

# Giving Back As She Promised

By Müge Mengü Hale (RC 92)

After a successful globe-trotting career in international banking, **Özlenen Eser Kalav**, ACG 67, is dedicated to building up the innovative, US-based Turkish Philanthropy Fund.

In the future, they say we will all have multiple careers that correspond to different phases of our lives. Özlenen Eser Kalav, ACG 67, is already a trailblazer. Her first success story began in 1976 as a leading female executive for international banking with Citi Group. During an extremely colorful career, she served as CFO for North Asia Division of the bank, as Strategic Planning Officer for Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle East Group, and also as Director of Recruiting for Citibank's Investment Bank and Institutional Banks.

After her retirement in New York, Kalav embarked on a new journey focusing on a career in philanthropy. Since 2007, Kalav volunteers her time, passion and expertise as President and CEO of Turkish Philanthropy Funds, a non-profit organization of the Turkish-American community which connects donors in the United States with high impact social projects in Turkey and the States. "The first part of my career was about taking" she said, "But I shared what little I had since college years. Now it is all about giving."

At the New York headquarters of TPF, where she manages \$13.5 million of assets this year, Kalav reminisced about her life and career and shared her treasured writings from her time at ACG. Her high school graduation picture on the cover of the school paper in 1967 features a smile as friendly and enthusiastic as it remains today. As a top student in her class, Kalav was the class valedictorian in 1963. Her gratitude to people resonates in her speech: "You have been there for us through sleepless nights. We promise to give it back". And she has followed

her promise ever since. Upon graduation, Kalav became the recipient of a Fulbright grant in 1967 to study in the United States and she earned an MS in biochemistry from Smith College.

She began her career in banking when she returned to Turkey for her husband Faruk Kalav's (RC 68) military service. Her professional life at Citibank started in Athens in 1976 as Middle-East North Africa Division's financial controller, covering over twenty countries. As a Citibank executive she lived and worked in New York, Tokyo, Manila, Athens, and Istanbul for 20 years. The highlight of

her career, she says, was as the CFO and Division Chief Administrative Officer for Japan and Korea, based in Tokyo, from 1985 to 1988. During this period, she managed the complex organizational restructuring of Citibank in Japan. Often interviewed by local newspapers and magazines as a top female executive, she served as a symbol of change for Japanese society. "I never dwelled on my gender but it wasn't common for women to be in my position in the 80s," she says.

### Philanthropy has always been in my life

While living all over the world, Kalav

remained deeply connected to her Turkish identity and Robert College roots. She served as the Head of RCAA in New York and remains a board member.

She also was invited to deliver the commencement address to the Class of 1990. "I could not have done what I did without the education and culture of College" she says. She is soft-spoken, yet her voice carries a confidence and humility that she says she gained in RC. "The well-rounded education, the clubs and activities set the stage for a successful business life and gave me the power to move forward."

Actively involved in volunteer work all her life, Kalav established an endowed scholarship for Faruk Kalav RC 68 and Özlenen Eser Kalav ACG 67 for RC Students in 2000 in the name of her late husband. "We were always a team. Charity was in our hearts from the beginning," she says.

Kalav now gives all of her time and commitment to Turkish Philanthropy Funds. Living abroad for many years, she feels her new post has reconnected her to all aspects of Turkey. "At this phase of my life, the more I know about Turkey, the more I see the areas of need, the more I am energized to give, to provide, to make a difference," she says.

### Turkish philanthropy funds

#### Everyone can be a philanthropist!

Turkish Philanthropy Funds is a platform created by a group of social entrepreneurs who wanted to formalize sharing and having large-scale impact in giving to Turkey. It is a 501(c)(3) public charity to help donors realize their philanthropic goals to meet community needs in the US and in Turkey.

Among the founding partners alongside Özlenen Eser Kalav ACG 67 are Haldun Tashman RC 66 and Mustafa Abadan RC 77.

"TPF's visionary is Haldun Tashman," says Kalav. Graduating from Robert College in 1966, Tashman came to the United States to study at Columbia Business School with a Fulbright Fellowship. Ten years later Tashman grew his privately-held company to an annual sales volume of \$200 million with 12 manufacturing locations on 3 continents. Tashman is the founding chairman for TPF and he was the recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2008.

TPF employs the community foundation model that allows donors to give through rather than to the foundation. "Donors do not give to TPF, rather they give through TPF." Kalav explains. "Individuals may contribute to specific issue areas or organizations through our pooled funds. Also, by opening a named fund at TPF, Turkish-Americans can channel their philanthropic dollars to their favorite NGOs in Turkey or to their local causes in the United States."

TPF provides a tax-deductible vehicle for contributions to organizations in Turkey. "It is a great way to donate your appreciated assets tax affectively," continues Kalav. TPF introduces high-impact organizations such as ACEV, TGV and many others to the Turkish community in the United States.

TPF has become a go-to resource for information on philanthropy. Leaders in philanthropy, education and civil society share their thoughts and experiences about philanthropy as guest authors on TPF's blog (<http://tpfund.blogspot.com>) while on tweetchats topics from gender equality to economic development are discussed.

Kalav underlines the fact that the TPF model allows all individuals, those of substantial and modest means alike, to participate in giving back to their community. "In today's world of Gates and Buffets, sometimes people believe that they need to give large amounts to be a philanthropist," says Kalav. But TPF's motto is "Everyone can be a philanthropist."



Founding partners of TPF

Müge Mengü Hale RC92 is a freelance writer based in New York and author of the popular weekly New York'ta Ne Var Ne Yok section in Referans newspaper. She can be reached at: [muge.mengu@gmail.com](mailto:muge.mengu@gmail.com).

