Friends Schools Newsletter Spring 2011

Two Unforgettable Years

By Vivek Chilukuri, RFS English Teacher

s an Indian-American in Palestine, I've grown quite accustomed to explaining to curious parents, vendors, and acquaintances, exactly what I'm doing here. "No, I'm not scouting for a Bollywood movie! No, I'm not undercover with the CIA!" In conversations last year, when I was finally able to explain myself, I usually rambled about my desire to see the Middle East, study Arabic, and work with young people. Today, however, I can explain why I'm here in one word:

divide the explain in Palestine, I've grown accustomed to explain acquirements."



My students, despite all their energy and

mischief, have made my experience in Palestine worth all the frustration, sleep deprivation, and Allenby Bridge Border crossing interrogations of the last eighteen months. Whether in profound comments in class discussions, hilarious performances of classic plays, or inspired leadership at Model United Nations conferences, Friends students have repeatedly shown me their boundless warmth, passion, and intellect. They have grown all too familiar with my endless writing handouts, indecipherable essay corrections, and obsession with neatly numbered agendas. I have come to appreciate their negotiation skills, on par with el-hisbeh's (local vegetable market) finest; desk art that would put Van Gogh to shame; the belief that no essay is complete without a plastic sleeve; and the ability to frustrate even the most carefully planned seating arrangement. As we've read, written, spelled, and yelled together over the last year-and-a-half, I have developed a deep respect for our students.

That is because my experience with Friends students has given me enormous hope about the future of Palestine. When our students discuss their experiences as children in the second *intifada*, or their frustrations about sociopolitical stagnation in the region, I am powerfully reminded of the maturity this conflict has forced on their young minds. It is this maturity of mind that has led them, fearlessly, to take on complex and often controversial material in class: "What is the role of media in society?" "How does culture influence gender roles?" "What is the nature of justice, and of life itself?" In their answers, but more importantly, in their willingness to question, I feel confident that Palestine is in good hands.

Much credit for this must go to our school. By providing a wide range of challenging classes, an atmosphere of open debate, and encouragement for service and activism, the Friends School helps cultivate well-balanced, thoughtful young people prepared for success in arts, sciences, business, and politics. Perhaps most importantly, the Friends School helps show Palestine's youth that, while walls may limit where they move, live, and work—no wall can limit how they think, feel, or dream.

Helping to keep that spirit alive over the last eighteen months, in whatever small part, has been an extraordinary privilege.

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Editor: Jumana Thalji, RFS Director's Office

Writing Puts Quaker Values into Practice

By Deena Zaru, FGS English Teacher

oming back to Palestine after ten years has been difficult—things are not as I remember them—but simultaneously fulfilling because I have had the chance to become familiar with home for a second time. I have collected every meaningful experience from growing up in the United States and studying English and Journalism at Guilford College and brought these lessons back to my school.

I spent the first quarter familiarizing myself with the students, the curriculum, and the teacher community. The second and third quarters I have been assessing how I can be of use and implementing reforms and adjustments to my approach and vision. I am deeply influenced by the Quaker testimonies of integrity, peace, simplicity, and equality, as these universal values have been at the core

of my education, the core of my family life, and the core of my spirituality as a Quaker. However, these beliefs could easily remain words pinned to our bulletin boards or taped on the walls of the classrooms if they do not guide our practice and the code of conduct that defines our relationships with each other.

The primary method in which I chose to incorporate these beliefs into the curriculum was by beginning a writing club for fifth and sixth graders and emphasizing writing in my classes, both for academic growth and as a way of practicing peaceful and respectful communication that students have been learning in their Problem Solving classes. Writing has the potential to teach children self-expression and self-respect, as it is a centered, peaceful way of communicating one's thoughts and beliefs. Through writing, people can come to terms with other people, ideas, or themselves.

Students have utilized writing assignments to resolve problems related to bullying, aggressive words, and acts in the classroom; to express and resolve fear and anger; to tell their stories; and to forgive, on many levels. I am continually impressed by each of my students. Through this process I have learned that while teachers can be a form of energy and strength for their students, students are often, if not more often, a source of energy and strength for me.

Sometimes seeing things through the eyes of a child gives adults more capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and strength. Working with children has reminded me that despite the war and hatred that define the news, the world truly is full of love and goodness.

The following are two selections that my students wrote. I thank them and all of my students, especially those deeply involved in writing, for their hard work and for sharing their insight with the community through the yearbook and in class.



