. **We will not share your email address with any organization or individual.**

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