

# THE OLIVE PRESS

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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**Realize Potential | Fulfill Dreams | Share Hope**

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## Trying New Things

Letter from Head of School

I want to welcome you all back to a new academic year. The teachers and administration have been working throughout the summer in preparation for our return to school. Students have returned to the campus and are happy to be with each other. In some ways it is very reassuring and all very familiar. Students in classes, the bells have returned, and we can enjoy greeting the students as they walk in each day.

It is all very familiar but it is also very different because, as we are all acutely aware, our world has changed. The covid-19 pandemic has changed the way that we do things. I suspect that once a vaccine has been found and the virus is controlled we will return back to normal. However, that 'normal' is going to look a lot different compared to what 'normal' looked like back in February.

We are all doing things differently now. Meetings are mostly remote, teaching is a blend of face-to-face and online. We have had to adapt. Even walking through town and shopping is no longer the same.



Neil Gailman, English author, once said "I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're doing something." This is 2020 – a year for trying new things.

Adrian Moody - Head of School

## Special Profile – Mazen Karam

By Besan Jaawan – Development & Communications Manager

*"I have always been an advocate for RFS. Ever since I was a young student I would urge my relatives to send their sons and daughters to our school."*

In this special feature, we are pleased to meet the new Clerk of RFS Board of Trustees (BoT), RFS graduate and former RFS parent, Mazen Karam.

*"I lived in the school and the school lived in me..."*

Growing up across the road from the Upper Campus, Mazen says his late father had instilled the love of RFS in his seven children's hearts since they were very young. His father had attended the school in 1932-1935. When the 1948 Nakba forced his family out of their home in Ramleh, his father took refuge in Ramallah and lived across the street of the Friends School lower campus then upper campus. A member of the Class of 1971, Mazen and all his siblings are proud graduates of RFS.

*"We were raised knowing that many successful persons were graduates of RFS... That the school provided a better education and had a unique legacy."*

Mazen remembers that even though he was living closest to the school out of all his classmates, he would always be the last to arrive. After the school day was over, he would spend his evenings playing basketball with his siblings and friends in the Upper School's sports fields or assisting his Chemistry teacher in working on science experiments. He fondly remembers the school's Science Fair, when he was able to create crystals and show off to older university students.

During the war of 1967, Mazen remembers the school being closed and artillery falling on campus and damaging the "Gaus House" (gardener's room) and the Principal's car.

*"The principal used to put us all in that car and drive us to take our swimming lessons at the YMCA in Jerusalem."*



Setting his goal to become an engineer, Mazen was required to enroll in Birzeit University (BZU) for one year before transferring to the American University of Beirut (AUB). While at BZU, he participated in the establishment of the first Student Council and was voted president. He transferred to the AUB then moved on to receive his Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from Baghdad University in 1976.

After Baghdad, Mazen's career took him to different countries which included Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, China, Greece, USA, Qatar, Yemen and back to Palestine. He has worked with the Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) since 1977 until this day. CCC is the top construction company in the Middle East and #19 in the world. Mazen is now the CEO and Managing Director of



the [Bethlehem Development Foundation \(BDF\)](#). And he does a lot of fundraising around the world.

*"I have calculated that about 67 people from my family and in-laws have graduated from RFS over the years... My goal was to have my children attend RFS as well and thank God I was able to make that happen."*

In 1996, Mazen and his wife Hala, also an RFS graduate (Class of 1978), decided to move their family of five back to Palestine from the USA so that their children can attend RFS.

Eva, Lara and Chris all went on to graduate from RFS in 2004, 2008, and 2009.

***"My hope is for RFS to survive this pandemic with the support of all stakeholders; employees, students, parents as well as the concerned ministries... So that it can stay on top and continue providing quality Quaker education to our Palestinian youth for the next 150 years."***

After serving twice as a member on the Board of Trustees since the late 2000s, Mazen begins his term as Clerk of the BoT along with Omar Tesdell as Assistant Clerk for the academic year 2020-2021. During the last 20+ years, he has been involved in the planning, construction and enlargement of the school and its campuses even before and after his participation in the Board.

Mazen stresses on the importance of all of the school's stakeholder groups standing together to face the unprecedented challenges caused by the pandemic, for the sole goal of sustaining RFS for the future generations.

