



2011 Bridges

The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program



The Face of Israel: Representing Israel at an International Science Camp

Be an Ambassador

We are happy to bring you this sixth issue of *Bridges*, written by Judy Dick, Coordinator of Educational Programs, with the help of Leah Barkai, Israel Coordinator of the High School Program. Let us know if you have news about your own students to share, and please pass this newsletter on to friends and family who might also want to support Ethiopian-Israeli high school students. You are an ambassador for these boys and girls and your endorsement will go a long way. Thank you! Please feel free to call Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or e-mail highschool@nacoelj.org.

It is not often one meets a young student with the grace and poise of Noa Yeshayahu. Noa, a senior at the Aleh Lod High School for Sciences, is calm when she describes her intense schedule studying for high-level matriculation exams, going to an advanced after-school program, and applying to be a student-soldier in the IDF's prestigious Atidim Program. Noa makes it all sound easy but it is clear that she is highly accomplished. Her talent was recognized last summer when she was chosen to represent Israel at an international science camp in Mumbai, India.

"This camp was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, both academically and socially."

"This camp was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, both academically and socially," Noa says. Noa learned about the camp through the Weizmann Institute of Science, where she attends a program for exceptional Ethiopian high school students. The camp's high level put science in a whole new light for her. "I met scientists and Nobel Prize winners that lectured to us about... their various studies."



Noa was surprised to find herself in the role of teacher too. As one of seven Israeli students amongst 240 students from around the world, Noa became an unofficial ambassador for Israel, fielding all kinds of questions about her home country. "I managed to significantly change many people's opinions about Israel," Noa says proudly. There couldn't be a better choice for the 'face of Israel.'

NACOEJ has literally watched Noa grow up. She attended a *Limudiah** in Lod and has been in the high school program since tenth grade. Noa fondly remembers *Limudiah* and the help she

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North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry
255 West 36th St. Suite 701
NY, NY 10018
212-233-5200 x 230
Fax: 212-233-5243
highschool@nacoelj.org
www.nacoelj.org

High School Sponsorships Help Students Attend Good Local Schools

Founded in 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has enabled countless Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers to attend high-quality local schools in their communities instead of leaving home for lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools. While basic high school tuition is covered by the Israeli government, schools charge additional fees that are often beyond the means of Ethiopian immigrant families. NACOEJ sponsorships cover these fees, so that Ethiopian students can take advantage of all educational opportunities in their schools. With this help, they earn an education that increases their chance of getting into college, and ultimately become self-supporting professionals able to help their families break out of poverty.

Sponsors Build Relationships With Students

Through letters and visits, our sponsors personalize their connection with their students across the sea.

The Written Connection

Efrat Sabahat, a bubbly eleventh grader who attends the Religious High School in Yavne, has been writing to her sponsor, **Robert Kushner** of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for five years. Kushner's advice has helped her learn about possibilities for her future.

Here are excerpts from their correspondence.

I am one of the students you are supporting with your generous stipend, I send you a thousand thanks! ... I would be very happy if you wrote me back and we



could correspond.
Efrat, Fall 2008

I very much enjoyed receiving your note thanking me... As we continue to write each other, please do not hesitate to ask me more and I will answer all of your questions. I am a retired lawyer. I have a wife and we have been married for 52 years.

Kushner, July 2009

Your life sounds very interesting, especially to me because I want to be a lawyer, but a criminal lawyer. What kind of lawyer are you? ...I also might want to become a psychologist or a

writer. I want to ask you if you always knew that you would be a lawyer? This is a decision you must have thought about deeply. Is being a lawyer the top of your achievements?

Efrat, Fall 2009

When I entered university, I studied accounting. Before I graduated... I decided that I wanted to go to law school in the evening. An official at the law school said I would get a better education if I attended law school during the day. During my law school studies, I began to realize that I wanted to be a lawyer and not an accountant.

My life as a corporate lawyer was indeed at the top of my

achievements. The lesson I learned, and one which you should learn too, is to choose a profession that you truly love...

