



Gratz Insider, January 2014 - Story Continuation

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## **From the Courtroom to the Boardroom: David Weinstein Brings His Passion for Jewish Education to Gratz College**

David Weinstein grew up in Oakland, California, where the Jewish population was relatively small. His parents and their fellow Jews organized their own study group and held regular discussions of Jewish text because their synagogue provided no such opportunity. During his youth, Weinstein was struck by this intense dedication to Jewish learning, and it made a deep and enduring impression upon him.

In 1969, after law school and two federal court clerkships, Weinstein traded the courtroom for the kibbutz and made *aliyah* to Israel with his young family. For over two years, he worked in irrigation, milked cows, and, as he says, did whatever else was necessary to “help build the Jewish State.”

In 1974, Weinstein’s support for Jewish causes led him to the Soviet Union on a trip to visit refuseniks. Observing Yom Kippur that year in a synagogue in Siberia, he looked around and noticed something striking: with the exception of a few teenage girls dragged in by their grandmothers, there were no young people in the congregation. Their palpable absence, he realized, was the result of the Soviet Union’s ban on teaching religion. While in Siberia, Weinstein also spent time tape recording Hebrew for a Russian Jew - who owned a Hebrew book, but who had no idea how Hebrew sounded. These experiences starkly demonstrated for Weinstein the importance of Jewish education to the perpetuation of the Jewish People.

When he returned to the Soviet Union ten years later, Weinstein witnessed a very different scene: he met a group of Jewish educators, who were actually teaching Hebrew to fellow Soviet Jews. He imagined the struggles that these educators must have endured and remembered his own parents’ efforts to pursue Jewish studies despite obstacles. For Weinstein, reflecting on these hardships only served to deepen his own commitment to Jewish education.

In the meantime, after leaving Israel, Weinstein and his family had settled in the Philadelphia area, where he was pursuing a successful legal career. He developed an expertise in antitrust law and other types of complex commercial litigation, and in 1995, helped found his current firm, Weinstein Kitchenoff & Asher LLC. Weinstein played a leading role in many influential cases, including one on behalf of a nationwide class of homeowners that resulted in one of the largest property damage settlements in history, allowing for the replacement of defective plumbing in approximately 340,000 homes.

One of Weinstein's proudest legal achievements was his pro bono work as court-appointed coordinating lead counsel for over 100 asylum cases brought by Chinese refugees who had entered the United States in the 1990's aboard a vessel called the Golden Venture. During these proceedings, Weinstein and his co-counsel raised legal challenges that ultimately persuaded Congress to pass a special bill granting asylum to most of their clients.

Currently, Weinstein is one of four court-appointed attorneys representing a class of Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants of Holocaust victims. This case has been filed against the Republic of Hungary and the Hungarian National Railways for their role in seizing the personal belongings of Jewish passengers on the way to Auschwitz.

Despite his active legal career, Weinstein has always carved out time to devote to Jewish learning. For him, Jewish education is more than the cornerstone of Jewish survival. It is, he explains, "at the heart of leading a meaningful Jewish life." As a result, over the last 16 years, he has been reading Jewish texts and discussing them with his rabbi on a weekly basis.

Weinstein's decision to join the Gratz Board of Governors in 2010 was a logical outgrowth of his passion for Jewish education. Believing in the value of inclusiveness, Weinstein is also philosophically aligned with Gratz's pluralistic approach. In planning for Gratz's future, Weinstein hopes to bring more women and young people onto the Board to offer fresh perspectives on the issues. Through technology and strategic partnerships, he wants to further increase the reach of Gratz College programs. On the high school level, he supports ongoing efforts to provide quality Jewish education to communities that lack the resources to maintain their own high school programs.

Relishing his new role on the Board of Governors, Weinstein explains, "Because I believe that ongoing Jewish education is a fundamental part of being Jewish, Gratz College fits neatly into my own value system."