

Bais Yaakov Alumnae Reminisce And Reflect

By Chaya (Meth) Tendler

Class of 2012
16,800 hours is a lot of hours. That's a rough estimate of the hours spent in school, from kindergarten through twelfth grade. So, it's pretty safe to say that much of our formative years is shaped by the school we attend. But what is the lasting impact of those hours? It was a pleasure for me, a proud Bais Yaakov alumna, to reach out to fellow alumnae to gather their impressions.

The enthusiastic responses from my interviewees offer a glimpse at the impact Bais Yaakov has had on their middos, Jewish values, relationships and careers.

IMPACT ON CAREER

Mrs. Chavi (Willner) Drang, class of 1999, is an occupational therapist living in North Miami Beach. She credits Bais Yaakov for giving her a solid education in both Judaic and secular studies, along with tools and opportunities which guided her in choosing her career. "I remember going to the school job fair when I was in twelfth grade and having observation days where I was set up to shadow other OTs. Both really helped me choose my career path." When she recently opened a home bakery business, she implemented leadership and entrepreneurial skills she had learned in high school, as well as the computer skills she had gained from Mrs. Yudkowsky's computer class.

Mrs. Simi (Malin) Sokoloff, class of 2013, is currently a Registered Nurse at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore and is also studying to be a Nurse Practitioner. She recalls, "I started off as a weaker student and due to the efforts and teaching methods of my teachers I became a strong student, which led me to great academic and professional success."

Another lesson that technically may not be part of the actual curriculum, but that Bais Yaakov students learn well is the importance of time management. Bais Yaakov is famous for starting events on time and for ending the school day precisely at 4:59! Simi



notes that properly managing her time is crucial to her success. "Time in Bais Yaakov was always used wisely and never wasted. As a wife, mother, nurse and student, using my time efficiently helps me stay organized and allows me to accomplish all that I do."

IMPACT ON SELF DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

"The social aspect was outstanding," recalls Mrs. Aviva (Schlossberg) Sondhelm, who graduated in 1966 from a much smaller Bais Yaakov than what we are familiar with today. "Since the school was so small then and the staff wanted to encourage ruach (school spirit), every girl's special talent was considered important and enlisted for the benefit of all." The emphasis the school placed on extracurricular programming and the way it encouraged blossoming social interactions enabled Aviva to develop special close connections to her classmates. "I credit my classmates, most of whom I am still in contact with, for enabling me to accomplish things I would never have attempted without their prompting and encouragement; their support long ago was felt long after."

Mrs. Rivka (Roll) Teitelbaum, class of 2005, lives in Johannesburg, South Africa where her husband is a member of Kollel Yad Shaul for Dayanus and together they have much community involvement. She too maintains strong connections with her

grade mates. "Our grade has an active WhatsApp group. It is truly unique and special that we can still support each other. I love seeing pictures of my friends from high school and what they are up to; it always makes me so happy."

Not only do students have fond memories of the relationships built with peers, but they also value the connection to Bais Yaakov's dedicated staff. Simi Sokoloff reminisces, "One of the most important ways Bais Yaakov has helped me to be successful in life is by modeling positive relationships. The respect between the hanhala, teachers and students is extremely admirable. Whenever I would speak to teachers or hanhala members, I felt respected and cared for. Bais Yaakov also provided many opportunities for developing and improving friendships. Because of the way interactions in Bais Yaakov made me feel, I now use Bais Yaakov's model in my personal and professional interactions."

IMPACT ON SHAPING MID-DOS AND JEWISH VALUES

"The whole atmosphere of Bais Yaakov was one of acceptance. Acceptance of every person, thanking the maintenance staff for keeping the school clean; acceptance of every Yid, even those in school who were not frum; and acceptance of each girl as an individual," says Dr. Rivka (Gold-

finger) Stein, class of 1992, who is currently a pediatrician living in Boro Park. She stressed that these lessons were not lectures given in an auditorium; rather they were learned by watching and interacting with each of the staff members, from the principals to the teachers to the office staff.

Rivka Teitelbaum echos this recurring theme. "Bais Yaakov taught me through osmosis to be accepting of all types of people from all walks of life. This has served me well throughout my life." Aviva Sondhelm also notes that much emphasis was placed on respect for parents, teachers and fellow schoolmates, in addition to other basic Jewish values. "Even our English principal, Mrs. Rosenberg, would gently remind children at the water fountain to say the bracha in gratitude to Hashem," she says. Singing the morning tefilos and bircas hamazon often during her formative years made a deep impression on her.

Bais Yaakov's impact reaches further. As Rivka Stein concludes, "The lessons I internalized from being in Bais Yaakov have carried through in every step of my life and I am now zoche to see them passing through to my children." Bais Yaakov is not only shaping the education of Jewish girls today; it is developing Jewish women who will strengthen our community tomorrow.