

# 2016 Bridges

The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program



## Become an Ambassador

We're delighted to bring you the 11th issue of Bridges. We hope you will enjoy the stories and that you will also serve as an Ambassador for Ethiopian-Israeli high school students by passing this newsletter to friends and family who might also want to support our students.

Your endorsement can ensure that more deserving Ethiopian-Israeli teens get the good education that is the key to their successful futures.

Questions? Call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, Ext. 230 or email: [Education@nacoelj.org](mailto:Education@nacoelj.org). She'll answer questions, contact prospective sponsors, and chat about the joys of sponsorship (she's been a sponsor for years). And if you have news to share about your student, please let her know. Thank you for your dedication to these Ethiopian-Israeli young people!

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## Rivka's Goal: Tokyo in 2020



Photographer: Oren Aharoni, courtesy of Yediot Aharonot

Rivka Bayech was in the 11th grade this year at the Religious High School in Rishon LeZion. She was sponsored by Jacob and Rebecca Cohen.

Rivka's father passed away and her single mother struggles constantly to support her and her three older sisters. Her NACOEJ sponsorship from the Cohens is vital.

After school, Rivka spends hours training rigorously in her field - Taekwondo, a Korean martial art.

Recently she won several top honors in the European Taekwondo championships!

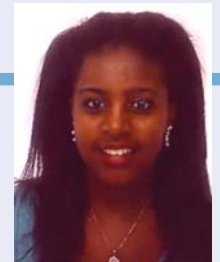
When it is time to enter the Israeli army, she plans to continue her athletic training. Her dream is to represent Israel in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. She is also looking forward to becoming a psychologist in the future.

All of us are very proud of Rivka and grateful to the Cohens for sponsoring her. We are hoping to watch her in Tokyo in 2020!

## "If you smile at the world..."

Rivka Wobanech was born in Ethiopia. She's been sponsored through the NACOEJ high school program, and is now in 12th grade at the Yavne School in Holon.

In one recent letter, she discussed her school trip to



*continued inside*

## High School Sponsorships = Textbooks, Supplies, and More...

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers. Thanks to their sponsors - you! - they can attend high-quality, local high schools rather than leave home for lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools.

Basic high school tuition is covered by the government, but Israeli schools charge additional fees which many Ethiopian families can't afford. Your sponsorship allows your student to get essentials like textbooks and supplies and to take advantage of all the school's educational opportunities.

Many students say a sponsorship lets them be **"...just like the other kids."** Your partnership gives them self-confidence and an education that is key to getting into, and succeeding in, college. This enables them to go on to successful futures. Thank you.

# “People will never forget how you made them feel..”

As they approached the end of their high school careers, six students at the DeShalit High School in Rehovot decided to write as a group to their sponsors. It is an extraordinarily touching letter we want to share with you.

**From:** Daniel Alemu, Eti Ayasu, Eden Darsu, Itay Getahun, Oshra Teseme, Hagit Zando  
12th grade DeShalit High School

**To:** Bennett Leff, Allen Greenberger, Cyrus Abbe, Albert Miller, Ita Markus, Marilyn and Sheldon Estreicher

Dear Sponsors:

**“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”**

We, graduates of the 12th grade of the years 2015-16, would like to thank you for everything you told us in your letters and for everything you did for us by supporting and helping. Thank you for being there for us and making sure we will have a fair chance. Thank you for the help and support.

Thank you for letting us know there are people who care and think about us. We would like to express our thanks and gratitude. We would like to dedicate to you Idan Raichel's song Circles. Here is an excerpt from it: *“Circles, circles, We remain, In the circles of life, Holding on to people.”*

Thanks again for being there for us over the last three years, thank you for caring, for the concern and wanting to help. We are proud of ourselves and of our achievements.

We know you are among the people who were worried about us along the way, wishing we will succeed. We're about to join the army and expecting a meaningful service.

We miss school a bit and also a little worried but we are mainly very excited.

Thank you very much, 12th grade 2015-16

Note: Sadly, Allen Greenberger, who sponsored Eti Ayasu, has passed away.

## *“If you smile at the world...” continued from cover*

concentration camps in Poland. When she first heard about it, she wrote, “I didn't know if I should go. I told myself I am not really connected to it because it didn't reach Ethiopia.”

But Rivka decided it was very important to her as a Jew, so she worked long hours the entire summer to pay for the expensive trip.

She wrote that she had previously heard the story of the Holocaust only “from outside”, but since the trip to the camps she feels a strong connection to the people and to the events that took place.

In her own words, Rivka said: “...we saw a mountain filled entirely with human ashes. It was very difficult to see it because it is so difficult to imagine these were people and now only their ashes remain. There are no names, and nothing is left...”

“At the end of the journey” she continued, “I felt very proud for being Jewish and being in Israel, the Promised Land that they dreamt of coming to. Thanks to them we were able to establish it.”

She wrote that she is studying hard now to succeed in her matriculation exams. After 12th grade she will join the army, she said, to serve the country. And then, on to college.