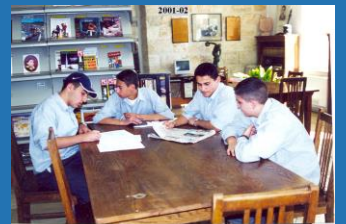
About what RFS means to him, Mazen said:  
*"... The school's curriculum has always been, and still is very strong compared to any other schools... I always encouraged, and still do, everyone around me to send their children to RFS. My cousins and my friends; I would lead them to RFS myself after urging their parents to enroll them at RFS... And as a father, I worked very hard to be able to come back to Palestine so my children can learn here at RFS like their mother and I did." \**

**\*\*\* Please visit this link to view Mazen's 1st message to the RFS community as Clerk of the Board of Trustees.**

## A Look at Our History

2003

During the Second Intifada, students often suffered from anxiety, nightmares and post-traumatic stress disorder, because of Israeli incursions and aggression. When school was open, anxious RFS teachers taught the standard lessons but they also offered daily counseling to troubled students. School was closed for weeks at a time during the Israeli incursion into the cities of Ramallah and El-Bireh in April.



2004

The White Gifts program continued to raise funds for needy families by organizing student bake sales. Enrolment grew from less than 1000 students to over 1500 girls and boys in 2018. Graduating classes averaged 95 students with 95% attending [top-rated colleges and universities](#) locally and abroad. For the first time in the school history, Ivy League colleges took interest in RFS students and admit many on an annual basis.

USAID/ASHA

For many years, USAID/ASHA funds were awarded to the school. New buildings included a gym, a library, computer labs, two apartments and a classroom building. In addition, there were many renovations to existing structures and improvements made to school grounds and landscape including a new parking lot and car garage, a tennis court, pathways and stairway. The Khalil Totah Auditorium was renovated with a new stage, seating, flooring and audio-visual and HVAC systems installed. Central heating was also installed in all school buildings. \*





By Anwaar Khoury  
Upper School Nurse

As September began, we finally got to come back to school. It was clearly not the traditional back-to-school experience that we've known. These tips will help you successfully manage your return to learning.

1. **Mask Manners:** Masks are one of the best ways to protect ourselves and others from getting COVID-19.
2. **Proper Hygiene:** Establish consistent rules about hand washing frequently.
3. **Reading:** Keep reading books of your choice.
4. **Socialize again with other children:** Now is the time to socialize with your friends in a safe way – remember social distancing.
5. **Get back on a regular sleep schedule:** Try to follow a consistent bedtime routine and avoid electronics.
6. **Have conversations:** Having open conversations with your parents, teachers and medical staff will help you know you are not alone and we do everything possible to ensure your health and safety.
7. **Remember, we're all in it together:** Understand that anyone can get the virus, no matter where you are from.
8. **School may remain virtual for some:** Sometimes you are forced to not to come to school for various reasons. We manage to keep you updated with classes using distance learning systems.
9. **Prevent separation anxiety:** After spending many long months at home, you may feel nervous about going back to school and being apart from family members. Try to develop tools to feel connected to home.
10. **Be available:** Remember that parents, teachers and medical staff are available to express your feelings to them.\*

## Lower School Principal's Letter

By Frieda Dahdah Khayat – Lower School Principal

Years ago, at a professional development workshop, I was asked to use one word to describe the world. I responded, "Change."

The world is dynamically changing and evolving by the second.

So, what does *change* mean for RFS?

### At Last, Back to School!

Mixed feelings filled the hearts of every member of our community. This was what everyone had been wishing for! Parents, teachers, administrators and even the students missed those draining school days! There was excitement and hope at the thought of kids being back at school. Unfortunately, feelings of uncertainty and fear also lingered at the mere thought of a fresh outbreak of the virus in the community.

Since 1869, the RFS community has overcome endless challenges, and COVID-19 is simply going to be another victory added to our list. As the principal of the RFS Lower Campus, it is my responsibility to gingerly prepare and secure our school with tactical changes for this unprecedented challenge.

### Teacher Schedules

Teachers and staff schedules have been resourcefully changed to cater to the dynamic situation. Additional teachers are assigned for reduced-student classes to meet distance requirements. An online schedule, in-person schedule, and a hybrid schedule were formulated.

### School Entryways

Five entrance gates are now opened to welcome its students. Parents are no longer allowed to stroll

through campus to supportively guide their children to their classrooms. Crowds and close contact of students of different grade levels have diminished with the designation of gates to specific grade levels, except for one gate designated for siblings only. On every promising morning, 2-3 teachers and staff members check student temperatures before permitting their entry. And at the end of the school day, teachers monitor school grounds to ensure required safe distance between all students.

