



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY LIFELINE

WINTER
2017

Dear Members of the NACOEJ Family,



As this year ends and another begins, I want to say right from the start that we've been blessed – always – with the most loyal supporters imaginable – you, with this Lifeline in your hand, and so many others like you – who have enabled us to do our work for Ethiopian Jews.

As I write this note, I don't yet know how many of you will have responded – or how generously – to the Emergency letter about the Limudiah I sent you.

But first reports are coming in and based on experience, I'm feeling good.

If you haven't yet sent your end-of-year gift, please do. Join the blessed folks making it possible for hundreds of Ethiopian children in Israel to find a place in our Limudiah classes.

If you've already done that, and you can still send something extra for the hungriest littlest ones still in Ethiopia, it will help us feed them.

Here's where we stand with the Limudiah now.

We're not going to have as many children in Limudiah this school year (2017/18) as last year. That's partly because we've cut back our programs



in Ramla because many of the children there have parents who grew up in our Limudiot, and find they can help their children just like other Israeli parents.

Also, many upper-grade Ramla children tell us they can manage on their own now and we're thrilled. Mission accomplished.

In one Ramla school, though, we've been urged to stay at least for grades one through four, and we will. And some Ramla parents are asking us for a "parenting program" to help them help their kids – and we have some money tucked away for that.

But, in two other towns, we've closed our programs for less happy reasons. We've worked in one for 18 years, but have never received serious funding from them, and the Ministry of Education has urged us and all other educational charities there to "Walk out. They have plenty of money to fund you!"

So, we (and others) have obeyed.

It doesn't make us happy, and at least one school principal recently phoned our Jerusalem office in dismay, wailing: "You mean you're really not coming back??"

In the other town where we closed, a new civil administration insisted we must work in a new way we consider bad for the children, so we left.

Happily, we're still in Lod, Rishon LeZion, Kiryat Ekron, Ramla and, in a very small way, just a few children, in Bat Yam,

one of the towns I discussed (without naming it) in my Emergency letter.

I told you in that letter that this town has had a sudden influx of immigrant families; most of the parents have no Hebrew; and the kids, spread around in a number of schools, seem completely lost. We will try to find them.

Of course, I am happy that we can teach around 480 children like this little boy this school year.



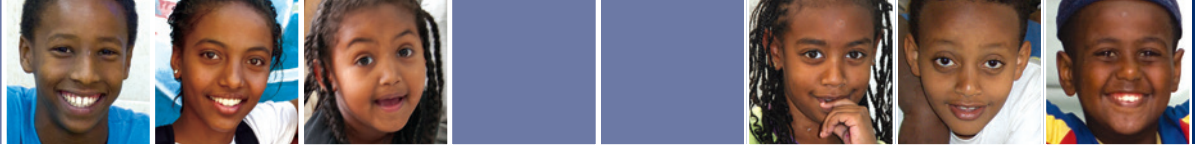
But, I'd be a lot happier if the Ministry of Education would match their praise of the Limudiah, and their urging of us to expand, with funding so we could do it.

I'll let you know if, when, and how we become able to take in more children this school year.

I'm going to end this note with a look around the world.

It's not a pretty sight. What with floods and hurricanes, wildfires and mass shootings, with politics run amok, and tragic refugees everywhere, you and I, all of us, must rightfully feel we have responsibilities in many places. We

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



NACOEJ HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

Mea Culpa from Barbara...

I have a mea culpa to make.

I've been neglecting to remind you about our sponsorship students in high school and college, and the hundreds of others waiting, hoping, praying to find a sponsor of their own.

They matter, too. Very much!

Karen Gens, our New York Director of Sponsorship Programs (and herself a long-time sponsor), just showed me a couple of letters from students to their sponsors. One was from Hywot Guvena, in 12th grade in high school, to her sponsor, Ronald Hyman.

Hywot wrote that she wanted to thank Ronald "from the bottom of my heart.

"Your sponsorship", she went on, "helped me and my family both financially and emotionally...You helped me get through the matriculation exam period with peace of mind..."

"For the past three years, my parents were relieved to know that they will receive help paying for my tuition expenses...Thanks to the fact that you made the financial burden more manageable, my parents were able to pay more careful attention to my younger siblings, and experienced a financial stability."

That's a pretty good return on a \$350

investment, isn't it? A kid who can ace her graduation tests, parents who experienced "financial stability" – and siblings who got better parenting.