Deena surrounded by her students. From right: Shahd Sawalhi, behind her Salma Mousa, Deena Zaru, Wasim Daibes, and Mohamad Rantisi

A Historic Moment for Egypt

By Salma Mousa, Grade (5A) student

t's a new and exciting page for the Egyptian people. Mubarak is gone! After 30 years of him being a president, he is done. Over two million Egyptians had been walking in the streets saying that they don't want Mubarak to rule anymore because there is too much poverty. Mubarak is very wealthy and all of his friends are very wealthy too, but most of the 85 million Egyptians are very poor. They want to have the right to choose a leader. The people's wishes became true after eighteen days of protesting. Flags are flying in the sky, tears are falling like rain for the martyrs of the revolution and happiness that there is now hope. Songs and dances are in the air. This is a historic moment and I saw it all on TV. But the question now is what to do after Mubarak and who will now lead? That's the question on everyone's mind. That's the first step for Arabs to change their world for the better. I think all the Egyptians will raise their heads up and they will have self-confidence because they are able to create change. I hope that Palestinians would do the same and change their own lives and one day be free.

Back Home

By Shahd Sawalhi, Grade (5A) student

'm a Palestinian and I live in Ramallah. It is a nice hilly city, famous for planting olive and almond trees. It has moderate weather and all the visitors feel the warm and nice hospitality when they visit it. Despite the nice overall view of Ramallah, I still feel sad to be away from my city of origin, Jaffa. Jaffa is a very nice city near the sea and it was called The Pride of the Sea. I was lucky one day to have a permit to visit Jaffa and it was a historical day for me because I had never been there. I went with my father and brother to visit. It was not so easy for us to reach Jaffa because there were many Israeli checkpoints.

Jaffa was occupied in 1948 by the Israeli army. The Israelis forced the Palestinians to leave their homes and lands and stay as refugees in the Arab countries and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. My grandfather and mother left their home and land and went to Beirut. They left everything behind them, thinking they will soon be back. The Israelis prevented the Palestinians from going back and they closed the borders. Till today, Palestinians are not allowed to even visit.

When we got close to Jaffa we began to smell different scents coming from the flowers of the orange fields and the humidity of the sea. Suddenly my memory went back to the stories of my father and mother in laffa. In the first moment I stepped down from the car my foot touched the land of laffa and I started to feel the breath and the voice of my grandfather and I felt that I am seeing him for the first time. Then we went to the beach and I saw the fine sand and the waves of the sea that took my grandfather's boat to Beirut. We saw the famous Watch Square and the old mosques and churches, buildings, streets, and homes in Jaffa. I now realize why people say "there is no place like home". We spent a lovely few days but we couldn't stay longer because our permit expired. Unfortunately, we couldn't get another permit after that visit to laffa. I hope that one day I can go back home.

Students' colorful plasticine models from the animation workshop amazed the entire school.

Lower School News in Brief

By Frieda Khayat, Acting Principal of FGS

MSN/AMIDEAST Training

The participation of FGS in the teacher development portion of the Model School Network (MSN) concluded in December 2010. MSN is a school improvement project funded by USAID and administered by AMIDEAST (America-Mideast Educational and Training Services). Over two years, seven FGS teachers from the subjects of English, science, and math participated in bi-monthly professional development sessions aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. The MSN program encouraged teachers from seventeen local private schools to build strong professional relationships in order to support and enhance their classroom practice.

Development

Stephanie Cole was appointed as the Head of Academics at the FGS. Stephanie comes to us with impressive credentials. Over the last sixteen years she has been a teacher, master trainer, curriculum developer, and instructional leader for numerous organizations in Palestine and abroad. Ms. Cole will fulfill several senior level responsibilities that focus on raising the quality of instruction. These include working closely with teachers in setting up a student-centered instructional program, especially in preparation for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP). In addition, Stephanie will provide important support to the FGS English Department. Before her appointment, Stephanie volunteered her personal time and conducted an institutional quality assessment for the FGS. The final report was submitted to the school's Board of Trustees.

Environment

FGS has engaged with the Ramallah Municipality to work on three environmental projects as part of our school curriculum in all grades. New procedures and activities are being implemented to make the campus and classrooms environmentally friendly. In addition, our weekly Monday morning assemblies have featured guests who have focused on environmental issues. These guests have included a representative from the municipal water department and a civil engineer.

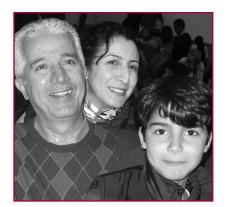
Animation Workshop

Since January, the FGS flat has been rented by two animators from Northern Ireland and Germany. Gary Roborough and Ian Caspers work with the A.M. Qattan Foundation as developers of the Animation in Education Program in Palestine. For the past four years, they have trained teachers and students in using the technique of traditional stop-motion animation. Their workshop series has taken them to schools in Silwan, Bethlehem, Jenin, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Haifa, Gaza, and other locations in Palestine. Here at the FGS, they have been working with teachers from the Learning Support Department and third grade students.

