



2012 Degrees OF Success

The NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student
College Sponsorship Program



Be an Ambassador

We are happy to bring you the fifth issue of *Degrees of Success*, written by Judy Dick, Director of Educational Programs, NACOEJ-NY, with the invaluable help of Yehudit Abramson, the Israel Coordinator of the AAS College Sponsorship Program. We are proud of all our students. Please let us know if you have news about your own students that you want to share. Call 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. You are an ambassador for these young men and women, and your endorsement will go a long way. Thank you!

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A Filmmaker with a Unique Vision

"I tell stories about my world," says young filmmaker Alemwork Marsha. "I look forward to others coming to see these stories."

Alemwork Marsha has been creating films and winning awards for them since high school. Her body of work offers a window into the experiences of the Ethiopian-Israeli community.



Alemwork, on the right, directing her latest film, *Etzlenu*.
Credit: Yossi Tzavker

life in Ethiopia and a Western society like Israel." The film was shot in a Rehovot neighborhood where many Ethiopians live, including Alemwork herself. It has been shown at Jerusalem's Cinematheque during a viewing of year-end productions by Sam Spiegel Film School students, and more recently, during the 2011 Montreal Film Festival.

Alemwork's video camera is just one extension of her unique viewpoint, a way of expressing what she sees. Whether it is a film about an Ethiopian child or a book project based on

Full of ideas, Alemwork has already created several short films that have been shown at film festivals throughout Israel. One of her earliest projects was *Mullu*, which centered on the nature of freedom in one Ethiopian woman's life. Another, *Corky*, is the story of a friendship between two young girls.

"The screenplay [*Corky*] was partly inspired by personal experience," says Alemwork. "Aside from the universal story of friendship between two young girls, it tells of the challenges of transition between

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AAS Sponsorships Encourage Students to Develop Their Potential

Since 1987, the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student (AAS) College Sponsorship Program has given Ethiopian-Israeli students the financial support they need to make it through college. 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, textbooks and other educational materials. Very few Ethiopian-Israeli families can help. 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 enables them to break out of poverty.

A Tribute to Vidal Sassoon

Vidal Sassoon cared deeply about helping young Jewish students overcome obstacles and build better lives for themselves. No stranger to hard times himself, Vidal spent much of his childhood in a Jewish orphanage in London because of his mother's poverty and his father's abandonment.

At 14, he was apprenticed to a hairdresser -- the start of a brilliant career for which he eventually became famous. He always remembered his own rags-to-riches story and looked for ways to give young men and women opportunities in life.

Inspired by Operation Solomon, he reached out to help the Ethiopian community in Israel. This led to his decision to underwrite a large part of the administrative costs of the NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student

(AAS) College Sponsorship Program, subsequently named for him.

More than 20 years later, over 2,300 AAS students have earned their degrees, owing much to his generosity and vision. We mourn the loss of this dear friend and benefactor, who passed away in Los Angeles on May 9, after a long fight against leukemia.

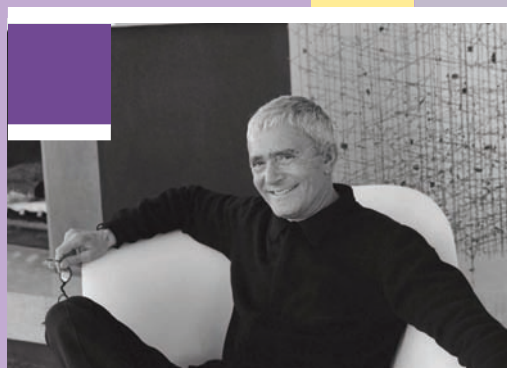
"I had the privilege of meeting Vidal on a number of memorable occasions. On one of Vidal's visits, we organized a lunch with a number of college students who were beneficiaries of stipends through the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student program. We could see how much Vidal enjoyed

meeting the students, all in different fields of study, and how pleased they were to meet him, share their experiences with him, and express to him the importance of the stipends which enabled them to build a future

"I heard of late of the passing of Mr. Vidal Sassoon. I am writing to express my deep condolences. I met Mr. Vidal Sassoon in Jerusalem as a student. We had lunch with him one day. I sat next to him and his daughter. He struck me as a good, active and energetic person. Most of all, he was a very generous man. I understand that he gave generously to NACOEJ programming and I am sure that many people like me benefited from the kindness of this dear Jewish man. His passing is a great loss to us all."