October 2009, Kushner

I have written four books to date and I also draw, sculpt, and dance. Aside from school, I am doing a few courses that will count toward a Bachelor's degree in the Faculty of Agriculture. In the future, I want to be a prosecutor and if I am successful, perhaps a district court judge.

Efrat, November 2009

I hope my story will be similar to yours. Well, I am trying to fulfill my dream to be a criminal lawyer.

Efrat

A Visit with Current and Past Students

Morris and Beverly Weinstein can take pride in seeing the fruits of their efforts helping Ethiopian teens. When

they visited Israel this winter, they were able to meet not only the student they currently sponsor, Atakelt Ekel, but also a past student, Hana Tayacho.

Morris and Beverly met Hana at a daycare center in the Assaf HaRofeh Medical Center, where Hana is doing her national service. Hana, who graduated last year, was sponsored by the Weinsteins for

three years of high school and they kept in touch constantly. Hana hopes to be a child psychologist or pediatrician one day – the Weinsteins look forward to hearing more from her in the future.

The Weinsteins also traveled to Bat Yam to see their new student, Atakelt. There is nothing like meeting a student in person. Both were impressed by Atakelt's dedication to her studies.

Beverly noted that although Atakelt has only been in Israel for a few years, she speaks excellent Hebrew and even knows some English.

About sponsoring an Ethiopian-Israeli high school student, Beverly says, "We are her *ima* and *abba* in the United States!" Like any "parents", they can be proud of their sponsored "children" as they grow up and succeed, in part due to their help.



Beverly reunites with Hana Tayacho.

A Partnership With a New School

One of the secrets to the success of the high school program is our good relationships with Israeli secondary (junior and high) schools. We work closely with schools to ensure that the NACOEJ scholarships help the students as much as possible.

This year, we began a new relationship with the Eliezer Ben-Yehudah School in Ness Ziona, a small city in central Israel. A promising group of seventh-graders from the school was accepted into our high school program, thanks to a generous donation from a long-time sponsor. It turns out that several of the students have familiar names; they had been in our *Limudiah* in the Reut School in Ness Ziona. In fact, one of them, Tigist Bitau, had become known to us when she won several running competitions.

This winter, NACOEJ staff visited the school. We were greeted with excitement by the school principal, who told us about the school, its student body, and our Ethiopian students. The school, housed

in an airy, light-colored stone building, is only three and a half years old. The Ben-Yehudah School is a comprehensive high school, which means that it begins with the seventh grade. The Ethiopian students are a

teacher and guidance counselor dedicated to working with the Ethiopian students.

It was an experience to meet the whole group of students at once. Initially shy, they

described their favorite subjects at school.

Most of their families struggle to get by, but these boys and girls are full of positive energy and have great hopes for the future. It was

Tigist Bitau: Having No Patience Pays Off:

Several years ago, we were amazed to learn that one of our *Limudiah* students, Tigist Bitau, had won a track competition meant for older runners. Apparently, the ten year old was mistakenly put in the 12-16 year old group but beat her competitors anyway. Tigist wrote to her sponsor that "My name means 'patience' but I unfortunately have none!!!" It looks as if 'impatience' is working for her- her winning streak has continued. This year she came in first in the national track championships for her age group (the correct age bracket this time).

Tigist has been running for the Run Ness Ziona team since she was eight, and her talent has been praised by athletic trainers at the competitions. Although originally called a 'wunderkind' by the newspapers due to her youth and petite build, when we met Tigist we saw that she has blossomed into a beautiful young girl. Along with everyone else, we look forward to seeing her progress along this path.



small minority amongst its large student body of 650 students, totaling only 30 this year. In order that they not fall between the cracks, the school employs

gradually opened up and talked to us about their studies and hobbies. They told us of their interests in dance, music, and sports, and

clear to us that our students are doing well here, and we are happy to enable them to attend a school that looks out for them.

