

Friends Schools Newsletter

Spring 2010



Inauguration of New Classrooms Building and Sports Field

On 2 February 2010, RFS celebrated the inauguration of its new classrooms building and sports field on the school's Upper Campus. The inauguration celebration began with a presentation in the school's Khalil Totah auditorium, followed by a tour of the school and a ribbon-cutting ceremony and reception. The guest of honor was Howard Sumka, mission director of USAID's West Bank/Gaza office. Dr. Sumka spoke of the longstanding and strategic relationship between USAID and the Ramallah Friends Schools and emphasized the important role of RFS in Palestinian education.

The new three-story classroom building was solely funded by USAID's American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program. In addition, this ASHA grant funded a major rehabilitation of the campus pathways, construction of a parking lot, and electrical upgrades; all of these aspects were designed in keeping with the school's long-range plan to maintain the historical nature of the campus while providing Palestinian students with the highest educational standards and resources.

The renovation of the school's historic sports field is a part of the school's plan to improve local youth athletic programs and extracurricular activities. This latest renovation includes construction of new boundary walls, resurfacing of the field, construction of a water cistern, and installation of artificial turf. USAID provided funding for the artificial turf through their ARD program while Cordaid-Netherlands, the American Consulate General-Jerusalem, and Al-Quds bank provided funding for the other elements. The field will serve the local community, including youth from area schools. 



Left to right: Samer Shehadeh (Clerk of RFS Board of Trustees), Laila Ghannam (Governor of Ramallah District), Howard Sumka (Missions Director of USAID, West Bank/Gaza), Joyce Ajlouny (RFS Director), Diana Abdel Nour (Lower School Principal), Jeanette Michael (Mayor of Ramallah); Back row: Mahmoud Amra (Upper School Principal)

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Editor: Rebecca Mason,
RFS Development Officer

The Happiest Moment at FGS: My First Day in School Uniform

By Nadine Maayeh, 6th Grade Student

My first day in the first grade was a real exciting and memorable one. The excitement began days before school had started; it began the day I got my books and school uniform. I remember trying on my uniform so many times. I got the smallest size available, but it was still too big for me. Nevertheless, I was so proud to be wearing it.

Even though FGS had been my school for the previous two years, the only common thing I saw that morning was the school gate. The rest of the school seemed new to me. The playgrounds, the classes, the teachers, and the buildings seemed so different from our sheltered kindergarten. Most importantly, I felt so different carrying a backpack filled with books and wearing the FGS school uniform. I remember looking at sixth graders and seeing them so big and confident. It felt scary to be sharing the same playground with them.

Now, when I look at first graders playing around the school, carrying heavy backpacks, and lost in their uniforms, I wonder if they feel the same way I did. Are they excited to have homework? Are they happy to be in uniform? Do they see us, sixth graders, as monsters? Well, I guess they do, but most importantly, they are proud to be in FGS. 


My Happiest Memory in the FGS

By Mays Dahadha, 6th Grade Student

One of my happiest memories in the Friends Girls [Lower] School is when I won the elections for the student council.

It was a new, rich experience that made us understand the spirit of the elections throughout this simple experience. I'm sure it's going to stay in our minds for years to go until we participate in real life elections when we grow up.

I felt happy and proud because the students trusted me and they knew I would represent them in a good way. We learned that a candidate should be trustful, sincere, and humble. On the other hand, voters should take the election seriously and vote for the candidate that they feel is going to stand by their side for their rights and demands.

Finally, the most important thing we learned is that cheating and bribes never make you win the hearts of people. 



