



Degrees OF Success



THE NACOEJ/VIDAL SASSOON ADOPT-A-STUDENT COLLEGE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

FALL 2010

AAS Program Sees Three Medical Students Graduate

Those who helped Ethiopian Jews leave Ethiopia in the 1980s and 1990s were surely inspired by the Talmudic teaching, "... whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." But they could not have anticipated that their actions would save many more lives. Three of the children who immigrated to Israel in those years just finished their medical studies and are dedicating their careers to saving the lives of others. They are Hadas Malada-Mitzri, Baruch Mulat, and Zoma Tade.

Their accomplishments are even more impressive when you realize that there are just six Ethiopian doctors working in Israeli hospitals, only one of whom, Dr. Avi Yitzhak (also an AAS alumnus), trained in Israel. Hadas (Ben-Gurion University) and Baruch (Tel Aviv University) will be interns at the Soroka Medical Center in Beer Sheva. Zoma (Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology) will be at the Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot. All three will also serve as medical doctors in the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces).

AAS sponsorships were especially pivotal for these students, whose intense schedules during medical school and simultaneous army duty made it difficult for them to work even part-time. None had parents who were in a position to help them financially. Excited at beginning the next phase of their careers, these hardworking students are appreciative of all those who helped them get there.

Hadas Malada-Mitzri: Healing Those Both Near and Far

By Debbie Herman

When you meet Hadas Malada-Mitzri, it is impossible not to get swept up by her energy and enthusiasm. Her motivation? An interest in global health and in helping the Ethiopian community in Israel.

Last year, she participated in electives in Ethiopia and Canada. About working in a hospital in Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia, Hadas commented, "It was a very educational experience, but also emotionally hard for me. There are so many sick people there with so many diseases. They have excellent doctors but they don't have the medications or the medical equipment to give the best treatment to the patients."



Hadas did a medical elective at a hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Hadas was one of only two Israelis chosen to take part in a unique program in Toronto, Canada, called IPEME – International Pediatric Emergency Medicine Elective. The summer course emphasized building cross-border relationships and Hadas studied together with Canadian, Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian medical students.

In Israel, Hadas works hard to help her community. She put together a Hebrew-Amharic pocket dictionary for Israeli medical students, to improve communication

Continued on page 3

AAS SPONSORSHIPS ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO DEVELOP THEIR POTENTIAL

For over twenty years, the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student (AAS) College Sponsorship Program has given Ethiopian college students the support they need to make it through school. While the first three years of college tuition are covered by the Israeli government for many Ethiopian students, all must pay for their own living expenses, including rent, food, transportation, as well as costly books and other educational materials. In too many cases, the financial burden forces Ethiopian students to drop out and take unskilled jobs. AAS scholarships provide them with a modest monthly living stipend that makes it possible for them to stay in school and earn a degree. Ultimately, this education provides them with a profession and empowers them to break out of the cycle of poverty.

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.

AAS Students Break New Ground in the Arts

AAS students and alumnae are making their mark in the arts, enriching the Israeli art scene with their distinctive styles. All express gratitude to their sponsors for not only giving them financial support but for also being voices of encouragement during their years of study.

HAVA TEZAZU

graduated in 2009 from the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio, one of Israel's best schools for theater, and soon landed an acting job at the Arab-Jewish Theater in Jaffa. Its directors had seen her school's production of the play "Scorched" and decided to produce it with some of the student actors, including Hava. Hava notes her good fortune, explaining that "An actor's starting point begins very low, especially for an actress who is an Ethiopian immigrant." The production has been highly acclaimed and Hava's sponsor, **Ann Bardacke** of Vancouver, Washington, also had a chance to see Hava's performance!

Hava recalls that the NACOEJ sponsorship was vital for her, "especially the wonderful... relationship with Ann Bardacke who... pushed me to continue despite the challenges. Thanks to her... I managed to successfully finish my studies."



Hava received favorable reviews for her two roles in the play "Scorched."

Photo: Avinoam Bartal



Sculpture Project, made from knitted wool and other materials.

eldad leaves his home in Kiryat Malachi early each morning to travel to school. Eldad is specializing in textile design and last year one of his pieces, Fragile Knit, was featured in an exhibition of top students' work. It was especially notable because he invented even the knitting technique used in it.

Eldad also volunteers as an art teacher for at-risk youth in Kiryat Malachi. His AAS stipend, from **Peachy and Mark Levy** of Santa Monica, California, covers the considerable cost of art supplies. It is fitting that Peachy Levy herself is a well-known textile artist who "particularly enjoys the work that he does."

ELDAD TARAKE

brings a rare blend of creativity and persistence to his artistic studies. The only Ethiopian in a student body of 2000 at the renowned Shenkar College of Engineering and Design, El-



Self-portrait, detail from comic book illustration

told me 'Stop doing that, concentrate on school!'" However, his path to the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, which he had never heard of growing up in Kiryat Gat, was not an easy one. Elias served as a commander in the Israeli army during the second war in Lebanon, worked as a security guard to save money for school, and took preparatory classes in order to develop his design skills.

