

the list of potential schools to eight by fall of my senior year. I applied to Penn, Princeton and other schools in the Boston area," said Ms. Gillette. After choosing potential colleges, Ms. Gillette then went through the application process, filling out applications, composing essays, making phone calls and being interviewed.

The most aggravating time for Ms. Gillette occurred during the waiting period. "I became discouraged, after having sent in my application to Harvard early and hearing no response. My friends, who also applied to colleges early, were all receiving their letters." It was also difficult for her to witness her friends receiving deferral letters thinking, "If she didn't get into that school, then there's no way I will."

Jean Ginsberg, college guidance chairwoman at Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School, agrees that the stress students feel during their junior and senior college-seeking years does exist. "Between the heavy course load and the standardized tests and the college exploration process, students become overwhelmed," said Ms. Ginsberg.

"It is our job as parents and professionals to help them find the proper balance," she added. To do that, Ms. Ginsberg recommends staying organized by properly managing time and making use of calendars.

Ms. Gillette also encourages students to start their searches early. "By junior year it's really important to discover where you want to be: the location, the feel, etc. Make a list of a wide range of schools, then narrow them down. Most importantly, follow through. Interview, write thank-you notes, complete everything on time and get in touch with the schools. Some schools take note on how much you call and by contacting them it shows them that you really want to be there."

In addition, Ms. Gillette recommends visiting potential campuses. "On your campus tour, look around to see if the students are the same kinds of students you want to be around for four years," she said. In the end, have no fear and don't feel alone. The stress is sure to let up upon receiving that first acceptance letter agree both Ms. Gillette and Ms. Ginsberg. □

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Career Changers

Going back to school midlife.



Julie Solomon, former professor now a nurse

PHOTO JUSTIN TSICALAS

Linda L. Esterson

Special to the Jewish Times

In 1998, Julie Solomon, Ph.D., earned tenure and became associate professor at American University.

Ms. Solomon had served the university for nine years, teaching Shakespeare and Renaissance literature. She wrote a book on Francis Bacon and published articles. Then she started working with children in the Butcher's Hill neighborhood, mentoring them, even taking them to dental visits.

She began to feel unhappy in the academic world, finding it stressful. "I didn't like the competitiveness, the feeling that I was going to conferences and having to

prove myself," she says, "and looking over my shoulder to see who was the smartest in the room."

In 2003, at 48 years old, she quit her job. Unsure of her next move, Ms. Solomon spent one summer as a nurse's aide at the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Rockville. She enjoyed it. Combined with her past experience working at a camp for developmentally disabled children in New York, she realized she enjoyed helping people.

Hearing more and more about the nursing shortage, Ms. Solomon entertained the idea of joining the ranks. Having earned her undergraduate, master's and doctorate degrees in English, she needed science prerequisites before she could

apply to nursing school.

At 49 years old, she enrolled in science classes at Essex Community College and then applied to the University of Maryland School of Nursing's clinical nurse leader program.

Ms. Solomon found junior college demanding, but fun. Learning the sciences interested her.

Nursing school, however, was different. She felt she had challenged her identity. "It made me nauseous," she says. "It was an unsettling, weird, uneasy feeling. It took my breath away."

It took Ms. Solomon a while to convince herself she wasn't rejecting who she was. Instead, she was "adding another layer."

As she studied and considered her future employment options, she decided on psychiatric nursing. "I wanted to start in an area that I would want to work on indefinitely," she says. "Psychiatric nursing in some ways underlies all nursing — all of us struggle with the relationship between our thoughts, feelings and behaviors."

"I feel like I can make a connection with people who have emotional troubles. I can be there for them."

Ms. Solomon, 54, graduated in May and accepted a position at the University of Maryland Hospital on the adult psychiatric ward. She begins the night shift in August.

Ms. Solomon is not unlike others today who decide to change careers later in life. Some make the decision following years of dissatisfaction in their careers, while for others the decision is not their own.

"Some people are laid off and take time to think and reflect before going out for a new position," says Patricia Morton, Ph.D., R.N., CRNP, FAAN, associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Maryland School of Nursing. "Some career shifts they initiate; others wait until they are laid off or relocate and seek when there is lots of newness in their lives. Most often, they are looking for fulfillment."

Amanda Baker, M.Ed., M.S., career counselor at The Career Center at Towson University, echoes, "Some see it as a blessing in disguise. It's the perfect opportunity to go back to school, try something new (and) do something different with the rest of their lives."

There are plenty of risks involved in changing careers. Ms. Morton cites the cost of education, going into debt to return to school and knowing happiness is not guaranteed.

Over the course of an employment lifetime, workers can change careers five to seven times, Ms. Baker says. Most people are not employed in their original field of study, but they use skills they've acquired that are transferable to other positions.

Mike Schneider, a camp administrator for the last 22 years, is now enrolled in Mid-Atlantic Healthcare's administrator-in-training program. Mr. Schneider's camp administrative experience, including overseeing the kitchen, maintenance, facilities management and budgeting, mirror his future role as a nursing home administrator.

The 12-month training process includes a 100-hour online course and training in admissions, laundry, maintenance, the

business office and food services, followed by state and federal certification exams.

Switching careers is challenging, as is undergoing training in a new field. Add to Mr. Schneider's trial the fact that he is doing so three hours from home in Berlin. He's home on weekends and in touch by cell phone and computer. By this time next summer, he expects to be back in town full-time with an administrator position at a facility in the area.

Learning as an adult ... is not more difficult, but is different.

Being the "go-to person 99 percent of the time," Mr. Schneider was the one who had the answers. Now, he says, it's a "totally different world" in which he's taken two steps backward to move forward. Instead of dealing with young campers who are homesick, he's dealing with elder adults grieving for their independence.

Learning as an adult, he notes, is not more difficult, but it is different.

"It's more about unlearning — I've done something for so long with a good deal of success," says the Reisterstown resident in his mid-50s. "It's important to increase my empathy skills and never lose sight of the fact that it is difficult for them." □

Linda L. Esterson is a free-lance writer in Owings Mills.



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