Misganaw Alon Demle,

AAS alumnus, Hebrew University '06, English Literature, sponsored by Gil and Harriet Rosen, currently an elementary school English teacher.



Vidal Sassoon

where they would utilize their academic studies to become equal citizens in Israeli society."
Shoshana Ben-Dor, Director of NACOEJ-Israel

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Ethiopian folk tales, her art lets her share her deep connection to her Ethiopian heritage.

This summer saw her finishing up her final film project for school, *Etzlenu* (loosely translated as 'Where We Come From') and travelling to Ethiopia to screen a Tigrean-language film she edited. *Etzlenu* centers on the relationship between an Ethiopian mother and daughter, exploring the theme of class differences as the mother, a cleaning woman, brings her daughter to the wealthy homes she works in. Alemwork is also working on

a feature-length film about a 14-year-old Ethiopian girl in the weeks before she makes aliyah to Israel during Operation Solomon.

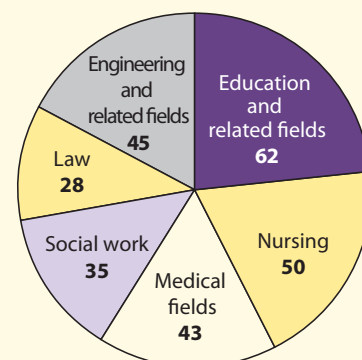
Her NACOEJ sponsorship from **Deborah Goldstein of New York** has been helpful in the pursuit of her degree. "It is important to support students in the arts to enable them to spread their wings," says Alemwork appreciatively. "I am graduating feeling good and confident," she says. "I have acquired good tools." We look forward to learning more about her many creative projects.

Just the Facts

Did you know that in the 2011-2012 school year...

- AAS sponsorships helped support **412** students in **6** universities and **27** academic colleges, including **6** nursing schools and **7** engineering schools.
- **110** of our students are graduating!
- **39** students were studying for advanced degrees; **12** of whom completed their Master's degrees.

Top AAS Fields of Study



A Page From the AAS Album

Each year, some sponsors have the opportunity to meet their students when they visit Israel. The joy that both sponsors and students gain from meeting each other face-to-face adds to the sponsoring experience and cements their bond. Both sponsor and student leave each other richer for the experience.

Marilyn Estreicher, a sponsor from Columbus, Ohio, who has a small business making and selling her own jewelry, met her student, **Michal Mangisto**, who is studying jewelry and fashion at Bezalel, at a small café near school.

Says Estreicher, "It was especially wonderful to connect with her, as I have an interest in fashion and jewelry. We had lots to talk about and she showed us some of her work in progress and stuff she had done. I really felt we had a warm connection, and look forward to seeing her again!"



Marilyn and Michal

Ruth and Aaron Bernstein from South Orange, New Jersey, are long-time AAS sponsors. During this visit to Israel, Ruth was able to reconnect with a past student, **Ilana Sanbato**. Ilana graduated in 2008 from the Technion where she studied Industrial Engineering. She is now serving in the IDF as an information systems manager. Ruth says that she was "overwhelmed by the charming, bright, poised young woman" and "so grateful ... for the opportunity to assist this special student achieve her degree and become an officer [captain] in the IDF."



Ilana and Ruth

When **Zina Schiff's** husband travelled to Israel to be a guest lecturer there this year, they made the extra effort to meet their student, **Dana – Demeka Kinde**, despite their tightly-packed schedules. Bubbling over with enthusiasm, Zina says that it was the highlight of her trip. Zina, a concert violinist from Brookline, MA, was thrilled to learn about Dana's work with children and her progress toward a Master's in Education at Haifa University. She says that the meeting helped her, "... understand how my mother, Rose Schiff, felt so strongly about supporting students from NACOEJ, since when she came as a 13-year-old from Russia to the US she had no opportunity to even finish high school." And now Zina's daughters plan on sponsoring students too.



