

**“The Conservative movement must withdraw permission to be anything other than fair to women. Talmudists like me know that feminist changes, and others on the agenda like the ordination of gays as rabbis, are all doable within the framework of halakha.”**

—Rabbi Judith Hauptman on “The Challenge Facing the Conservative Movement,” in *New York’s Jewish Week*, July 8, 2005

## “It’s About Difficult Conversations”



**S**achi Feris wants you to know that for millions of kids heading back to school this fall, segregation did not end in 1954. More than 50 years after the landmark ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, an overwhelming majority of students still attend schools that are de facto segregated.

That’s why, at the age of 24, Sachi started Border Crossers, a program bringing together elementary school students from all over New York City so that they can have some contact with each other’s cultures.

“I grew up in New York City where 90 percent of my friends were white and Jewish,” says Sachi. “When I went to college, that was the first time in my life that Jewish wasn’t the majority. I had always known that was the case, but on a day-to-day level, growing up in NYC, that wasn’t my reality. I realized

there’s this thing called white privilege that I had never heard of before, and I had to do something about it.”

Border Crossers brings together kids who wouldn’t ordinarily meet. The students, from five different schools, take turns visiting each other, experiencing the other groups’ space and seeing each neighborhood. Using poetry, drama, art, and journal-writing, they have a chance to express both commonalities and differences.

“If you go on Google and do a search for lesson plans on discrimination, you’ll find lots of materials for high school—but almost nothing for younger kids,” Sachi notes. “People say, ‘fourth graders aren’t ready for this, they don’t know what discrimination is,’ but that’s simply not true. You can ask them ‘what does it feel like to be treated differently because of your

age’—every kid understands that.”

Sachi runs the program on a shoestring budget. Border Crossers’ teachers are paid only a modest stipend, dedicating themselves because they care about uniting young people from different backgrounds. The program culminates in a collaborative social justice project; this year, students from all the schools joined together to paint a mural that told their story.

Although the program grew out of her desire to reach out to groups beyond her Jewish friends and family, Sachi says that the idea is, for her, a way to come closer to the social justice values that are an intrinsic part of her Judaism. She feels that exploring cultural bridges and boundaries is a form of *tzedakah*. Eventually, she hopes to make the curriculum widely accessible to teachers in other cities. —O.C.