



Gratz Insider, September 2012 - Story Continuation

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### **Student Spotlight: A Late-Night Discovery Brings Suzanne Gereaux to Gratz College**

One night in late May, while Kansas City slept, Suzanne Gereaux did not. Fatigue could not quiet her restless mind. So she got up and assumed her familiar position at the computer. Her fingers darted across the keyboard, typing out search words similar to the ones that she had input many times before. But this time, the result was different. The screen was illuminated with a description of what Gereaux had been seeking for months: an online graduate program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The program was offered by Gratz College, a place unfamiliar to Gereaux, but one that could potentially unlock her future.

Why was this Missouri woman spending sleepless nights searching for a master's program in Holocaust Studies? The unlikely answer begins 45 years ago when ten-year-old Gereaux was deeply moved by the book *The Diary of Anne Frank*. She was also profoundly affected by the words of her own father, a man she described as "a champion of humanity," who explained that indifference to human suffering, as displayed by the world during the Holocaust, is shameful. He made this lesson all the more personal by telling Gereaux that one of her uncles had originally come from a Jewish family and would have likely been killed had he lived in Europe during the Holocaust.

As a young adult, Gereaux could not pursue her longtime interest in World War II and Holocaust history because she had to enter the work force, rather than attend college. After working for 34 years, however, Gereaux found herself unemployed during the economic collapse of 2008. Months later, unable to find work, she packed up, moved into her mother's basement and, in the fall of 2008, entered Webster University in St. Louis as an undergraduate—at age 51.

After four years, she graduated *summa cum laude*, with the goal of pursuing a master's degree in Holocaust Studies and ultimately teaching this subject at the college or junior college level. Then, Gereaux faced her next hurdle: the death of

master's programs in this subject area. Unable to relocate for the programs that she did find, Gereaux was resigned to pursue a general master's in history from a local university—until that sleepless night in late May when she discovered the Gratz online program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

At 2:30 that morning, Gereaux e-mailed Mindy Blechman at Gratz. Through an expedited application process, Gereaux was soon accepted into the program and enrolled in an online course. This summer, she also traveled to Philadelphia to attend the Gratz Summer Institute, where she took “Teaching the Holocaust,” a class she described as “monumental.” For the first time in her life, she not only studied the Holocaust with Jewish students, but also met Holocaust survivors.

“I am just thankful Gratz is there,” says Gereaux, “because it allows someone like me, with a passion, to get a degree from a good school and develop a unique niche in an area of current relevance. On a whim, I got up one night—and there was Gratz.”