

Josh Kramer Interview – Fall 2011



What has your path been since you left Schechter, i.e. school/education, personal, communal?

When I graduated from Schechter, I attended Shaker Heights High School. During high school, I was active in USY and was a camper at Ramah in Canada, went on Ramah Seminar '05 and then was a counselor the next two summers. At Ohio State University, I was an International Affairs Scholar which includes traveling to a different country every year during Spring Break.

In 2010, I graduated with a degree in Political Science. While in college, I also joined AEPi, the Jewish Fraternity, and was involved in Hillel. Some of my other activities included serving as a fellow at The Climate Project, a summer internship at the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland through the Cleveland Hillel Internship Program, studying abroad at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, learning Yiddish in Vilnius, Lithuania, and interning through the John Glenn Washington Academic Internship Program in Washington, DC.

After graduation, I briefly worked for then-Chancellor Eric Fingerhut at the Ohio Board of Regents. When Chancellor Fingerhut resigned, I answered an advertisement for a job that included Afghanistan in a list of possible locations...

What are you doing in Afghanistan and why did you choose to take this unique path?

The job I applied to was through Central Texas College, a community college that holds the military contract to provide educational services for the military. This includes administering standardized tests, academic advising, running education centers on military bases and navy ships all over the world.

I'm employed as the Army Learning Center Operator at Kandahar Airfield. This means I am part facilities manager, part librarian, part computer lab proctor, and part all-around "help the soldiers get an education" staff. Nearly half of my job is helping soldiers submit paperwork in order to get their military benefits for attaining higher education. While it's not glamorous, I feel good knowing that I'm helping these soldiers further their education.

It's very strange living on a military base. That backdrop in war movies that has helicopters flying all over is my current reality. I'm here because I love traveling and I love helping others. It seemed like the right time in my life to do this.

How did Schechter inspire your sense of personal and communal responsibility?

Schechter helped me every step of the way. Right now, our unofficial Jewish Chaplain here at Kandahar Airfield has gone on emergency leave and duties have fallen to me to help arrange the Rosh Hashanah services. I'm happy to step up, but I never would have been able to if I hadn't attended Schechter. It's also the directly attributable reason I have been involved in AIPAC, in Federation programs, in Hillel, and have gone out of my way to make contact with Jewish communities in Istanbul, Prague, Mannheim, Riga, and other places during my travels.

What are you doing to celebrate the High Holidays? How are you deepening your connections with Judaism while far from your family?

The Jewish community at Kandahar Airfield Base couldn't be more amazing. It's the most active Jewish group in Afghanistan and probably Iraq too. We're figuring out how often we'll meet during Rosh Hashanah and I'm excited to be coordinating things. I will miss Park Synagogue's choir but this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Each week, we have Friday night Shabbat dinners (gefilte fish and all!) following an all-inclusive service with more than a dozen attendees. At the end of Shabbat, we gather for Havdallah. I am grateful that I was assigned to this base since it allows me to be me.

Do you have a blog on which people could follow you and learn more about your experiences?

Yes! I really enjoy writing my blog. Go to transcredibleexploits.blogspot.com.

Here are two posts that might be of particular interest:

<http://transcredibleexploits.blogspot.com/2011/09/being-contractor-or-missing-rib-burn.html>

<http://transcredibleexploits.blogspot.com/2011/08/kandahar-jewish-community.html>

PS. I was really, really, really homesick for the Rib Burn Off this year.