

Friends Schools Newsletter

Volume 18, Number 1

Fall 2005

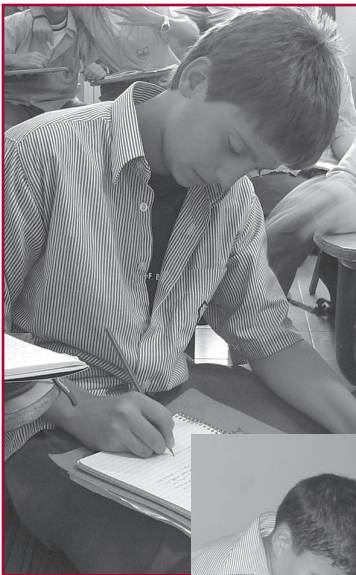


Rejuvenation: New Faces and Enriched Programs

By Joyce Ajlouny, Director

With the commitment of staff to serve, the determination of students to learn, and the support of the school community at large, keeping Ramallah Friends School dynamic and fresh is easy.

While hard work and positive energy continues to motivate us all, the tangible rewards renew our confidence in the tremendous impact the Ramallah Friends School has on this community.



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Keeping the flame alive in all of us is an essential element of survival in this troubled Holy Land. This newsletter focuses on the faces and programs that bring new life to the school this year. The new faces are of exceptional people committed to service and to peace. I admire the courage and solidarity of all of our international staff that have left so much behind in Michigan, Connecticut, Kenya and Germany to be with us and help us continue making a difference in

this community. This year is much richer at the Ramallah Friends School because of their love, courage, and their will to serve.

These new beginnings are complemented by a series of review process that are shedding much light on the quality of education we offer the Ramallah community. The aim of this process is to rejuvenate our staff and to invigorate our curriculum with a new creative spirit that emphasizes our values.

With achieving excellence in education as one of our mission aims, the school has initiated three interlinked processes this year that strive to improve the quality of education at the school. These include:

- A review of the present curriculum and the design of an enriched curriculum focusing on more reading, writing, learning by doing and the promotion of useful study and time management skills.
- Organizational restructuring to include new and revitalized job descriptions for the Heads of Departments at school, giving them more responsibilities for support and supervision of staff.
- A new teacher performance evaluation scheme is being designed that is tied to an incentive program promotes staff development.

School values at the FBS are also being reviewed in the context of the Ethics Curriculum. John Hishmeh, along with the assistance of Joshua Lilande, is leading an effort to draw on available curricula in the design and implementation of courses on conflict resolution and non-violence, Christian Quaker Faith and Practice, comparative religions, and many others.

Our Challenges...

We strive to maintain a healthy school environment for our students in the midst of a life bound by concrete walls, poverty and violence. To do this and everything mentioned above, we need to overcome our present financial crisis. We thank our supporters for their continued prayers, love and care, without which we could achieve nothing.

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Editor: ???

A New Beginning

By Frieda Dahdah Khayat, Deputy Principal, FGS

August 2005 marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. I was assigned as the new Deputy Principal of the Friends Girls School. I accepted the post without hesitation. I was confident of my ability and of the knowledge I had gained from previous work experiences and several national and international workshops. In addition, I had a strong desire to serve my school and community.

The Quaker values of truth, simplicity, peace, equality, tolerance, service, creativity, discipline and justice that I had acquired as a student at the FGS equipped me with confidence and readiness to give and serve.

I had some mixed feelings of anxiety, fear, and tension, but they disappeared when I stepped onto the school grounds. I felt at home as I joined the administrative team of the Friends schools. I joined a team that consisted

of two of my former teachers, Jeries and Diana, and a classmate, Joyce, who is now the Director. I saw

several faces I used to see while I was a student; teachers, members of the administrative team such as Hala, and the employees such as George. I discovered that some of my former students have become members of the teaching staff. They all smoothed my transition to the new job and were a great support.