The Supportive Role of Parents

By Dr. Ghassan Toubassi, Head of PTA

or the last four years the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) has strived to activate and strengthen the relations between the three major components in the school: the school administration, the faculty, and the students and their parents. The PTA is in continuous follow up with all parties and holds regular meetings with the school administration and the teachers as well as the Student Council.



RFS PTA member, Mr. Bassam Walweel with his family at the event that was organized by the PTA in cooperation with the Student Council for supporting the Students' Financial Aid Fund.

Lately, we have been working closely with the school on the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Program. For that purpose, we have formed a committee for parents interested in exchanging thoughts and ideas that will lead to the best implementation of the program.

We are fully aware that our sons and daughters are taught by the most qualified and educated teachers and we believe that the Friends School stands out as the best academic institution in the country. Therefore, we should establish joint forces to understand and hear each other's viewpoints in order to be able to achieve the best results.

We recently sponsored the "Back-to-School" party for elementary students, and earlier we managed to furnish the Cinema club in the school. More recently, we launched an important event in cooperation with the Student Council with the aim of collecting donations to support the Students' Financial Aid Fund. The event included an auction of

the students' art works. Around 250 parents attended the event, which included several musical performances by RFS students.

We hope that we will always be able to promote and support the school that we cherish, because the school plays a vital role in the education and upbringing of our children.

Lower School News in Brief

continued from page 3

School Anthem

The FGS school anthem has been revived. Students now sing the anthem as part of the Monday morning chapel program.

Yearbook Committee

The school's yearbook committee is working hard on this year's edition. The committee has held fundraisers such as a bake sale and selling Mother's Day gifts.

Preparing for the Open Day

Teachers and administrative staff are busy with preparations for the FGS Open Day on Friday, April 8. Students will present musical and athletic performances during the day. Other planned activities include games, face painting, educational displays, and a book sale.

Elections for Sixth Graders

Elections for our sixth graders are an annual practice at FGS. Students study the democratic process then put it into practice. Students nominate themselves, campaign, and vote for representatives in election booths. Teachers and parents assist students in this important learning activity. The election process and results have been broadcast on local TV channels.

Christmas

Three Christmas musical performances took place in December for the school community. Students presented Christmas songs and sketches, as well as a flute recorder performance. In coordination with the Peace Center in Bethlehem, our school participated in decorating a Christmas tree. FGS students created ornaments for the tree. These decorations included their own messages of peace for the world. The Christmas tree was displayed in Bethlehem.

Community Service: Activities That Support Our Values

Donations were made to the annual White Gifts Program by FGS students and families, as well as by school staff and other members of the school community. This year White Gifts gave support to 127 needy families and students during the Christmas season. Fourth and fifth grade students made visits to five community charitable institutions. They performed songs and distributed gifts during these visits.

Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

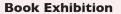
The IB Middle Years Program

After several years of hard work from the staff, the school became this year an IB Middle Years Program (MYP) Candidate School. A pre-authorization visit took place on November 3rd and 4th. The authorization team from the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) met Board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The visiting team's report was

very positive and the IBO is arranging for the authorization visit to our school for November 2011. Among the preparation for the MYP, nine FBS teachers visited the Al-Mashreq MYP authorized school in Amman to gain a first-hand experience on the implementation of the program.

Dabkeh

The yearly performance of the folk dance (Dabkeh) group took place in the school's multipurpose hall at the end of January (photo top right). The performance was attended by over 700 parents and students. The group was also invited to the Kings Academy School in Amman in February and performed for the students there.



The Arabic department organized a four-day book exhibition at the school. Major bookstores participated in the exhibition that was visited by hundreds of students and parents (photo middle right).

MUN Conferences

The participation of Upper School students in Model United Nations (MUN) conferences is growing each year. Twelve students participated in the MUN conference in Amman in October. Another six went in January to Doha, Qatar.

Exchange Program

The school was once again proud to announce scholarship exchange program opportunities in partnership with Westtown and Penn Charter schools in Pennsylvania and Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. These three Quaker schools have generously offered to accept one sophomore student each and to provide a full scholarship for the academic year. The school is in the process of selecting the students who will be offered this valuable opportunity.

Westtown School Visit to the RFS

For the second year in a row, the Friends School had the honor to host eleven seniors and four adults from Westtown School in Pennsylvania at the beginning of March. The Westtown students and teachers were hosted by RFS students and adult supervisors for a week where they had a full schedule of activities. Westtown students attended classes, did service work planting trees (photo bottom right), attended talks about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, and visited Jericho and the Dead Sea.





