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Teacher With A Foot Fetish Was Allowed To Prey On Jewish Students For Years

By [Ari Feldman](#)

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[Nikki Casey](#).

One evening when Linda Gerstel was in ninth grade, one of her teachers at the prestigious Ramaz School, Albert Goetz, asked her to stay late after class.

By then, in the mid-1970s, Goetz had become a formidable figure at Ramaz, on Manhattan's Upper East Side. He would soon become a legendary college adviser, able to secure a student's acceptance at an Ivy League school with one phone call. And, as most of the students knew, he was a personal friend and tennis partner of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, Ramaz's well-respected principal. Lookstein, now the principal emeritus of Ramaz, officiated at the marriage of Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner in 2009.

But to Gerstel, Goetz was just her funny, friendly math teacher.

Then he made an unusual request.

"He locked the door and said he had a friend who was on deadline, writing for a scientific journal, and that he needed pictures of feet," Gerstel, now an attorney in New York and Connecticut, told the Forward.



An image of Albert Goetz from Ramaz's 1976 yearbook.

Classmates.com

An image of Albert Goetz from Ramaz's 1976 yearbook.

Gerstel didn't realize that Goetz' interest in her, and her feet, was sexual. When she told her older sister about the episode later, her sister said Goetz had done the same thing to her.

Goetz's history of misconduct at Ramaz has come to light as the result of [an independent report released by the school](#) in August about cases of sexual misconduct by past teachers. According to [the report](#), Goetz had predatory relationships with female students over a period of more than two decades while he was at Ramaz. His behavior ranged from photographing their feet to brushing the girls' hair to "physical and romantic relationships" with them, according to the report.

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[Ari Feldman](#) August 30, 2018

And while the photographs were widely rumored at the school, a parent has told the Forward that she informed Lookstein about Goetz's "physical" relationship with a student 1982. The parent said that he declined to act on the information because she had been "sworn to secrecy" and wouldn't tell him the name of the student.

The mother's account contradicts Ramaz's report, which was compiled by investigators at the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton. The report stated that there was "no evidence" that Lookstein or any other Ramaz administrator ever knew about the physical relationships. It did acknowledge that Lookstein had known at multiple points about Goetz's practice of photographing female students' feet and had chosen not to dismiss him.

The mother's account of her conversation with Lookstein was corroborated by two former students who attended Ramaz in the 1970s and 1980s: the woman's daughter, who the Forward will refer to as "Sarah," and a woman the Forward will refer to as "Reena." Goetz didn't touch or photograph either Sarah or Reena, they said. Both told the Forward that they were told about the conversation between the mother and Lookstein at the time it happened.

"It's about time that these people were called on this," said the mother. "It's amazing to me what they preach, and what they do. Just be consistent."

The relationships included physical contact, going on dates, and exchanging love letters, according to “Elana,” a former student at the school in the 1970s and 1980s who asked to remain anonymous. Elana said she had spoken directly with two women who had such relationships with Goetz. She said that, to her knowledge, the relationships were not “case[s] of sexual harassment or sexual abuse or rape or anything like that.”

A Predator Roamed Jewish Schools. Why Wasn't He Stopped?

Ari Feldman July 9, 2018

A spokesperson for the school and for Lookstein did not respond to emailed questions sent on September 12 about Lookstein’s continued role at the school, whether he draws a salary or maintains an office at the school, and what more the school plans to do to shape its policies toward protecting students from misconduct by teachers. The Forward also queried whether Lookstein was aware that Goetz had physical relationships with students prior to 2005.

Lookstein did not respond to a phone call and two text messages to his personal cell phone that were denoted as “Read.”

Goetz did not respond to multiple messages left for him on his home phone voice mail and at his current place of employment.

“He knew how to pick them.”

The mother’s story is the latest revelation about sexual misconduct in Jewish schools in New York City that have surfaced this year. Ramaz released the results of its investigation in August, while two other schools — SAR Academy, in Riverdale, and Westchester Day School, in Mamaroneck, NY — have not yet done so.

The Ramaz report named three former teachers, including Goetz, who abused students at the school. One of the other teachers, Stanley Rosenfeld, was the subject of [a Forward investigation in August](#). The Forward reported earlier this month that Lookstein was informed in 1980 that Rosenfeld, who was an administrator at Ramaz from 1972 to 1974, had molested a Ramaz student. The third man, [Richard Andron](#), was a karate instructor at an afternoon program at Ramaz.

 An image of Goetz eating pizza with students from Ramaz’s 1982 yearbook.

Courtesy of a former Rama...

An image of Goetz eating pizza with students from Ramaz’s 1982 yearbook.

Goetz came to Ramaz in 1969, according to a copy of his resume from 2013 obtained by the Forward. He was only removed in 2005 when he was about to be honored at the annual dinner, and community members contacted the school administration in protest, citing his sexual harassment of female students. The school investigated him and found that he had photographed the feet of at least 17 Ramaz students, and had “romantic and physical relationships” with two students in the early 1980s. The investigation and its results are described in Ramaz’s August report. The report doesn’t say whether Goetz’s relationships with female students were sexual, and Ramaz declined to answer questions about the report.

Goetz used his position of authority as a teacher and a college adviser to compel female students to let him take their picture and brush their hair, according to Gerstel, Elana, Sarah and Reena.

According to the students, Goetz had a type. The girls he became closest to were often academically talented, religiously observant and not conventionally pretty.

“Plain, intellectual, quiet and good,” said Sarah. “That was his sensitivity, knowing which girls were going to stay quiet.”

“They were outstanding students — religious, not rebellious, went onto Ivy League schools,” said Reena. “He knew how to pick them. He was a master.”