My new job entails many duties. I am in charge of designing and implementing school discipline procedures, managing parents' relations, coordinating reading and writing curricula, organizing student activities and school linking initiatives, teaching up to ten classes per week, and participating on many committees. My belief from the beginning was that my work would not be successful without coordination and cooperation with the teaching staff, administrative team, parents and students. "Human beings are like parts of a body created from the same essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, the others cannot remain in peace and be quiet."

This new beginning reminds me of other new beginnings I have known. Life is a long journey and each step marks a new beginning. I ask God to help this new beginning lead to successful results and reflect positively on all those involved.



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The Hart Family Joins the FBS Community

Everyone experiences changes in their lives from year to year, but not usually quite so profound as the Hart family has experienced this year. Doug Hart, along with his wife and two children, left their home in Rockford, Michigan, so that Doug could join the faculty of FBS. Doug is teaching ninth and tenth grade English, his son Justin is attending kindergarten at FGS, and his wife Carolyn and two-year-old daughter Anya are doing their part to support and encourage this adventure.

him on the road and away from his family, and his decision to move to Ramallah was in part a decision to change that. He and Carolyn are delighted to be able to explore historical sites and cities with their children, and are thankful for the opportunity for Justin to experience another culture, another language, and another way of life.

Although Doug's background involves politics, he claims his decision to move to Ramallah was not political. "I came for the Palestinians, not Palestine, although I am sympathetic to their cause. I wanted to focus on kids, and their passion, and their energy." He finds teaching exhausting, but qualifies that with the fact that many jobs are exhausting. Being tired is a natural part of working. Even though he has teaching experience, every situation is unique and he admits he is learning as he goes. The family has enjoyed developing relationships with the students, faculty and neighbors in Ramallah. Doug may think it was his luck that brought him here, but all at FBS know we are the lucky ones.

When asked what brought him to Ramallah Doug responded, "Luck." He visited last April to do some research on life under occupation, and after visiting with the director, Joyce Ajlouny, he entertained the idea of returning to teach. Doug was the State Representative of the 73rd House District in Michigan from 1999 through 2004, and is owner of a consulting group that specializes in Civics Education. His career has kept



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Pain and Hope Brings New Student to FBS

By Youssef Bashir, Grade 11

Youssef Bashir is a new student in the 11th grade at FBS. He is from Gaza, the fourth of seven children. His home in Dir al-Balah is close to the Kfar Darom settlement. A number of years ago the Israeli Army requisitioned the upper two floors of his home. On February 18, 2004, UN personnel visited the Bashir family in order to confirm reports regarding the confiscation of the family's land by the IDF. After their visit, Youssef and his father walked their visitors to their car to say good-bye. The following is Youssef's account of what happened.

As I was saying goodbye, I heard a gunshot and I was sure that since there were no clashes in my neighborhood, the bullet was heading somewhere far away from me. To my surprise, that bullet was aimed at me and struck me in the back. I looked behind and I saw that an Israeli soldier had shot me. Since that moment my life has completely changed.

I was taken to an Israeli hospital for treatment. They were unsuccessful in removing the bullet. For seven months I lived in the hospital without being able to walk. Today I am walking fine, but the bullet is still in my back. The bullet is not only a reminder of pain,

it's more than that. After my treatment, I came to the conclusion that although one Israeli soldier had shot me, many more Israelis were there to treat me and to save my life. I not only believe in peace, but my belief in peace has never been stronger. I pray for peace every day because I believe the future that is ahead of me is my future and no one has more of a right than me to decide that future and try to shape it.

Last summer, Youssef participated in the Seeds of Peace camp in Maine, with Palestinian and Israeli youth. Today he lives with a relative in Ramallah in order to attend the Friends School.

I am very excited to spend more time at this school. It's like a family. The teachers are good and you can ask them about something and they will help you, even those who aren't teaching you. The headmaster takes time to talk to me and tells me to keep up the good work. Taking part in the activities and getting to know other students is helping to develop my character. The only thing I don't like at the school is that you will get a negative point if you come to class late. They don't want us to do that. Ohhh come on, I'm lazy, I want to sleep!



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Reflections on Interdependence

By Joshua Lilande

Joshuah Lilande is from Kenya and has left his family for a year in order to teach history and ethics at the Friends Boys School. He brings with him his Quaker faith and a desire to learn from, and share with, his Palestinian brothers and sisters.