The Student Council at RFS

By Faris Saadeh, Student Council President

he Student Council is an elected group of students, consisting of a president, vice president, and second vice president. There are also an Arabic secretary, English secretary, and a treasurer. Representatives are elected from grades 7-11. The Student Council is elected by the whole student body.

Members of the Student Council work hard to identify the needs of students, represent them in meetings, and fulfill student expectations. The Student Council listens to all students in order to bring about change and development for the entire student community.

The Student Council's work touches the educational, social, and civic lives of upper school students. Officers know their positions require responsibility and effort beyond the school day. All students are encouraged to work with the Student Council to improve the school and the community.

The 2010/2011 Student Council are proud to announce the following accomplishments:

- 1) The annual Halloween party;
- 2) Picking olives in many different regions of the West Bank;
- 3) A student assembly in memory of Yasser Arafat;
- 4) A movie night that was organized by the cinema club;
- 5) A student assembly in memory of Belfour's treaty;
- 6) The creation of the "Student's Scholarship Fund", funded by students;
- 7) Several sports activities;
- 8) Publishing a school magazine;
- 9) Selling student sweaters;
- 10) Color Day for 7th-9th graders;
- 11) Dabkeh (Palestinian Folklore dance) show and performance;
- 12) A trip to the King's Academy School in Jordan for a performance by our Dabkeh Troup;
- 13) The revision of the Student Council Constitution;
- 14) Introducing the idea of solid waste separation at the school by distributing a wide variety of recycling bins in cooperation with Environmental Club;
- 15) Conducting discussion sessions;
- 16) Hebrew language courses;
- 17) Organizing the annual "Junior-Senior" party.

As our term ends, we are looking forward to completing promises we've made to the students. In order to fulfill our duties, we are planning several events before the end of this school year, including:

- 1) A conference about the role of youth in resisting the occupation;
- 2) The second edition of the school's magazine, Amigos;
- 3) Several sports tournaments;
- 4) Several memorials for upcoming national occasions;
- 5) Traditional Palestinian food day;
- 6) Producing a film about "normalization";
- 7) A "Film Festival" where interested students can make movies which the student body will view and select a winner.

The Student Council members are willing to give our precious school more and more each day, as we have always felt that the school is our second home! Serving the school to us doesn't stop at the school's gates, since by our work we don't just serve the school but we also serve our beautiful country, Palestine.



RFS students picking olives at the village of Birzeit near Ramallah.



FBS students enjoying "Color Day" organized by the Student Council.

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



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Sterling (£) Gifts: should be made payable to the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET), noting "for Ramallah" on the back and 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@tiscali.co.uk.

*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2010–2011 range from U.S. \$2,000 to \$2,700.

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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Walking in the Footsteps

By Subhi Khoury, RFS Senior

n the Administration Building at our school, there once was a ramp with stairs on the side. I used to jump up the ramp and continue while a friend of mine took the stairs. One time I told him, "Just jump, it will be much faster and easier." He told me, "But I want to walk in the footsteps of all the great people that entered this school." His answer was supposed to be comic, as he rarely took anything seriously. However, his answer made me think.

The Friends School is more than 100 years old—just think of all the influential people who've passed through its halls. Also, since Palestine is such a small country, imagine the effect this school has had on our history. Though at times I've felt cynical and dispirited about school, months before graduating I know with certainty that our school is doing something right. In opening the eyes of Palestinian youth to the world, our school is a powerful incubator of new thinkers and leaders. At our school, you can adopt whichever opinion suits you, as long as you are prepared to defend it. That's more than you are allowed to do in Al-Manara (city center) these days. By never aligning with one political group or ideology, this school has rightly prioritized producing passionate, well-rounded Palestinians with free minds.

For all its merits, our school has some faults. It does too good a job at educating us and opening our eyes to the wide possibilities of the world, and in doing so, makes us unsuited for life in Palestine. From my father's class, Class of 1978, only ten percent remain in this country. Whether this will be the fate of my class, I do not know; but, wherever we may be, this school has done a great job at preparing us for life.

Hopefully, one day, I will walk my own children through the welcoming doors of the Friends School and up the steps where so many have gone before.



Subhi Khoury



Ramallah Friends Schools c/o Friends United Meeting 101 Quaker Hill Drive Richmond IN 47374-1926

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Joyce Ajlouny,

RFS Director, will be at the FUM Triennial in Wilmington, Ohio, July 27-31. Visit www.fum.org for more information and to register.

Donor Thanks

Friends Schools, Ramallah/Al-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General October 1, 2010 - March 1, 2011

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

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