

# THE OLIVE PRESS

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## Before and After...

Letter from Head of School

This month we are reflecting on changes that have taken place at school due to COVID-19.

The pandemic has not only changed how we do things but also it has fundamentally changed who we are. Our interactions with people are socially distanced and no more hand-shakes or hugs.

We are wearing masks whenever in the presence of other people and we meet using computers rather than in person. Social events where we share the joy of the company of others are all but gone and limited to small bubbles of safety. The breakfasts once shared in my office have gone.

Normal interactions have become abnormal. Travelling over holidays has disappeared and travel itself for some able to travel has become an increasingly uncertain and complicated process. Most importantly, the cost to health and life has become enormous.



People however are resilient. There will be a time that the pandemic will be over and life will return to a new normal. There will be things that will have changed forever and how we approach interactions at school will be fundamentally different. There are lessons learned and new practices developed. Let us hope that any psychological scars fade in time with the virus.

Adrian Moody - Head of School

## A Tribute to Two Distinguished RFS Graduates...

By Besan Jaawan – Development & Communications Manager

With heavy hearts, our community has had to bid farewell to two highly distinguished RFS graduates during the past few months.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, His Excellency (H.E) Akel Biltaji, member of Class of 1959, passed away in Jordan due to complications related to COVID-19.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, Ustaz Jeries Abu Ezam, member of Class of 1974, and RFS staff member of 40 years, passed away in Palestine after fighting the virus for weeks.



H.E the late Mr. Biltaji was born in Gaza in 1941 and became a refugee in 1948.

Throughout his life, his career led him to Jordan where he served as Former Jordan Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Advisor to His Majesty King Abdullah II, and former Mayor of Amman. Today, he is considered as the "Godfather" of Jordanian Tourism and a pioneer in the Arab aviation industry during the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Throughout his life, he had worked at the Royal Jordanian Airlines for 28 years in different posts, the last as Senior Vice President.

In 2007, he received the prestigious [World Tourism Award](#). His other Awards include: Highest Jordanian Orders; Austrian Grand Gold Merit; French Grand Maitre de la Legion d'Honneur; Royal Norwegian Order of Merit; French Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur; Gran Cruz, Spain; Ordre National du Mérite.

H.E was an esteemed member of the [IIPT- the International Institute for Peace through Tourism](#) International Advisory Board. And he is considered the first Arab to receive the title of Vice President of the International Organization for Aircraft Services and Catering.

Speaking about his father, Laith Biltaji told [PAX International](#): "He had a unique energy that was infectious. He truly believed that there is good in everyone. Always looks at building bridges between people across the world in every capacity."

**An international peacemaker, an icon in the world of Arab tourism, and himself personifying the diversity and harmony of Jordan and Palestine, H.E. Akel Biltaji will be missed all around the Arab World. At RFS, we are forever proud of our graduates and H.E will forever be remembered as someone who carried the Palestinian and Quaker messages of Peace with him throughout his life.**

We offer our deepest and most sincere condolences to his family and loved ones, may his soul rest in peace.



An unusually cold April morning felt darker and colder as we received the terrible news of the passing of our dear teacher and colleague, and former RFS parent, Ustaz Jeries Abu Ezam, at the age of 66.

I instantly remembered how he had quickly and calmly rushed all of us, 500 Upper School students, into a safe hall in the year 2001 the moment that the Israeli Military issued a statement saying they were going to bomb the Police Station neighboring our campus.

Ustaz Jeries left a remarkable thumbprint at RFS as a beloved Chemistry teacher and strict but friendly Upper School Deputy Principal. He himself is part of RFS' modern history as he led the school successfully through challenging wars and intifadas and helped keep it sustainable.

**Not enough words can describe Ustaz Jeries' legacy at RFS... That is why I would like to share with you some of the short messages other members of our community wrote in his memory...**

His teacher [Bruce Stanley](#), wrote: "Jeries was one of my students. I will never forget his smile and his dedication. God bless him and his family for his contribution to making a better world!"

Former RFS Director, [Colin South](#), wrote: "I am shocked and saddened by the death of Jeries. He was a great teacher and educationist. A loyal and compassionate professional will be sorely missed..." Current Upper School Principal, and one of his students, [Riyam Kafri Abu-Laban](#) wrote: "Ustaz Jeries's love for RFS was unmatched. He dedicated his life's work to serving our community... He was always there... He was my teacher, a lifetime friend, a colleague and mentor."

We offer our deepest and most sincere condolences to his family and loved ones, may his soul rest in peace. \*

## Living Our Quaker Values

FRIENDS SCHOOLS PLACE A PRIORITY ON TEACHING THE VALUES felt necessary for leading a life of service in the community.

We seek to encourage our children to explore their individuality and their responsibility as school community members in the framework of a person of faith.

Friends School staff seek to permeate the whole of our school life in each classroom with these values. The school staff seek to reward those who enhance the life of our school community and to encourage better behavior from those whose actions or words are unacceptable to us.