*I have learned to teach by giving the definitions of the words students may find difficult to understand, which would hinder them from following the lesson. I posed a question to one of my 12th grade classes as to the meaning of the word **independence**. Several definitions were given, including one from the dictionary. We finally agreed that the word only exists in theory but not in practice. We observed that no country could exist on its own without the other; none can exist in a void.*

As a school, we are a family; a family that works together, where members respect one another regardless of their position. The school is a community and an institution where people live and meet to share and do common things towards achieving common goals. This community includes people from various families and neighborhoods; however, they are united by the

desire to shape their futures through high standards in education. This cannot be achieved without withholding the tenets of a family where respect, responsibility, endurance, patience, honesty, faithfulness, and all other virtues are practiced and upheld. We shall have no problem fitting in the outside world if we hold to these virtues.

We are called upon to tread lightly upon the earth for it is the dwelling place of God, to deal gently with all the living things for they were created by God, live simply, humbly and joyfully for we too are beloved children of God.



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FGS: A New Year, A Fresh Start

By Diana Abdul Nour, FGS Principal

Although New Year's is celebrated on January 1st, for every educator and parent the beginning of the new year is the day school begins again. This is the beginning when parents, teachers and children anticipate a fresh start, one full of expectation and hope. It is a time to reflect on the previous school year, decide how we want things to change, make new goals, and consider the challenges we have to achieve these goals.

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I always meet with the staff before school starts. We select one or two themes for the year. This year our two themes are *Respect* and *Honesty*. Throughout the school year, teachers reinforce these themes. It is essential that respect and honesty be instilled in our children at all levels and at all times. We strive to teach respect for others and that respect be mutual. In our Monday morning chapels, the entire student body meets and we do activities to reinforce these themes.

Some challenges are overcome; however, some challenges must be adapted to. There are challenges we face every day on a school campus and we need to find solutions quickly with as little disruption to the day as possible. Meeting students' individual needs is a challenge our teachers are faced with every day. Our political situation is a challenge we have allowed to strengthen our determination. We have faced long closures that have forced students to relocate. Some parents have been unable to cover tuition costs. Many students have not been able to travel outside the city, have never seen their country or even visited Jerusalem. Nonetheless, we strive to give them security and normalcy in a very abnormal situation.

As we are challenged our faith is strengthened and our hope for a better future is kept alive. Our children are our motivation and the leading force behind our hope. Our children's smiles speak volumes and they inspire us to keep working for the best on their behalf. In the words of a FGS graduate: "Our dream is to always keep hope alive."

FBS: New Beginning, New Challenges for Many

By Jeries Abu El Etham, Principal, FBS

Enrollment has increased at the Friends Boys School to a total of 490 students. More than ever, our objectives are important in order to provide the best possible education and learning environment for our students. Our objectives include:

- To facilitate effective learning and good teaching by developing a positive behavior policy;
- To develop the work of department heads who supervise, evaluate and oversee the professional development of teachers in their departments;
- To promote reading and writing skills in both English and Arabic;
- To plan and implement extra curricular activities;
- To develop a curriculum enrichment plan that encompasses research and thinking skills, learning by doing, school values, time management, and reading and writing;
- To develop the training of all seventh through tenth grade teachers regarding the IB (International

Baccalaureate) middle years program so that by the end of the school year, a clear and detailed plan of implementation will be ready.

With the help of three staff members, the Friends School is also able to offer a learning support program for special needs students, along with counseling support to help students build social skills and self-confidence.

The school is committed to good teaching and effective learning. This requires hard work from all our faculty members. Our staff shares a sense of responsibility towards our students and our school. Professional development of teachers is seen as an important part of good management that adds to the quality of education. Short term courses, workshops and other training opportunities for teachers require a special budget, which is a real challenge since we are unable to add these costs to tuition fees paid by our students. Financial support is critical to our ability to provide the highest quality education in Palestine.