The second letter Karen showed me was from Michal Tegave, a nursing student at Ben-Gurion University, to her sponsor, Sandy Gottstein.

Michal told Sandy that her generous sponsorship helps her continue with her studies. "I study during all the days of the week," she wrote, "and I also work while I study to provide for myself. Thanks to your scholarship I can work fewer shifts and invest more in the studies...that allows me to advance and succeed in the future".

She went on to say that her immigrant parents, who didn't know Hebrew and had "difficulties" in adjusting to Israel, always encouraged Michal and her siblings, "to learn, acquire an education and succeed so we will have a better life.

"My mother," she said, "has been raising us on her own because my father passed away, and she doesn't have the means to help me..."

What touched me most, reading the letters, were

a few sentences in each:

"I hope that you will continue to sponsor and give to more people who need your help," wrote Hywot, who is soon to graduate from high school. "Your sponsorship helps teenagers raise their grades and focus on their studies, instead of thinking how to pay for school..."

"In the future", wrote Michal to Sandy, "I hope to be on the giving side rather than the receiving one. May there be more people like you to help those with little means."

Amen to that!

And let me not forget Hywot's remark that: "I believe that when a person sponsors, he or she is also rewarded and filled with satisfaction."

Our sponsors say Hywot's right.

So – if Hywot's and Michal's words, bring more sponsors to the high schools and colleges where so many bright young Ethiopian Israelis are waiting and hoping to hear from you – I will feel, thankfully, forgiven.

Just contact Karen at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email her at education@nacoelj.org and she will help you. ■

Congratulations to...

NACOEJ's new Board Chairperson Susan Giesberg and husband David Lappen on their son Joshua's having been named a recipient of the 2018 Marshall Scholarship to study for up to three years at Oxford University, all expenses paid by the British government. These extremely prestigious scholarships honor the U.S. Marshall Plan which enabled Europe, including

England, to recover after WWII, and are awarded to outstanding young American scholars. Our heartiest congratulations to Joshua's brother Michael; and of course to Joshua (who used to sell his grandmother Middle Giesberg's home-made brownies to his elementary school classmates to raise funds for NACOEJ).



An important article by our friend, MK Avraham Neguise, has appeared in "The Times of Israel". You can scan this QR code to access it on the NACOEJ website or go to www.nacoelj.org/llol-28.

SPONSORSHIPS CHANGE THE WORLD

The Long, Long Lists

Both our NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program and our NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-a-Student College Sponsorship Program (AAS) have long, long waiting lists of young Ethiopian Israelis hoping with all their hearts for sponsors.

And for good reason.

Our High School Sponsorship Program enables Ethiopian-Israeli teens to go to good local high schools, rather than be separated from their families in lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools.

The problem is that though the government covers tuition in local high schools, the schools charge extra, compulsory fees for essentials like educational school trips, taking special courses, and other things Ethiopian families can't pay for.

A sponsorship enables an Ethiopian girl or boy to participate and learn "just like all the other kids", and (as Hywot says), takes a huge burden off the whole family.

Our AAS Program for college students lets a sponsor provide a modest but essential living stipend that covers students' most basic needs for food, rent, transportation, textbooks and more, which government tuition grants do not provide.

Most Ethiopian families cannot help their students financially, and too many have had to drop out of college for want of money for rent and food – losing the opportunity to get the degree that will change their lives.

By becoming a sponsor, you will shorten those painful waiting lists and give another young Ethiopian Israeli a chance to reach academic success and a bright future.

Please become a NACOEJ sponsor this school year. **It's not too late.**

Call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email to education@nacoej.org – and ask friends and family to join you as sponsors as well!

You'll change a student's life – and yours will too. Together, let's shorten those sad waiting lists. ■

We are Proud...

In 2010, we wrote to you about Dr. Avi Yitzhak, a former AAS student who headed an IDF field hospital in Haiti following the devastating earthquake that ravaged that country.

Now Dr. Yitzhak, head of the Combat Medical Branch in the Medical Corps, is in the news again and we are so proud. He recently became a Colonel in the Israel Defense Forces, the first Ethiopian Israeli to achieve this rank.

In conferring the rank, Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot said that: "Every officer at this level represents over 20 years of service. Each one has a story. Nevertheless, Colonel Avi Yitzhak is a ground-breaker."

Col. Dr. Avi Yitzhak was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he began studying medicine at 16 years old.

