



Gratz Insider, July 2013 - Story Continuation

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Gratz Alumna Arlene Marcus: Teaching the Lessons of the Holocaust

Judaism did not play a large role in Arlene Marcus' childhood. In fact, Marcus describes the extent of her early Jewish education as being limited to her mom's advice on being a good person.

About ten years ago, Marcus, a busy ESL teacher and mother of two, who was on the cusp of becoming an empty nester, decided to take a Summer Institute course at Gratz College. It was Professor Josey Fisher's course called "Teaching the Holocaust." One course led to another - until in May of 2007, Marcus graduated from Gratz with a master's in Jewish Studies and a graduate certificate in Holocaust Studies.

Even before graduating, Marcus began to heed Dr. Steinlauf's advice to pass on her newfound knowledge to others. She did so at first by incorporating some of what she learned at Gratz into the adult ESL classes that she taught at Union County College in New Jersey. In fact, she created a reading course for her ESL students entitled "Holocaust and Memory."

The students' reaction to this course varied. For some, it was their first exposure to the Holocaust. For others, namely the Polish students, the Holocaust was a familiar topic on which they were able to offer some of their own knowledge. And for a Guatemalan student, class discussions inspired her to open up about atrocities that she had experienced in her own country.

While Marcus has become the go-to person at her school on issues of Holocaust and genocide, she has also taken on a volunteer position at the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City. After an intensive eight-month training program, Marcus is now a gallery educator at the museum, where she gives tours, primarily to school groups.

But her drive to disseminate knowledge does not stop there. She has also applied for and received a grant from Facing History and Ourselves, an international educational organization that helps teachers incorporate the lessons of the Holocaust and other

genocides into their curricula as a tool for fighting prejudice, discrimination and indifference. With this grant, Marcus and two of her colleagues will be developing an advanced ESL course with a Holocaust theme. Much more extensive than her original reading program, this course will focus on the notion of insiders versus outsiders - “we and they” - a concept not only relevant to the Holocaust, but one that is likely to resonate with immigrant students.

Reflecting back on the last decade, Marcus attributes much of her “personal growth as an educator and a Jew” to Gratz. “Studying for that master’s degree and that certificate made me a different person,” she says. “I wholeheartedly give Gratz credit for where I am now.”