Nadine Maayeh



Mays Dahadha

Lower School News in Brief

By Diana Abdel Nour, Lower School Principal

MSN/AMIDEAST Training

The MSN Program (Model Schools Network) designed by AMIDEAST (America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc.) for training teachers of 17 private schools is ongoing. AMIDEAST is also funding renovation of our teachers' area and the purchase of five net-books for teacher use. The seven participating RFS teachers reported that:

[W]e were exposed to many important topics such as different learning styles, various methods of teaching, use of technology in classrooms, and class management ... [S]haring experiences is advantageous as teachers from different schools gather and present their ideas to each other. (English teachers)

The training offered us the opportunity to use various methods of critical thinking, training on the Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint, participating in the Science Summer Club, exchanging experiences with the teachers from different schools, and training on how to use the cooperative learning style in teaching. (Math and Science teachers)

MSN is also working with the principals of the 17 schools. They conducted two three-day workshops on transformational principalship and one on setting standards for principals in Palestine. In addition to the benefits we gain from the well-selected American trainers, principals can also share experiences with one another, something that is not practiced in our area.

Teachers' Workshops

Because we believe in teachers' development, we mark a day each semester during which students stay home and teachers participate in full-day training workshops. On March 13, our workshop included four important sessions, including a lecture on Quakerism given by Max Carter from Guilford College, and a lecture by one of the teachers who talked about her journey with an autistic child.

Volunteers

Mark Gillingham, a Canadian volunteer, is spending three months (March-May) with the school. He is helping the English teachers of lower grades by working one-on-one with individual students.

Yearbook Committee

The school's yearbook committee is working hard to prepare for publication and to fundraise by selling very nice pottery (trays and coasters) to the students. Written on the pottery are nice words for Mother's Day, which we celebrated on March 21.

Applying for Enrollment at FGS

The school has been bombarded with applications for enrollment for 2010-11 and is under tremendous pressure from the community to increase the number of admitted students. For the lower kindergarten (4 year olds), we received around 120 applications but only have space for 60 new chil-

East Meets West(town)

By Laura Blum and Hannah Evans, Westtown Class of 2010

A group of seventeen seniors and four teachers from Westtown School in Pennsylvania had the honor of visiting the Ramallah Friends Schools this past March. We came as a part of a “Senior Project” — a unique opportunity for seniors to pursue a topic of interest outside of the school community for two weeks. The goal of our trip was to gain more of an understanding of the religious and cultural landscape of Palestine/Israel, as well as insight into the current political situation. In our first week we visited the Old City, religious sites in Tiberius and Nazareth, an intentional community of Jewish- and Arab-Israelis, and spoke with a number of non-violent activists, both Palestinian and Israeli.

One of the most valuable experiences of our whole trip was our visit to RFS. Several students from the Upper School and their families hosted us. RFS has had a long history of sending students to Westtown, but this was the first time that Westtown students had ever visited RFS. Together with our host students, we visited classes, did service at local refugee camps, and visited Jericho and the Dead Sea. We loved meeting people our age at RFS and getting to know them on a personal level. Our hosts were very gracious and welcoming to us, and provided us with an experience that we will never forget. We hope to have continued contact and friendship with RFS (even if their football team did beat us mercilessly!). To all our friends in Palestine, we miss you. Know that you are always in our thoughts and prayers. We hope this will be the first of many Westtown visits to Ramallah, and you are always welcome at Westtown.



RFS and Westtown students

*Right: Music class;
below: spring field trip*

dren. In first grade, we received 45 applications to fill 15 spaces. Although our criteria give priority to siblings, children of graduates, and girls, the number of those who are meeting the criteria far exceeds our capacity.

I look at this positively: the school is in high demand. I wish we could accept all by opening additional sections, but I know we don't have the space.

School Trips

March 10 was designated for school trips for all grades. First to third grade went to Jericho while fourth to sixth grade went to Jenin. Students enjoyed the day and had fun. All teachers and some parents accompanied the students.

Preparing for Open Day

Teachers are working hard to prepare for Open Day which will be held on May 21. Activities for this year will include:

- A music performance by all students
- A performance of the play, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, by third grade students
- A science, art, and social studies fair with displays
- Educational games that parents and students can enjoy together; hosted by our math teacher

As always, we are looking forward to having a big crowd of parents.



