



Gratz Insider, Spring 2015 - Story Continuation

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Student and Staff Spotlight on Alisha Abboudi

In addition to being a graduate student and part-time development professional at Gratz College, Alisha Abboudi is a mother and grandmother - with five children and one grandchild. As a result, she managed to squeeze the interview in for this article during the ride to her son's basketball game.

Given her upbringing and her educational background, Alisha was destined for service to the Jewish community in one way or another. She grew up in central New Jersey, where she attended Orthodox Jewish day schools. She later earned a bachelor's in Judaic Studies from Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women. During college, Alisha and her husband served as New Jersey chapter leaders for the Orthodox youth group NCSY.

In describing her education, Alisha recounts an incident from her childhood that has stayed with her all these years. She vividly remembers seeing her father leave the principal's office with a tear-stained face when she was only in third grade. She later learned that he had just made one of his annual visits to seek financial assistance to keep his children in Jewish day school.

Reflecting on this incident, Alisha explains, "There is no doubt that the tears my father shed formed the person I would become. The leadership roles I took on in high school, college and adulthood all directly resulted from those tears. In fact, those tears represent the investment we all make every day in forming who our children will become."

As a young mother herself, Alisha balanced parenthood with her commitment to the Jewish community by launching a career as a Jewish educator. When her family relocated to the Philadelphia area, she began a ten-year stint as an educator at a local synagogue school. She also forged an ongoing and extensive commitment to service as a lay leader in the Jewish community, first at her synagogue, and later, at her children's day schools. In fact, she dubbed herself "a Jewish communal service junkie" in a recent article published in eJewish Philanthropy (Abboudi, Alisha. (2015). Growing a Culture of Philanthropy Doesn't Take a Village, It Takes a Small Army.

eJewish Philanthropy.). And, she still sits on two boards, as well as on a number of steering committees.

In 2012, Alisha crossed the aisle from lay leader to paid professional when she became director of development at Kohelet Yeshiva High School, a Modern Orthodox high school in suburban Philadelphia. As Alisha worked to implement fundraising strategies and to broaden and strengthen the school's donor base, her experience as a lay leader informed many of her professional decisions. During her second year in this position, she also traveled weekly to New York to earn a graduate certificate as part of the first cohort in the Art and Science of Fundraising and Jewish Philanthropy program at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University. This past summer, Alisha resigned from her position as development director, seeking to return to school to further her education in the field of nonprofit management.

In late August, Alisha stopped at her local Starbucks, where she struck up a conversation with a fellow congregant, Joy Goldstein, president of Gratz College. Alisha mentioned that she was pursuing going back to school to further develop her leadership skills and to expand her knowledge of financial management. Coincidentally, Gratz College offered the perfect program: a master's in Jewish Communal Service and Nonprofit Management. The College was in the process of filling a cohort of students for this program, which offered a fellowship opportunity as well - and Joy encouraged Alisha to apply.

After the serendipitous encounter at Starbucks, Alisha applied for both the master's program and the fellowship. At the same time, Gratz College needed a grant writer with Alisha's experience on its development staff. As a result, in the fall of 2014, Alisha not only became a Mid-Career Fellow in Gratz's Jewish Communal Service and Nonprofit Management program, but also a part-time development associate at Gratz.

Reflecting on this fortuitous outcome, Alisha appreciates the crossover between work and school, as her studies give her the knowledge to bring important questions to the table on the job. She is also greatly inspired by the leadership at Gratz College, adding that "the on-the-ground experience in this new setting is broadening, eye-opening and enriching."