

Making the World a Degree Richer: Ethiopian College Students in Israel

The Vidal Sassoon Adopt-a-Student program was born in the 1980's when our founding president, Jonathan Giesberg, of blessed memory, visited the handful of Ethiopian college students in Israel and found they all had the same problem: although the government was paying their tuition, they had no money for food, health insurance, carfare, rent, and books.

At Jonathan's urging, NACOEJ started looking for sponsors who would provide a modest living stipend for these young women and men who were the hope of the Ethiopian community.

Today, there are many more Ethiopian college students in Israel – and many graduates. Thousands have been helped by NACOEJ. They include lawyers, teachers, scientists, social workers, entrepreneurs, artists and performers, diplomats and politicians, government officials, army officers, medical professionals, and more.

But many promising students are still dropping out of college because they have no jobs and no money for basic necessities. This year, NACOEJ has 370 sponsored students in our AAS program –

up from last year, but still not nearly enough.

Letters from AAS students to their sponsors are often so touching they bring tears to our eyes. Knowing we don't have room in the *Lifeline* for all or even most, we decided to print one special one. It's a poem, written in Hebrew by student Erez B. Kassahun to his sponsors, Mark and Emily Friedman of Silver Spring, Maryland. The poem was translated in the NACOEJ Israel office.

"Sometimes you want to say something, but you don't know what.

Sometimes you want to scream, but you remain silent.

Because there is no word that can express, no word that enters the emotion.

Sometimes it is not enough. Sometimes it does not express everything...

Maybe a new word should be invented, a special word just for you.

A word that would really express what's inside, a human word

That would come out of one heart and enter deep into the other!"



Jonathan Giesberg in Israel in 1987 with Ethiopian friends Fiona and Elana (right). Elana was the first Adopt-A-Student and became a professional chemist.

Then, Erez, an educational management major at Bar-Ilan University, adds:

"I have no words to express all my gratitude and appreciation to you. I would like to say thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for the help and support you give me with this stipend. Your donation helped me in every aspect, financially, academically and emotionally. Your help encourages me to aim higher and reach more. I wish and pray that you will always be repaid ten-fold for all your doings.

Sincerely, Erez B. Kassahun"

Please consider having heartfelt words like these addressed to you or to a group you can form to share the expenses of a student. Call Evelyn Deitchman at 212-233-5200, extension 226.

A FINAL WORD...

On a recent trip to Israel, I was told by an Ethiopian member of our Israeli Board that our college program was our most important effort "because it is the last chance for our young people to achieve success". On the same trip, a Jewish Agency official told me the high school program was our most important "because it gives youngsters a chance to make it into college and help their families at the

same time". If I had to choose, I would pick the after-school program because it sets the stage for a youngster's whole life. But they're all critically important to the future of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel. Without any of them, the chances of success go down. With them all, together we can reach for the stars...BRG