Developing Curriculum in Religion for the Upper School

By Max L. Carter, Director of the Friends Center at Guilford College

Through the delight of a sabbatical from Guilford College, I was able to spend two months in Ramallah this winter during the Centennial celebrations of the Friends meetinghouse, an event that coincided with the 40th anniversary of my first coming to Palestine. I had initially planned to assist in the preparations for the Centennial, but so many wonderful volunteers stepped forward that I was able to turn to helping at the Friends Boys [Upper] School in revising the curriculum for 8th and 10th grade Quakerism and developing a curriculum for a proposed World Religions course for 10th grade.

Quakerism had been added to the curriculum recently to feature the schools' history and the centrality of Quaker testimonies in the schools' culture. The courses had been creatively planned by Baltimore Yearly Meeting volunteer, Betsy Brinson, and teachers, Ramzi Shaheen and Vivek Chilukuri. I added a summary of Quaker origins and diversity, along with a focus on how Quaker testimonies apply to the students' own lives.

Building a world religions curriculum was a greater challenge. Such a course has not recently been taught at the RFS, but the administration is keenly interested in introducing the study to its students, so they may have a deeper appreciation for the traditions of others and an understanding of a world restricted to them by military occupation. Moreover, only

eight one-hour periods are allotted for covering the world's religions! Beginning with an excellent book in the Upper School library by Huston Smith, I used his approach of seeking the commonalities of religions in addressing the needs and desires of humanity: understanding our place in the material world and harmonizing that understanding with "revealed" Truth from "above".

As proposed, the course will begin with a look at "the primordial tradition" of the "four-layer universe," the realms of the physical, psychological/biological, theological, and spiritual. In succession, then, these concepts will be observed in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, "non-orthodox" faiths, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and "aboriginal" traditions. Each unit will begin with an outline of that religion's historical development and will include key concepts and terms, classroom exercises, and questions for reflection.

Each unit will seek to give not only an understanding of each religion's distinctives, but also the similar ways each addresses the human condition. The exercises and questions seek to engage the students in critical thinking about their own beliefs and lives in Palestine.

It has been a blessing and privilege to be allowed to work on this project! If the students learn a fraction of what I have gained from the experience, it will be a success!



Max Carter and RFS 8th grade student, Ayham Zughayer



Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

Back to School Bonfire

In cooperation with the student council, the annual back to school bonfire took place on October 15. It was a good opportunity for our students and staff to have fun together while celebrating the beginning of a new school year.

MUN Conferences

The participation of Upper School students in Model United Nations (MUN) conferences is growing each year and has become a tradition. This year, 12 students participated in the MUN conference in the Netherlands. Another six went in January 2010 to Jordan. Six students participated for the first time at a conference in New York in March 2010 and another six went to a conference in Cairo. All students from grades 9–12 were given the opportunity to apply for participation. The selection process was based on academic achievement, commitment and behavior, activities and leadership, and presentation skills.

Exchange Program

The school announced scholarship exchange program opportunities in partnership with William Penn Charter, Pennsylvania; Westtown School, Pennsylvania; George School, Pennsylvania; and Sidwell Friends School, Washington, D.C. These four Quaker schools have generously offered to accept one student each and to provide scholarships for them for academic year 2010–11. These schools are among the best Quaker schools and offer a quality of education and experience that is rarely matched by others.

The school held a presentation about the exchange program for interested ninth grade students and their parents. The school selected four students from the applicants based on several criteria: academic achievement, mastery of the English language, leadership skills, community service participation, and personality.

RFS Launches New School History Archive

By Betsy Brinson, RFS volunteer historian and archivist

How can we tell the history of the Ramallah Friends Schools if we do not have good records of what has happened over the past 140 years? We are pleased to announce the recent creation of a school history archive. With the establishment of this official depository, we are closer to sharing our history with the public at large, and remembering it ourselves.

Betsy Brinson and Gordon Davies, volunteers this school year from the United States, have spent much of the year tracking down documents and old school photographs and entering them into an electronic database. To date, there are almost 700 photographs of students, teachers, and staff, buildings and school activities dating from 1869 when the school was first founded. We hope to find and add more photos to this rich collection.