Elias hopes to build up the field of animation in Israel. One of his school projects focused on a major inspiration in his life, his father, who was recognized by Israel as a Prisoner of Zion, having been imprisoned for helping Ethiopian Jews escape Ethiopia to go to Israel. He greatly appreciates the support he receives from his sponsors, **Barney and Rachel Gottstein** of Anchorage, Alaska.



A page from a comic book Elias is creating about his travels in Alaska after army service.

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

"It's important that my little brother and sister are proud of me and won't be afraid to dream. After all, dreams sometimes come true!"
NANI MELAKU

GERMAO MENGISTU

is a 2007 alumnus of the AAS program. Last spring, Germao won first place in a prestigious short story competition held by Haaretz, a major newspaper in Israel. His story describes the reactions of Ethiopian immigrants arriving in Israel in 1985. Germao himself came to Israel in 1991. As a young boy in Ethiopia, he longed to attend school but instead had to work on his family's farm. His dreams of receiving an education were only realized in Israel, where he eventually attended Haifa University, with the help of an AAS sponsorship from **The Pittsburgh Foundation** and **Alan Cornell** of Boca Raton, Florida. Germao is now able to write movingly about the immigrant generation of Ethiopian Jews.

NANI MELAKU

was overjoyed to hear that she had won first-place in a national drawing competition held by Israel's Student Authority for immigrant students. Nani, sponsored by David and Aviva Rubin of Skokie, Illinois, studies finance at Ono Academic College in Kiryat Ono. She was surprised to win and says "More than anything, it's important that my little brother and sister are proud of me and won't be afraid to dream. After all, dreams sometimes come true!"



Kochav (right) advises one of his young athletes before the "National Track and Field Championships, 1000 meters" held in Tel Aviv.

must run next year's Tiberias Marathon in two hours and 15 minutes or less.

In 2001, Kochav completed a Bachelor's degree in physical education at Israel's prestigious

Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport. During college, he was sponsored by **Andrew and Karen Friedman** of Silver Spring, Maryland. Kochav was the Friedmans' first AAS student. Andrew says he decided to become a sponsor because it seemed that "Ethiopians were having a rougher ride than most", integrating into Israel. They have been staunch supporters of both Kochav and the program ever since. The Friedmans have visited the Hadera-based runner in Israel many times and were guests of honor at the athlete's wedding last January.

Like most athletes in Israel, Kochav works full-time in addition to training. He splits his time between teaching physical education at a high school,

coaching emerging runners and heading **Ratzim MeHalev** (Running from the Heart). The last is a non-profit organization he founded in 2008 to identify and cultivate athletic talent in young people. Kochav first enlisted the help of a few friends and offered free coaching to promising Ethiopian youths. Today, about 40 athletes are training twice a week with the non-profit's volunteers. Many of the runners who participate come from poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Kochav meets them in school, school clubs and even on the streets. He and his friends have created a support system that nurtures young talent.

As an athlete, coach and community organizer, Kochav is a star in more ways than one. "I want to serve as an example to the next generation," says Kochav. "This is my contribution."



Kochav continues to train.

Photos: Win Robins

AAS Star Rises

BY JONATHAN PULIK

Since he was 14, Kochav Bitaw has been running. A teacher spotted his athletic potential one year after Kochav immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in 1991. He went on to represent Israel at competitions in China, Paris, and in 2004, in Boston. The long-distance runner, whose name means 'star' in Hebrew and Amharic, now hopes to represent Israel in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. According to the Israel Athletics Association, he ranks among the 50 fastest Israeli runners of all time. The road to the London Olympics is still a long one. To qualify for Israel's squad, Kochav

Hadas Malada-Mitzri

(continued from page 1)

between them and their Ethiopian parents.

It is clear that Hadas is an Ethiopian-Israeli success story. But it was not easy going. Hadas and her family emigrated from Ethiopia over 20 years ago. They journeyed by foot for six weeks before reaching Sudan, where her father was imprisoned and tortured by the Sudanese. After ten months in a refugee camp, the family was flown to Israel by the Israeli government. Neither of Hadas' parents have much formal education which has made it difficult for them to find well-paid jobs. But Hadas' parents stressed the importance of education to their eleven children. "They didn't want us to be in the same situation," says Hadas. Hadas is very appreciative to her parents for their encouragement.

She thanks her "wonderful sponsors", **Barney and Rachel Gottstein** of Anchorage, Alaska and **Hannah Klein** of Wheaton, Maryland.

Baruch Mulat:

An Anatomy of a Medical Student



As an officer – and now a doctor – Baruch Mulat stands out. Already a high-achiever in high school, Baruch studied in the gifted track and received certificates of excellence from both his school and city. It is not surprising that he also excelled in medical school and in the IDF.

Baruch and his family are no strangers to NACOEJ. His mother, Tiruwork Mulat, worked in our school in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia before Operation Solomon, and his aunt, Fantu Tsega, has been a NACOEJ city coordinator for Limudiah* since 1995. The value his family places on education has clearly inspired Baruch.