We will be sharing with you the statement of our school Quaker Testimonies and their implications. This month we focus on the Quaker Testimony of Simplicity.

### Simplicity

Friends believe that the most important things in life aren't things.

To live simply is not to buy what we do not need or cannot afford. This challenge is based on the principle of leading a life free of ostentation and unnecessary luxury.

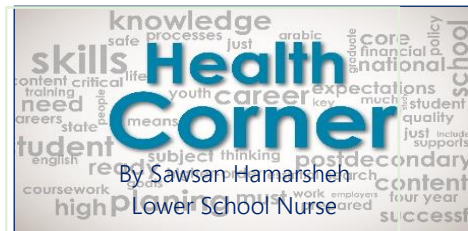


### Simplicity

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\*To know more details please visit our website [www.rfs.edu.ps](http://www.rfs.edu.ps)



### School Life Before & After COVID-19

Throughout the COVID19 pandemic, coming back to school has earned a new meaning caused by the need to implement strict preventive measures in order to limit the spread of the virus as it spreads faster and is more difficult than any other viruses of its family. What is to come after the pandemic is still an illusion and no one knows when the pandemic may be settled and when students will be able to return to their classrooms as before COVID19. And we do not know whether the school environment will return to how it was before or if there will be new health standards.

Faced with all this, we have to admit that this pandemic has changed the way we teach and work and even the way we live. The attempt to coexist with the virus by following preventive measures in their different forms, and their positive impact in some cases, have led us to think about making more changes in the school environment aimed at providing a safer and healthier environment for our children and staff even after the pandemic.

This is reinforced by the expectation that the virus will stay but without the need for strict precautions. Social distancing, wearing masks, and increasing awareness towards hygiene, all had an obvious role in maintaining physical health such as a decrease in the number of cases of the Influenza virus and other infectious diseases that affect children in schools. As well as maintaining the psychological and emotional health of students since the beginning of the pandemic.

In the meantime, it is still difficult to predict the long term behavior of the virus and the role of children in transmitting the virus is still unclear. Until we have a more robust and data-informed way forward to deal with the virus within the school community, conducting COVID19 medical testing whenever symptoms indicating a possible infection, and the continuation of implementing the school's preventive procedures are critical to ensure a safe return to school for all. \*

## A Year Different from All Others...

By Frieda Dahdah Khayat – Lower School Principal

This year has been different than any other year. However, despite the turmoil, tension, instability and the fear of the unknown due to the spread of the Covid19 virus and the exacerbation of the pandemic, as a school we have faced all challenges and we have worked hard to make the necessary adjustments and procedures to fit with our new reality.

We have transformed our entire school to distance learning and we trained our staff for online teaching. Our teachers were provided with a number of electronic blackboards and laptops were distributed to all of our teachers. And a series of workshops was held on using the Education platform.

Additionally, we administered a big change in the admissions procedure and for the first time in the school's history, new student applications were submitted entirely online to ensure everyone's safety and in accordance with health protocols. The first orientation meeting with new parents was also held online to inform parents in regards to school policies and the admissions procedure and we shared with them some general instructions online instead of face to face.



The next step was to interview applicants, and that was done online as well. Face to face interviews were limited to a certain number.

We, as Palestinians, have lived through a lot of crises and we adapted over and over again. This pandemic has exposed us to new experiences which we faced with trial and error over and over again and now we can share our experience with others as our school, the Friends School, remains a bright platform that leads the way for many in this community and we are always piloting the way in creativity in all aspects, all thanks big thanks to our admirable dedicated staff. \*



## The Story of Once Upon a Library...

By Carmen Abdul Hadi – Middle School Librarian

Not so long ago, there was this cozy place, called library, where students would come to enjoy their time reading, playing different games or just chatting...Oh. How they loved chatting! And because there was no "SHHHH!" around they would get loud. And their voices would fill the air...

Other students would come for a last minute research...or print out a forgotten homework. Or just try to break the house rules about using these very smart devices that they love so much...Eventually the devices would be jailed...and bailed out with a promise and a large smile.

And while all was quiet and normal... a furious and mischievous virus escaped...and everything changed...

Nobody was allowed to come to this lovely place anymore. Shelves were full. And books were waiting...But the students' voices were still in the air...

We are all trying with all our might to jail this virus. And we are going to make it...Maybe not now but soon...

And the books...they found a way to reach their beloved ones...

The story has an open happy ending that we all must believe in!

Libraries are ever-evolving. As the community changes and grows, so does the library. When a pandemic hit, the library must adapt to it, too.

We can use this new reality to offer something different. That is what we have been working on. Many of us are challenged, but we're coming up with good, creative ideas.

When everything seems dark, consider you may be the light.

Quaker Proverb

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### Head of School Announcement

Friends United Meeting General Secretary writes to the RFS community announcing appointment of new Head of School.

Please check the front page of our website for the detailed announcement available in English and Arabic.

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