Paper records and documents have been collected from alumni and various school collections. We have searched through old files, storage boxes, and closets. We even got material from the trunk of a car. It has been quite an adventure!

We note that the Lower School, under the leadership of school principal, Diana Abdel Nour, and her predecessors, has been particularly successful in maintaining its old records over the years.

The school archive will be permanently located in the Upper School library. School librarian and archivist Lisa Ma'rouf will oversee and maintain these valuable items.


Using professional archival standards, paper documents and historic photographs will be placed in acid-free storage boxes in order to preserve them for the future. New materials will be added as they are



Tim Hussey presents Joyce Ajlouny with a collection of rare documents and photographs from the Hussey family archive. Tim is the great-great-grandson of Timothy B. and Anna Hussey, who helped to begin the Friends Girls School. These early Quakers also helped select and purchase the land for the Friends Boys School in the late 19th century. Tim was in Ramallah for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Friends Meetinghouse. He stayed at the Boys School during his visit.

identified. All materials will be open to scholars and others conducting research. They will also be open to alumni and current students.

Alumni have been encouraged to share their personal school photos. These photos will be scanned into the electronic collection and returned promptly to their owners. In addition, school alumni have been invited to share their most memorable school stories to be included in the archive.

Finally, Betsy, a professional public historian, has conducted hour-long oral history interviews with over 40 graduates, teachers, administrators, and students to help in telling the school story. These interviews will be transcribed and the written transcripts will be placed in the school archive for permanent safekeeping. The actual recordings will be saved in an archival database. Excerpts from the interviews will also be used in a proposed school history publication. 

World Religions Course

On the recommendation of the PTA, the school started developing a course on World Religions to be taught through the Ethics classes next year for grade 10. Max Carter, a professor at Guilford College and an old friend of the school, has volunteered to develop the course (see Max's article, p. 4). In addition, Betsy Brinson is working on developing two Ethics courses on Quakerism for grades 8 and 10 (see Betsy's article, above).

Folk Dance

The school's debkeh (traditional Palestinian dance) group had a very successful performance in January which was attended by over 800 people. They performed at the Ramallah Cultural Palace, a hall that is generally reserved for professional events. They also performed at the inauguration celebration of our new classrooms building in February, much to the delight of our distinguished guests.

RFS Debkeh Ensemble at Ramallah Cultural Palace



Community service: clearing rubbish



RFS boys' basketball team wins district tournament

Community Service

Mohammad Salim, the coordinator of the community service program, continues to work with different charitable organizations to send our students to them to do voluntary work. Groups of students participated in several projects during the past months, such as planting trees with the municipalities of Ramallah and Al-Bireh, olive picking in several villages, and cleaning green areas in the Ramallah area.

Boys Basketball

The school's boys' basketball team won first place in the tournament for all schools in the Ramallah District this year. Like all of our teams, we are happy and proud of their achievement.

Meet Our Faculty

By Rebecca Mason, RFS Development Officer

Many of our newsletter readers have encountered names over the years that have become familiar: Diana Abdel Nour (Lower School principal), Mahmoud Amra (Upper School principal), Joyce Ajlouny (RFS director) ... the list goes on and on. Many of our readers also have an understanding of the projects and progress made by our faculty and staff. But there is so much more to our faculty than curricula and classrooms, and we want to better acquaint you, our friends and supporters, with the lives and opinions of some key faculty who have dedicated their careers to the Ramallah Friends Schools, shaping it into the fine institution that it is today. Duha Al-Masri (head of preschool) and Mohammad Salim Darzaid (Upper School teacher and Community Service coordinator) are two such educators who continue to make a positive impact on our students, our school, and our local community.