Baruch's beautifully written letters to his sponsors read like a journal of the life of a medical student. On the right, we include some highlights. In one of his last letters, he wrote about his internship saying "I hope to learn, ... and most importantly, help as much as possible."

Baruch says about his sponsors **David and Aviva Rubin** of Skokie, Illinois, that: "The saying 'All Jews are responsible for each other' was never truer. May there be many more people like you - and I hope that I can reach the level of generosity and nobility that you have achieved."

*NACOEJ after-school program for Ethiopian elementary school children.

August 24, 2004

"I began the year with doubts and fears...What if I am not good enough?"

June 15, 2005

"Today, at the end of two years, the pieces of the puzzle start coming together and slowly I can see the picture of a human being."

July 15, 2007

"There were children hospitalized in the ward in such terrible medical conditions that I was filled with pity..."

"On the other hand, I witnessed singular moments of happiness, like births,...In short, there is not a dull moment in medicine."

March 28, 2010

"I am happy to report that one month ago I passed my government licensing exams to practice medicine in Israel."

PAYING IT FORWARD

Even with demanding schedules, many AAS students make it a priority to volunteer. Some discover, through volunteering and work experience, that community service is their professional calling. The students featured below all believe in helping the lives of those less fortunate than themselves.

Photos: Win Robins

YAFIT GUBAZE

has always found that her studies and volunteer activities were intertwined. Yafit was an AAS student as an undergraduate at Bar Ilan University, (sponsored by **Alan Cornell** of Boca Raton, Florida) and is currently a graduate student at Tel Aviv University (sponsored by **Anita D. Goodman** of Rye, New York). While at Bar Ilan, where she majored in education, she volunteered as a tutor and teacher's assistant. But it was her work with at-risk teenagers after college that led her to pursue a Master's degree in Guidance Counseling at TAU.

Yafit continues to volunteer this time at a facility for children who have been removed from their homes by court order. She works one-on-one with several children, helping them with their studies. Yafit observes that the sessions also give them the emotional support they need so crucially. Her future path? "I want to continue working with kids in distress," says Yafit. "This gives me a lot of satisfaction."



Yafit Gubaze

BARNEY'S BOOKS

Long-time AAS sponsors **Barney and Rachel Gottstein** believe that the best way to improve the future of Ethiopian -Israelis is through education. They support many AAS students, but are always looking for more ways to help young Ethiopians in Israel. The latest result is a new program called Barney's Books. The Gottsteins realized that many Ethiopian parents cannot afford to buy books for their young children, which means that they learn to read later than Israeli children. So they chose to provide children's books to AAS students in the hope that they would bring them home to read to their younger siblings. Barney's Books instantly created a lot of excitement among AAS students, who seized the opportunity to encourage younger family members to read.

Two of the Gottsteins' sponsored students, Mullu Worke and Dan Gashai, were inspired to go one step further. They chose to bring some of the books to read to disadvantaged children.

Mullu Worke, an education major at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, works at a shelter for abused women on weekends. Although this leaves her little free time, Mullu says "I chose to work in this place hoping... to help the children rehabilitate their lives." Her experiences at the shelter shape her school projects. Community service appears to be in her future- she plans to pursue a Master's degree in social work.

The oldest child in his family, Dan Gashai has always looked out for others. Dan worked his way through university and helped out his parents, who were unemployed. In the army, he rose to the level of an officer in the prestigious paratroops unit. Dan is now studying for a Master's degree in developmental cellular biology at the Hebrew University's school of medicine. Even though he no longer has time for a job, he still volunteers at a learning center where he tutors children with special needs.



Mullu reads to children living with their mothers at an abused women's shelter in Jerusalem.

JUST THE FACTS

Did you know that in the 2009-2010 school year...

- AAS sponsorships helped support **402** students in **6** universities, and **24** academic colleges, including **8** nursing schools and **7** engineering schools.
- Students' fields of study included law, psychology, engineering, occupational therapy, physics, optometry, medicine, education, guidance counseling, computer programming, dentistry, nursing, social work, visual arts, business administration, speech therapy, architecture, film and political science.
- **117** of our students graduated!
- **34** students were studying for advanced degrees; **14** of whom completed their Master's degrees.
- **4** students were enrolled in medical school, **3** of whom graduated.

Be An Ambassador

We are happy to bring you the third issue of "Degrees of Success," written by Judy Dick, NACOEJ Coordinator of Educational Programs, with the invaluable help of Yehudit Abramson, the Israel Coordinator of the AAS College Sponsorship Program, and Israel staff writer, Jonathan Pulik. We are proud of all our students; let us know if you have news about your students that you want to share. Call us at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or e-mail college@nacoej.org.

Please pass on our information to friends and family who might be interested in helping students. Your endorsement will go a long way toward helping more wonderful Ethiopians-Israelis get the education they need. Thank you!



**NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY
THE NACOEJ/VIDAL SASSOON ADOPT-A-STUDENT COLLEGE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

255 West 36th St. • Suite 701 • New York, NY 10018 • 212-233-5200 Ext 230 • Fax: 212-233-5243
E-mail: college@nacoej.org • Web: www.nacoej.org