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Donor Thanks

Friends School, Ramallah/El-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General
February 1, 2005—September 30, 2005

We would like to thank the following people and their Meetings for their recent donations to Friends School.

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Atlantic City Area Friends Meeting	Danfoura, Haneen and Hanna	High Point Friends Meeting	Mounsey, John	Stoltzfus, Margaret
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	Hawkins, Bruce and Ruth	Middletown Friends Meeting	Southwest Friends Financial Corp.	
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News in Brief

Faces missed...

- Vanoush Kassis has decided to retire after 27 years of service to the school. Vanoush served as Head of the Preschool and later as the Administrative Assistant to the Director. Vanoush was responsible for putting together and editing this newsletter as well as coordinating student financial aid at the school. Recruitment for her replacement is underway while Lisa Lowe covers for the Fall months.
- The time for Nabila Said's retirement after 37 years of relentless service to the Ramallah Friends School and its community arrived this year. Nabila served as the Deputy Principal at the Lower School during the last few years. While we are sad to see Nabila leave we are happy to see her transition to a new life among loved ones in Amman, Jordan.
- Mahmoud Amra our upper school, FBS Head, is on a one year leave to head a school in Qatar in the United Arab Emirates. Mahmoud will return to us next school year with new energy and ideas. The school is in good hands as the Deputy Principal, Jeries Abu Elezam, fills in as Acting Principal.
- We will miss and wish to thank, Lisa Taraki, our dedicated Board of Trustees member, as she concluded her term of service.

New faces...

- Frieda Dahdah-Khayat is our new Deputy Principal for the Lower School (FGS). As a graduate (1983) and parent, Frieda is by no means new to the school environment.
- Doug and Carolyn Hart with son Justin (KG) and daughter Anya have joined our community from Michigan. Doug is teaching English for 10th graders and Carolyn is busy being a mom and putting her great talent of photography to use by taking lots of pictures, some already in this newsletter.
- Joshua Lilande from Kenya is teaching history for 7th graders and is challenged by a great adjustment to a totally new culture. Joshua will soon be joined by Henry Mukwanja, a Friend-in-Resident who arrives in early November from Kenya.
- Lisa, Tim and Paul Lowe arrived in August from Connecticut. Tim teaches English to our 8th graders and Lisa is temporarily filling the post of the Administrative Assistant to the Director.
- Thanks to the Barenboim-Said Foundation, Hike has joined Martin from Germany along with at least 6 other musicians (Erich, Anna, Peter, Seon-hee, Daniel, Diane and others) to teach our students instrumentation and general music classes.

continued...

A First Impression That Doesn't Fade

By Lisa Lowe

First impressions are a one shot deal. You only get one chance to make them, and one chance to receive them. Soon after my husband Tim, my son Paul and I arrived in Ramallah, we had the opportunity to attend a concert performed by the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. That "first impression" was written with indelible ink on our memories and has been reinforced time and again.



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The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is composed of young musicians from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Spain. The famous pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, together with his good friend the late Professor Edward Said, a Palestinian intellectual, writer and teacher at Columbia University, collaborated in its formation. For the first time since its establishment in 1999, the orchestra performed in Ramallah to a standing room only crowd at the Palestinian Cultural Palace. The theme was "Freedom for Palestine" in memory

of Professor Edward Said.

Even more impressive to me than the music and the musicians, was the audience. This crowd of hundreds of Palestinians, who have suffered and continue to suffer tremendous hardship due to closures, incursions, land appropriations, travel restrictions and economic hardship gave this Israeli conductor a five-minute standing ovation. They applauded his talent as well as his call for peace; a just peace, a peace that envisions Israelis and Palestinians living and working together,

not destroying the other. They applauded the music, the musicians, and the memory of Dr. Said. This audience included old and young people, families, teenagers, religious and non-religious, intellectuals, shopkeepers, students, and politicians. This was a face of Palestine remarkable in its sophistication, outstanding in its cultural appreciation, and significant in its diversity. This isn't the face of Palestine one sees on CNN because it isn't a face that the world would allow to be imprisoned behind a massive cement wall. Nevertheless, it is the face we see time and again in the streets, the shops and the homes of Ramallah.