Duha Al-Masri

Right: Teaching basic math through counting beads



Duha Al-Masri was born and raised in Nablus, the eldest daughter of six children. "My childhood was very rich with experiences. What was really distinct about it was the space that my parents provided us with; space to think, to play, and be independent, basically it was fun." After graduating from Birzeit University in 1982, she began her career at RFS as a kindergarten teacher. In 2000, she was promoted to head of the preschool and has since been instrumental in creating innovative curricula that encompass environmental awareness, civics, and leadership. Duha has also cultivated strong relationships with other area schools as well as with the Ministry of Education, leading to partnerships in which RFS serves as a model for teacher training aimed at implementing aspects of our unique programs into local schools.

Duha's most memorable teaching experience was also her greatest learning experience: "My first encounter with an autistic child came at a time when I had no experience with children who had special needs. At that point, I just thought that this child was being difficult and stubborn. After the child was diagnosed with autism, I felt really sad regarding my initial reaction. It was an eye-opening experience that reflected itself on my attitude and my work throughout the years." And it shows. Duha has welcomed many students with special cognitive and physical needs with open arms; she has also been instrumental in shaping RFS's mainstream education policy and Special Needs program at the kindergarten level.

Duha remains committed to spreading environmental awareness in the school as well as in the community: she is a volunteer with the Committee for the Environmental Beautification of Ramallah as well as a member of the steering committee for "Green Schools," a joint project between the Ministry of Education and the Ramallah Municipality.

Like Duha, Mohammad Saleem Darzaid is a long-time faculty member who has helped to cultivate the minds and hearts of his students. In addition to teaching math and ethics, Mohammad serves as the coordinator for CAS (Creativity, Action, and Service), a community service element of the International Baccalaureate program. Through CAS, Mohammad matches RFS students with service learning projects ranging from clearing rubbish from vacant lots for new gardens to visiting the elderly in local nursing homes. His commitment to youth leadership development extends beyond the school's walls: he served for many years as the leader of the Boy Scouts in Al-Bireh and he is the current secretary general of the Al-Bireh Youth Foundation.

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



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*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2009–2010 range from U.S. \$1,800 to U.S. \$2,630.

For further information and inquiries, feel free to contact our office at development@palfriends.org or Tel: +972-2-295-2286, www.palfriends.org.

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As one of 11 children, Mohammad was born in the village of Beit-Ello but grew up in Ramallah. Five of his brothers are teachers, and most of his siblings live abroad. He graduated from Yarmouk University in Jordan in 1980 and began teaching at RFS in 1984 as a math teacher after a few years of teaching in area public schools. Throughout the years, Mohammad has served as head of the yearbook committee, head of the math department, and a member of the teachers' committee. Mohammad is an avid reader of poetry. The last book he read was a collection of poems by Mahmoud Darwish, the most well-loved Palestinian poet. When asked who he would choose to be for one day, Mohammad chose the classic Arab poet, Almutanaby. "He was a wise, intelligent, and brave poet. If I were Almutanaby for one day, I would stand in front of the people and read my poetry and ask them to be honest, simple, creative, and generous." This is exactly what he asks of his students.

Both Duha Al-Masri and Mohammad Saleem Darzaid find Ramallah Friends Schools to be the best fit for their teaching methodologies. Duha finds the school to be well-suited to her desire for professional and personal development and Mohammad appreciates that the school's principles and values extend beyond the classrooms and into the greater community through the cultivation of relationships between students, their families, and the school's faculty and staff. We are grateful for Duha and Mohammad and hope that they continue to mold our students into the strong and integral leaders of tomorrow for many years to come. 



Mohammad Saleem Darzaid



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Donor Spotlight: Bethesda Friends Meeting

We gratefully acknowledge our long-standing supporters from Bethesda Friends Meeting. For 36 years, Bethesda Friends have been hosting the annual Spring Fling social gathering in an effort to raise funds for our Scholarship Program. Over the years, their efforts have given many financially disadvantaged students the opportunity for a great education while raising awareness about our school. Thank you, Bethesda Friends!

Friends Schools, Ramallah/Al-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General
October 1, 2009—April 1, 2010

Donor Thanks

We would like to thank the following people and their meetings for their recent donations to Ramallah Friends Schools.

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