When Rivka was only in 8th grade, she liked to say: “If you smile at the world, the world will smile back at you. Everything is for the best.”

Rivka's story is exceptional and yet representative of the commitment of young Ethiopian Israelis to become the best that they can be.

And sponsors like you enable them to reach that goal.

## Much More “Real”

Dina Tanners has been involved with NACOEJ as a generous donor since 1990. She has also been a high school sponsor since 2005.

We’ve highlighted her story in the past but would like to do so again now because of her recent experience. It affirms yet again the *nachas* sponsors can have from their students.

Dina went to Israel earlier this year. With the help of Leah Barkai, our Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship program, and the help of Karen Gens, U.S. Director of Sponsorship Programs, she met with her high school student, Fentia Mehebau. Here is how Dina described their meeting at the AMIT School in Kiryat Malachi:



*We talked the whole time in Hebrew, at least 20 minutes. I was very impressed with the principal/director of the School, Ohad. He takes on extra responsibilities for this project even though it is not his job.*

*Fentia asked me good questions...I gave her my email and What's App number in case she wanted to write me. She had just gotten email the day before.*

*Her favorite class is English and she said that she has some talent in it. I knew one of her previous teachers from the elementary school across the street. We both agreed how wonderful Fentia is.*

***Meeting Fentia made the project much more “real” for me. Thanks for organizing it.***

Because you’re a sponsor, we’re sure you too would treasure a meeting with your student. Let Karen know if you plan a trip to Israel and she and Leah will set it up. Email: [education@nacoej.org](mailto:education@nacoej.org) or call 212-233-5200, ext. 230.

## Professional Proof: Why Your Sponsorship is Vital

Here is an important letter to Leah Barkai from an Israeli high school administrator whose school has many NACOEJ-sponsored, Ethiopian-Israeli students. It shows clearly why your support is so vital to your student/s.

**From: Dr. Gilad Amir, Principal, Hebrew University Secondary High School**

Dear Leah,

On my behalf, and on behalf of the management team and teachers, but mostly on behalf of the students of Ethiopian descent who study at our school, I would like to thank you for the generous donation from the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry for the 2015-2016 school year.

We appreciate your dedicated care and efforts for making the financial aid for our Ethiopian students who need support. These students reach good achievements and some of them excel in different study fields. The opportunity to reach these impressive achievements and a promising future is given to them thanks to these donations that come from good people from across the sea.

All the best.

## A Little Push to Dream...

Following is a sweet letter from a brother and sister in high school addressed to NACOEJ, as well as to their sponsors.

NACOEJ Advisory Board member, Marsha Croland, has been sponsoring the sister, Desalo Gebeye, since the 2011-2012 school year. Desalo attends Michlelet Emunah High School in Jerusalem.

Cherina Eisenberg has been sponsoring Desalo's brother, Asubuelo, since the 2013-2014 school year. He attends ORT Spanian High School in Jerusalem.



It's Asubelo and Desalo Gebeye!

We are writing this letter to thank you for your generous sponsorship, and the help that you provided us and our parents each and every year.

We would like to tell you that the magnitude of your help is great and indescribable. By helping us with the school tuition you are giving us a little push to continue studying and dreaming.

Thank you very much, our appreciation is endless.

## They Told Each Other About Their Families

Sponsors Herbert and Abby Bixhorn visited their student, Kudis Avraham, in the Revivim School in Rishon LeZion. They were accompanied by Leah Barkai and Yehudit Abramson, NACOEJ Coordinators of the High School and College Sponsorship Programs, and Iris Greenberg, advisor and vice principal of the school.

It was a warm and successful visit during which Kudis explained that her name means Kadosh (holy in Amharic and Hebrew). She talked about her parents and grandparents who came to Israel in Operation Solomon, and the Bixhorns told Kudis about their family.

Everyone was shown around the school and learned about the high level of study there and how they integrate Ethiopian students into all the programs. It was a visit that brought the Bixhorns and their student closer together.

*From left: Iris, Kudis, Herbert and Abby* ▶



### From a Grateful Family to their Daughter's Sponsor

To: Elaine Schwartz

*We the Bogala family, are thankful and appreciative of the generous sponsorship that you have been providing us for a few years now.*

*It's without a doubt that your sponsorship is helping us manage with our daughter's school tuition. Knowing we have your support provides peace and serenity to our daughter and to us.*

*Blessings to all those who care and open their heart.*

*Sincerely, Bogala Family*

## Just the Facts

**Did you know that in the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program in the 2015-2016 school year...**

- **255** sponsors participated in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program
- **1085** students were sponsored
- **65** schools in **18** Israeli cities had sponsored students
- **172** of our students graduated
- **Hundreds** of students are still hoping for sponsors

**With your dedicated partnership, NACOEJ has been sponsoring Ethiopian-Israeli high school students for 20 years! There are many more students who are waiting and hoping for sponsors!**

## 34 Years and Counting...

Since 1982, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) has been providing humanitarian and educational aid to the Ethiopian-Jewish community. NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.