'Face of Israel' continued from cover

got (although Shoshana Ben-Dor, the NACOEJ Israel Director, recalls that Noa was often busy helping other students). Noa greatly appreciates the support she got from her high school sponsor **Ethel Booth**, from Los Angeles, California.

Noa has come a long way. She recalls how nervous she was, beginning high school. "In

elementary school, I was an exceptional student, but when I got to high school, so was everyone else. I had to work harder to prove myself and to get good grades." Noa is in the computer science track, although her favorite subject is math. She also commented that she is one of only two Ethiopian students in her school and thinks the school needs more.

What next for this impressive young woman? She has already been accepted to several universities, including the Technion. She is waiting to hear about the Atidim Program, which would allow her to get her college degree before doing her army service. Noa's eyes light up when she discusses math, but her vision for the future is broader. She wants to

study engineering and industrial management and help Israeli companies become more successful. We are sure that wherever she goes, she will be a tremendous asset.

**Limudiah* is the NACOEJ after-school program for Ethiopian elementary school children in Israel.

Sponsorships Make it Possible For Students to Aim High

Our Ethiopian-Israeli students are setting their sights high as they plan for the future. Students tell us they hope to be doctors, engineers, fashion designers, dancers, dentists, and more. Your financial support and words of hope help your students tremendously. Read about just a few of our students' goals and achievements.



Yossi Yeheyas stands out for his dedication to his studies and his family. This high school teen went to an after-school program in order to excel in his studies, took the highest level matriculation exams in several subjects, and also attended wrestling classes. Last summer, he visited concentration camps in Poland with a youth group, which he counts as one of the most moving experiences in his life.

Yossi has achieved all this despite personal tragedy. A few years ago, his mother suffered a stroke and is still recovering. In 2008, his older brother underwent a heart operation and is now confined to a wheelchair. Another brother stays at home to look after him. Yossi has taken this to heart and hopes to

study medicine, saying "This is why I want to become a cardiologist."

After graduating from Ben Gurion High School in Ness Ziona this year, Yossi will serve in the Israeli army and has applied to its elite paratrooper unit. To his sponsors, he writes that, "Your support helped me a lot throughout school. It allowed my parents to breathe easy about paying my tuition and allowed me to focus on school and friends."



"I dream of being a pilot in the air force," writes eleventh grader **Fikra Fentahun**, a student at Ben Gurion High School. She already has a head-start. Fikra, who takes advanced studies in

"I dream of being a pilot in the air force."

physics and computer science, was referred to a special program that offers flying lessons to Ethiopian students. She is excelling in the course and has passed its rigorous exams. At this point, she has already begun to fly.

Fikra has soared above her circumstances in more ways than one. Born in Ethiopia, she immigrated with her family to Israel in 1999. She lost her mother as a baby, and her father is unable to work

due to an accident at a past job. Currently, she lives with her aunt.

Despite all this, she is a

diligent student and is also a member of Scouts, an Israeli youth group. Appreciative of the help she received from her sponsors, **Gary and Esther Polland** of Bellaire,

Texas, Fikra is excited about her future.



Avraham Mengistu and **Shmuel Bekoya** are considered model students at Elyashiv Yeshiva High School in Lod. Both excel academically and took their final matriculation exams this year. They give back to the community as counselors in the Bnei Akiba youth group. And last summer, they were chosen to represent the school on a trip to Poland organized by the local municipality.

Future plans? These boys will proudly serve their country next year in the army and then they hope to go to college. "I want to be a lawyer or accountant when I'm older, and an army officer. These are my dreams and I hope they will come true," says Avraham. We thank their sponsors, including **Barry Gold** of South Fallsburg, New York, for helping them get the best possible education.

Just the Facts

Did you know that in the 2010-2011 school year...

- **1041** students were sponsored in the NACOEJ/ Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program.
- **59** schools participated in the program in **18** cities throughout Israel.
- **181** of our students graduated high school!
- More than **800** students on our waiting list did not receive sponsorships.

WE NEED MORE SPONSORS!



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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.