He moved to Israel at the age of 19, mastered Hebrew in a year, and went on to get a degree in medicine from Ben-Gurion University, during which time he also became a medic and an officer in the IDF.

He then enlisted as a battalion doctor in a special unit in the Paratroopers Brigade. He



Col. Dr. Avi Yitzhak (left) and Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot (right). Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

was wounded in the Second Lebanon War, and as chief medical officer for the Gaza Division during Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, he saved the life of a wounded Lieutenant Colonel.

He is married, has four children and lives in Beersheba. "I always felt the responsibility of representing the Ethiopian community," Yitzhak told Israel Hayom in 2016.

"I was the first student from the community to study medicine in Israel and I believe, ultimately, that everything is dependent on the individual and the sky is the limit."

Both Dr. Yitzhak and his wife, Zehava, were AAS students.

Shoshana Ben-Dor, NACOEJ Israel Director, has a quote from him sitting on her desk: "One works hard, but there are fruits".

In regard to the help he received from AAS, Dr. Yitzhak has said: "I am one of them and I am not ashamed to say it."

Mazel Tov Col. Dr. Yitzhak, we are proud of you! ■



“You came to this land as an immigrant. You became one of its defenders.” Israel Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan



“He put himself in front of the terrorist. He stopped him, even as his own life was taken.”

These words were spoken by Israeli Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan, at the funeral of Solomon Gavriyah, age 20. Solomon was an Ethiopian-Israeli border policeman who was killed by a terrorist this past September as he helped

defend the community of Har Adar near Jerusalem.

Solomon, who came to Israel from Ethiopia as a child, lived in Beer Yaakov with his family. Both he and his sister attended our NACOEJ Limudiah program there.

Solomon, who was posthumously promoted to Staff-Sergeant, was devoted to Israel with an unparalleled passion.

Just a year before, he had been wounded in another terrorist attack in the same area. Once he was healed, he came right back to his former post, determined to continue to serve his country.

He died a hero of Israel, alongside two security

guards who also gave their lives to protect the people of Har Adar.

Solomon left behind a heartbroken girl friend who called him, “...the best person I knew”. Speaking as though Solomon was beside her, she said: “You never complained. You were a warrior. A hero, my hero.” His sister tried to speak for the grieving family at the funeral but broke down in tears.

Member of Knesset Avraham Neguise said at the funeral that the people of Israel and the Israeli-Ethiopian community, “lost one of our great heroes”.

Boaz Ellison, an EMT who has worked for 30 years for Magen David Adom, Israel's medical emergency service, was one of the first to arrive at the scene of the terror attack. He treated the victims and later realized he had treated Solomon the year before at the same place.

“This is the first time that I have come across the same victim at different attacks,” said Ellison. “Last time, my treatment was effective but to my sorrow, this time, I was unable to save him.”

NACOEJ mourns Staff-Sergeant Solomon Gavriyah, a true hero of Israel and the Jewish People. ■

Dear Members...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

have to respond to them, and, of course, we do.

But, as you make your end-of-year decisions, I hope that like me, you will keep two special things in mind. One is that where it comes to Ethiopian Jews, and especially the children, hungry for learning, starving for food, every penny makes a very big difference.

And the other is that, alas, our Ethiopian children don't

Don't forget to consider leaving a bequest to NACOEJ in your will. It will carry your good work on behalf of Ethiopian Jews into the future, meeting the very real needs of this very special community of Jews. Thank you.

get much publicity. Many people barely know they exist. So if we don't help them, who will?

Let me close with this: All we truly need is for you to go on being your wonderful selves – as you have always been. With a heart full of love, thanks and hope, I send you my deepest good wishes for a better, happier, more fulfilling New Year. ■

Barbara

LIFELINE • WINTER 2017 • ISSUE NO: 89 • LIFELINE IS PUBLISHED THREE TIMES ANNUALLY.



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

BOARD CHAIRPERSON: Susan Giesberg
PRESIDENT: Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein
VICE PRESIDENT: Deborah Goldstein

TREASURER: Mitchell Kaplan
SECRETARY: Sanford Goldhaber
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Barbara Ribakove

We've noticed recently...

...that some checks in response to Lifeline mailings have been made out to Lifeline. Unfortunately, we cannot cash checks made out this way, so please be sure to make out your check to NACOEJ. And thank you so very much for all you do to help Ethiopian Jews in Israel and Ethiopia.