### New Essential Agreements

The 1<sup>st</sup> week of school was like no other. Essential agreements were made for online classes and in-person classes. The entire school day was devoted to training students on face mask rules, hygiene procedures and safe distancing.

### Technology

All classrooms are now equipped with smart boards, desktops, and webcams for endless learning experiences. Risk-taking teachers broadcasted their in-person classes for students that were unable to attend school due to isolation or just fear of the virus. While other isolated teachers broadcasted a lesson to their entire class of students sitting in their very own classroom from home.

*Change* is an inevitable part of life that should be perceived as an opportunity to make us stronger to better weather the next challenge. Amidst *change*, RFS is vigilantly committed to delivering a valuable and transformative education while fostering a safe and nurturing environment for its entire community.\*

## Middle School Library Corner

By Carmen Abdul Hadi – Middle School Librarian

October is the International School Library Month, an annual celebration of school libraries worldwide.

*"Reading fiction is important. It is a vital means of imagining a life other than our own, which in turn makes us more empathetic beings."*

But what is fiction? **Fiction** is the literature created from author's imagination, not presented as fact, though it may be based on a true story or situation. Mysteries, science fiction, fantasy, adventure, humor, horror are all fiction genres. Thousands of books are published every week so how does a reader (especially one that is just getting into reading) decide which one to pick up?! How does one choose what to read?

The first rule in choosing books is to read what you like! Every reader can find a book to match their preferences. If you need help email the librarian!

On the MS library virtual site, [available at this link](#), you will find the survey to help you identify your reading genre.

Let's see... You are going to look for a book to read..... Chemistry? Definitely not!! How about a biography of Albert Einstein? Well, maybe; that could be interesting. Then you notice the latest mystery novel from one of your favorite authors. Perfect! You are definitely in the mood for a good story. You'll read the fiction book... Reading is a wonderful journey full of enormous variety!

Try things out! Happy Reading! \*



## IT Improvements since March 2020

By Salim Zughayer – IT Manager



*IT Department has finished distributing 120 laptops donated by RFS families to our teachers.*

Since the announcement of a state of emergency in Palestine on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2020 and the closure of schools, Ramallah Friends School has put intense attention on improving and developing our IT systems and services to empower our distance learning program.

RFS staff was able to make an immediate transition from face-to-face learning to full online teaching in March within days of the arrival of COVID-19 in Palestine. Starting with the Upper School, students started receiving online lessons and instruction through constant communication with their teachers while safe at home.

As the school year came to an end without students being able to reach our campuses, the school began preparing for another challenging school year to come. Nobody knew, or knows, whether this school year 2020-2021 was to be taught online, face-to-face or blended. With that realization, RFS prepared for many scenarios and our IT Department held a vital role in helping our teachers and school provide the best quality education possible through any of the suggested scenarios.

The following are some of the improvements and developments Ramallah Friends School's IT department has introduced since March 2020:

### 1- Integrating Education Platform

The integration and combining of Education platform with virtual classroom to become one application now able to serve our community as a school management system and virtual classroom application.

### 2- Teacher Training Sessions

Full training sessions in several levels were given to all of our teachers and staff on using several virtual teaching programs and systems.

### 3- Introduction of Google Meet

The application of Google Meet (an enterprise-grade video conference application) for all teachers, staff and administration members, as well as all students in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>.

### 4- Installment of Cameras in Classrooms

The installment of video cameras in all Lower and Upper school classrooms to enable online teaching for any students unable to reach the campuses.

### 5- Hardware Upgrade

Several forms of hardware upgrade to improve online education.

### 6- Laptops for Teachers & Staff

120 Laptops were donated by friends in the community and were distributed to teachers on both campuses.



### 7- Internet Speed

The strengthening of internet speed up to the speed of upload/download 100 mbps.

### 8- Google Classroom Application

The introduction of Google Classroom Application for student assignments and exams.

### 9- 3000 Education Accounts

All RFS students and parents received access to personal Education accounts, which are web based and mobile applications, to facilitate online lessons, reaching the total of 3000 accounts.

### 10- Touchpads (Wacom) – Arriving soon!

Scheduled to arrive soon, these touchpads offer convenient navigation with a digital stylus and can be used to sketch and write while teaching online.

**11- Class Schedules:** different class schedules were organized and implemented to fit the new blended, synchronous and asynchronous learning on campus and online.\*

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

*Quaker Proverb*

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