As we've had a chance to get to know this "face" a little better, we've discovered that the Friends School has played a part in its formation. Everywhere we go we meet people who have attended the school, or whose children or grandchildren attend. There are similarities among these people, similarities that include gratitude for the school, hope for a peaceful ending to the conflict, desire to contribute to the strengthening of their country, intelligent conversation mixed with the common Palestinian attributes of hospitality, warmth and friendliness. The Friends School has a long history in Ramallah. The Friends School values truth, simplicity, peace, equality, tolerance, service, creativity, discipline and justice. Part of the school's success is that it is planted in an environment that shares many of these values. It's a partnership that works, and has worked for over a century, a partnership that has helped fashion the face I've described. We are blessed to be a part of this ongoing Friends legacy, and fortunate to have been introduced to this face of Palestine.

News in Brief



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- To add to that, our school has employed eight new local teachers this year! There is a lot of adjustment taking place and we hope to provide the support needed to make the transition as smooth as possible.
- New faces are not limited to staff. This year our student enrollment topped the 1110 mark, with at least 30 additional students from last year. We are at full capacity, although we are considering making space for one more 10th grade section next year.

- Two new members joined our Board of Trustees. We welcome Cairo Arafat and Jane Masri, both active parents at the RFS, for their willingness to serve.

Activities and networks...

- Back-to-School bonfire and barbeque celebrations were a hit for both our Lower and Upper Schools in September. Students and their families were given an opportunity to unwind with many activities from music and dancing to hotdog eating competitions and potato sack racing!

Sponsor a Student or Support Children with Special Needs

The Scholarship Fund and Special Needs Program at the Friends School assists many deserving and talented children each year. Without your financial assistance, it would be difficult, even impossible, for these students to attend our school. Your support and partnership will have a lasting impact on the lives of our students...our future leaders.

**Participate in the future
of the Friends School,
with your tax-
deductible gifts!**



☐ Yes, I would like to contribute to the Ramallah Friends Schools:

☐ Scholarships and Child sponsorship*

☐ General Award (any amount) \$ _____

☐ ESJ Award (min. \$1,500) \$ _____

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Tax deductible gifts should be made payable to the Ramallah Friends School and sent to: **Global Ministries, Friends United Meeting, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1926**

£ sterling gifts should be made payable to the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET), noting "for Ramallah" on the back, saying if Gift Aid may be claimed, and sent to: QuIET, Yew Tree House, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, OX15 4ET or Brian Morphy at QuIET, Tel: 01295 720019; e-mail: brianmorphy@hvmail.co.uk.

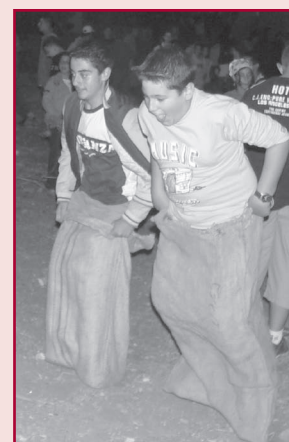
*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2004–2005 range from U.S. \$1,500 to U.S. \$2,300.

For further information and inquiries feel free to contact Ms. Vanoush Kassis: vk527@palfriends.org or Tel: 011-972-2-2952286, www.palfriends.org

- Links with George School and Westtown were re-established through the visit of the Director to both schools in October. Both schools have committed a full room and board scholarship to one of our students each year. The selection process will start in December.
- An exchange program between the Ramallah Friends School and Sidwell Friends School was set up in memory of Sami Sulieman, an accomplished and devoted American-Palestinian and a once active Sidwell parent. The exchange program will kick off with a short term exchange

opportunity for two of the Ramallah Friends students this Winter/Spring.

- The Director attended the Friends Schools Heads gathering in early October at Westtown. This was a wonderful networking opportunity for the Ramallah Friends School.
- Together with Brooklyn Friends School, a co-production is planned for the Bridge Film Festival... a wonderful surprise awaits us all! Andy Cohen of BFS and colleague will arrive at our school in November to help guide the project.



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