Dana and Zina

Since I was a child I always wanted to be a nurse and wear the white uniform and take care of people who don't feel well. I want them to start feeling good and healthy. In this world it is impossible to avoid illness and so we must make sick people more comfortable. Finally after many attempts, I have been accepted to the nursing program that I wanted so much. I am still so excited about school. It is so fascinating learning anatomy, about the body's different organs and their functions. Thank you for your financial support which reduces my worries.

—Mulu Engedaw



Mulu, Joyce, and Mentamer

Joyce Fulps, a retired nurse from Kansas City, Missouri, was overjoyed to meet her two nursing students, Mentamer Gesse, who is studying at the Barzilay Nursing School in Ashkelon, and Mulu Engedaw, who is studying at the Shaarey Tzedek Hospital in Haifa, and to introduce them to her synagogue group with whom she traveled.

I was very happy to see you and to get to know you. Until now, we have only corresponded and I always wanted to see the woman who has been helping me so. Our meeting was very moving. I was so happy to see you, the amazing woman both within and without. You are a beautiful woman, a person with a heart of gold, and set a good example. I want to tell you that I have started volunteering with a Holocaust survivor once a week. I go and speak to her at her home. What made me do this was your amazing story and boundless help. Every time I go to her, I am reminded of you and I say, if only I could be like you.

—Mentamer Gesse

Our Students Are Winners

Many of our AAS students are no strangers to hardship and have to overcome great challenges just to achieve a college degree. As children, some endured the arduous trek from their villages in Ethiopia to Sudan on the way to Israel, while others left their villages with their families to reach Addis Ababa in order to make aliyah. As first- or second-generation immigrants, many suffered from poverty in Israel and struggled to reach the level of their classmates in school, while having to help their parents acclimate to a new society. But despite these obstacles, AAS students are excelling in their studies and going for the gold.

On the Road to Success

"I never thought of myself as a runner or a college student. I always had to work harder in order to be something - nothing in me is a natural talent - I have to work and make huge efforts in order to be what I am," says the recent winner of two medals in track, AAS student **Asher Ashageree Teka**.

But even when he was in junior high school, Asher's athletic ability was recognized by a sports teacher who made sure that he switched to a school where he could develop his talent in track and field. As Asher began winning national championships, his confidence grew, helping him overcome his academic difficulties, so that he successfully graduated high school and also received an

award for being an exceptional athlete. His goal, a career in sports, was clear to him. Asher's path has been a long and difficult one. Born in an



Ethiopian village, he and his family made their way to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, when he was six and eventually came to Israel in Operation Solomon.

Acclimation to Israeli life was not easy for his family, who first lived

in a trailer park. School was especially challenging for the young Asher. But his love of sports has seen him through. During his army service, Asher was a physical trainer who helped soldiers keep fit, making him feel proud that he could contribute his skills to help his country. The youngest of five, he also became the

primary caretaker of his elderly father, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, after his mother passed away from cancer while Asher was in the IDF.

After the army, his passion for sports motivated him to study to improve his grades in order to get into a good college. At the same time he worked part-time jobs to make ends meet. His hard work paid off and Asher was accepted to Wingate College (where he had been sponsored by **Kenneth S. Kaiserman* of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**). At Wingate, he studies physical education. But even there his struggles did not end. Asher found himself falling behind academically, and it was not until a learning disability was discovered, and he took a class that helped him manage it, that he was able to catch up.

Since then, Asher's perseverance and talent have brought him success both in his classes and in several national university track competitions. Recently, he was one of ten runners in the Israeli Championships and he hopes that his successes will encourage his 26 nieces and nephews to put in the hard work needed to achieve their goals.

*Since this article was written, we are sad to inform you that Ken Kaiserman has passed away. His dedication to NACOEJ and the AAS Program was extraordinary.



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Graduating in Style

We have been following **Eldad Tarake's** progress as he explored fashion and textile design, receiving recognition for his talent each year, and last year winning an award as "best student." Recently, his final school project, a collection of textile designs, was featured in the graduating students' exhibition at the Jaffa Port and discussed in several articles in the Israeli media. His textiles, with their strong colors and geometric designs, draw on traditional Ethiopian motifs but Eldad gives them a modern spin.



Eldad says that the monthly stipend from his sponsors, **Peachy and Mark Levy of Santa Monica, California**, "put a smile on my face" and he was happy to thank his sponsors, "returning the smile in his letters." [Peachy Levy is a nationally known textile artist.]

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.