But Goetz was even more selective about the women he chose to engage in romantic relationships with. He often selected these students to be the editor of the yearbook, of which he was the faculty adviser for several years.

“They were his favorites, and his protected,” said Elana.

The relationships were known among a subset of the school’s female high school students in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to the unnamed former students. They happened at a time when friendly, close relationships with teachers at the school were not unheard of. Students often socialized openly with the teachers after school hours. Goetz was widely known to take the yearbook staff on birding trips on the weekends, or have them to his apartment for dinner. On Sundays, the yearbook staff worked in Ramaz’s empty building under Goetz’s direction.

Many students thrived with these close relationships with faculty, and the former students who spoke to the Forward said that favoritism didn’t prevent them from getting great educations. Goetz, for example, was cited by the former students as being the best math teacher they ever had.

But Goetz presented a unique case of providing students with strong reasons to maintain a close relationship with him: His college admissions prowess.

After joining the college advising office in 1978, he helped push the school towards becoming the admissions “juggernaut” it is today, according to Lee Levine, who filled in for Goetz after he was let go from the school in 2005. In a [2007 review of independent high schools](#) by the Wall Street Journal, Ramaz had a higher rate of graduates in elite colleges than nationally known schools like Sidwell Friends, in Washington, D.C., or Horace Mann, in the Bronx.

“I believe that Goetz gets the credit for having created that dynamic, whereby a phone call from Ramaz could change a deferral to an acceptance,” said Levine, who left Ramaz in 2007, and still works in college advising. “There are very few people on the ground who can do that.”

Meetings about college advising took place in Goetz’s office, which was located in a corner of the school’s basement, after school hours — sometimes until eight p.m. He often asked the female students to brush their hair or massage their feet, sometimes for nearly the entire advising appointment. Some of Goetz’s students essentially decided to let Goetz have his way, if it meant they would get into the school of their dreams.

“If you’re singled out by this person, and he likes you, then you don’t want to mess with that,” said Elana, who said she also had her feet photographed by Goetz.

The student continued, “[T]here were all the signs of inappropriate attention to students, and everyone saw that, everyone knew about that, and it was never questioned. Nothing was ever done to say this is inappropriate.”

‘He’s not like that.’

Reena said she caught Goetz with female students on two occasions in the early 1980s. The second time, when she opened the door to his office unannounced, two girls who worked on the yearbook were behind his desk. One of them was sitting on his lap, and both of the girls looked disheveled. The former student recalled that as soon as she walked in, all three of them jumped and moved away from each other.

“I have no idea if he ever actually had sex with them,” Reena said. “I don’t know how far it went with any of the girls.”

In 1982, just before graduation, Sarah informed her parent about a female student’s relationship with Goetz. The parent said she was “appalled,” and immediately called Lookstein.

When informed about the allegation, the parent says, Lookstein “sang [Goetz’s] praises.”

“Oh, he can’t believe it, he’s not like that,” the parent recalled. “He defended him.”

Lookstein asked the parent to identify the girl in the relationship with Goetz.

“I wouldn’t tell him,” the parent said. “I said, ‘I’m sworn to secrecy, but you still need to look into it.’”

“He didn’t want to do anything if I didn’t tell him who she was,” the parent added. “You don’t have to know who it is, you just have to know its happening.”

According to the August report, Lookstein did know about an instance in which Goetz had tried to photograph the feet of a female student in the early 1990s. The student reported the incident to her parents, who in turn informed Lookstein. Lookstein then told the parents that it was “not the first complaint he had received about Goetz,” according to the report

Lookstein then had Goetz evaluated by a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist was only aware of the lone incident, and deemed Goetz fit to continue working at the school. But by 2000, according to Gerstel, Goetz’s photographs were no longer simply a rumor.

“It wasn’t a secret,” said Gerstel. “People knew.”

Gerstel said she informed Lookstein about her own episode of being asked to show her feet for Goetz’s photographs in 2000, when she was looking for a Jewish school for her daughter.

“What I told him is that I didn’t feel comfortable sending my daughter to the school because Al Goetz was still teaching at the school. And he didn’t seem surprised,” Gerstel recalled. “I didn’t really feel so comforted by that.”

Doubles partners

From the 1970s up until 2005, Lookstein maintained a social relationship with Goetz, according to a person familiar with the long-running match. They were frequent tennis partners, sometimes playing doubles matches together with their wives. Goetz was a member of Lookstein’s rotating doubles crew, which was the subject of [a short story in the New York Times](#).

After the 2005 investigation was completed and Goetz was dismissed from the school, he moved to Virginia. In 2006, he began working as an adjunct lecturer in mathematics at George Mason University, and taught on-and-off there until the spring semester of 2017.

According to David Walnut, the chair of GMU’s math department, no student has ever lodged a complaint about Goetz while he taught at the school. Walnut said it was unclear if Goetz was hired on the recommendation of Ramaz, because the former chair who hired him has since died, and the math department frequently hires adjunct instructors on the

strength of their resumes.

Goetz is currently the Senior Mathematics Editor for the publications of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, where he has worked since July 2005.

A spokesman for the NCTM could not be reached for comment.

In response to the release of the August report, Ramaz said it had conducted a daylong training with students and teachers in the school about how to recognize sexual misconduct. The school said it planned to incorporate lessons from that training into its policies.

Gerstel said that the school needs added safeguards, including at least one independent board member to whom students and parents can report issues of misconduct. She added that students may not always know when they're being sexualized, or when a close relationship with a teacher is verging on becoming a sexual relationship.

“There needs to be an awareness campaign,” she said. “Not all students will recognize behavior that can lead to more inappropriate conduct.”

She also said that she wants the school to protect children over its own reputation.

“For such a long time, nobody wanted to embarrass the school,” said Gerstel.

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