

Challenge gift to launch new program in Holocaust and Genocide Education

It has been said that the shortest distance between two people is a story. Stories build meaningful connections; they help illuminate what it means to be human. That is certainly true for Trustee Emeritus Bill Cummings, A58, H06, M97P, J97P, and Joyce Cummings, M97P, J97P.

Bill and Joyce Cummings were moved by Eliezer Ayalon's stories of his experiences during and after the Holocaust when they met him on their first trip to Israel last fall. A native of Poland, Ayalon was imprisoned in five different camps before being liberated, near death, in May 1945. His personal accounts inspired Joyce and Bill to think broadly about how education could help prevent such a horrific tragedy from ever happening again.

The couple has generously committed to a gift of \$1 million to endow a new program in Holocaust and Genocide Education at Tufts Hillel, provided the same amount can be raised from other friends.

"Our Tufts Travel-Learn trip to Israel gave us a new understanding of history, and how injustice corrodes the most cherished values of society," says Bill, a self-made entrepreneurial success story in real estate development and construction. "We wanted to channel our experience into something positive, and Tufts Hillel was certainly a very natural choice for educating others. Tufts students share a profound curiosity and concern about the world, and many are already on their way to being catalysts for social change."

It is not the first time the Cummings have enriched Tufts with their philanthropy. Bill and Joyce endowed the Cummings Family Chair in Entrepreneurship and Business Economics in 1998 to help students develop the skills necessary to run successful businesses. In 2005, their generous support led to the dedication of the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. Bill has also been a valued contributor to his alma mater through service as an overseer to Tufts Medical School, and as a trustee of the University.

"We believe in giving back," says Bill, co-founder with Joyce of Cummings Foundation, Inc., which has grown to become one of the largest charitable foundations in Massachusetts. "I was fortunate that Tufts recognized my potential before I saw it myself. I graduated with a wider sense of the world and of what I could achieve. I hope our philanthropy fosters an attitude in students that they can shape the future — that while we face enormous problems in our world today, they are part of the solution, they can and should be active citizens."

This new initiative will create a vibrant program intended to equip students with the knowledge and skills to aide in the cause of preventing future acts of genocide. In the next few months, readers will be hearing more about this fund raising effort. In the meantime, Bill and Joyce have agreed to underwrite two separate programs for students and the Tufts community at large.

On Tuesday, October 19, Eliezer Ayalon will travel from Israel to Medford to speak with students and faculty about his experiences surviving five different camps during the Holocaust. In addition, with support from the Cummings Foundation, Hillel last May brought an interfaith group of 20 to the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda, where orphaned children can "dry their tears" (*Agahozo*) and "live in peace" (*Shalom*). This village was founded by Anne Heyman (wife of Tufts Trustee Seth Merrin, A82), who was inspired by her work with Hillel's Merrin Moral Voices program.



"We are tremendously grateful to the Cummings family for supporting Tufts' mission of active citizenship and Tufts Hillel's commitment to *tikkun olam*, repairing the world," says Rabbi Summit. "We welcome assistance in launching this important endeavor. Whether as a patron or a participant — we encourage involvement in establishing a program that will make an impact at Tufts for generations to come."

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