



Quaker Education in Palestine since 1869

Ramallah Friends School takes another large step into the future of learning!

By Salim Zughayer, RFS IT Manager and Joseph Devoir, RFS teacher

A Tradition of Excellence and the Future of Education

Ramallah Friends Upper School has been the premier educational institution in Palestine for well over a hundred years. Walking through the gates of the school, one is not only struck by the beauty of the grounds, but also by a sense of temporal displacement. The ancient buildings covered in ivy and their stone surfaces that countless students have made smooth over the years give one the sense of having gone back in time.

However, if one journeys further into the school, and especially into the classrooms, the feeling of having gone back in time quickly disappears. The Friends School of today is increasingly known for its technological advances in teaching methods.

Old buildings and classrooms have been retrofitted with the newest tools such as, elevators to assist students with special needs and power point projectors for multimedia presentations. The school has worked hard to stay on the cutting edge of learning technology. The payoff in terms of student performance and technical savvy has been considerable. Graduates now leave our school filled with the knowledge they have gained, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, they leave equipped with the tools needed to continue their learning in a new world of unlimited information and access.

As technology continues to advance at exponential rates, it is not possible to rest on past success and advancement for long. In other words, for the Friends School to remain on the cutting edge, we have to continue moving forward.

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Friends School Newsletter

Spring 2013



We are delighted that **Lena Awwad**, member of the Ramallah Friends School Class of 2009, received the 2013 Harvard College Women's Leadership Award. This award each year recognizes a graduating senior at Harvard who has demonstrated exceptional leadership.

Lena is the co-chair of the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Committee. Having been unable to attend Ramallah Friends School for three years as a child during the second Intifada because of the Israeli checkpoints closing off her village, her focus has been on advocating for the Palestinian right to education. Through persistence she completed her education and made it to Harvard. She has been a role-model to many fellow students and to women in her college community and at home. A ceremony honoring Lena was held on April 15th at Harvard. We are extremely proud!



Ramallah Friends School
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*Photo on the cover:
Second graders enjoying their break*

Ramallah Friends School is a
ministry of Friends United Meeting



Sweet Sorrow

By Hendrik Taatgen, Lower School Principal 2011-2013

At any school students and their teachers should regularly see their principal walk in the hallways, stop by in their classrooms or visit on the soccer field or playground during recess. The principal's area of work encompasses the entire school, not just the office. Regrettably, deterioration of my knees makes it increasingly difficult for me to move around school, and it is time for me to leave. Shakespeare said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." I care about Palestine and will miss the school in many ways:



Hendrik with RFS kindergarten students

- Nurturing students' curiosity about the world and their appetite for learning
- Working with teachers to optimize education for our students
- Witnessing self-confidence in teachers grow because of trust placed in them
- Meeting and conversing with parents who take education to heart and support the school in positive and constructive ways
- Working with my team of dedicated support staff



I hope to return. Marga and I love Palestine, and it is our dream to come back and hike Palestine from north to south. (In my case, with new knees!) We promise we will stop by the school and check in with old friends, colleagues and supporters. In wishing everyone all the best, let me conclude with my usual acknowledgement: Thank you for your support of FGS.

Lower School News in Brief

By Hendrik Taatgen, Lower School Principal

Academic Improvement Plan

Under the caring and conscientious guidance of Ms. Duha Masri, the Lower School teachers continue to improve their UbD (Understanding by Design) skills. UbD unit plans progress in creativity and quality, bringing educators closer to the goal of integrated teaching and learning. As the UbD skills advance, our school becomes better prepared to implement the Primary Years Program (PYP). One way to do this is to use field trips as a capstone activity that completes a unit. With the Ministry of Education restrictions on school field trips loosening, teachers now plan for and carry out exciting educational excursions. All the Lower School teachers participated in school field trips to Nablus in January and Jericho in February. Every one of the teachers found the trips to be quite informative. Excursions are designed to extend education outside of the classroom adding an experiential dimension to learning. We hope our students will gain a fuller understanding of Palestinian identity from a first-hand experience of the country's flora and fauna, customs and ways of life, historical sites and means of livelihood in these field trips.

Parent Volunteer Program

Ms. Elizabeth Price, who has children attending the school, developed a Parent Volunteer Program (PVP). Although many active and supportive parents volunteer in the library, some parents through this program, have donated time and energy to other school programs including field trips, class presentations, teacher assistance in the classrooms and after-school activities. Stories of volunteer efforts and help needed are showcased on the school website.

After-School Student Life

To engage students in productive after-school learning, the Athletics program was introduced last year. This year the English-language program Reading Eggs was added. Student involvement in these programs provides a healthy alternative to time they might otherwise spend surfing the internet without parental supervision. Negative consequences of unsupervised student internetting — screen addiction, cyber-bullying, accessing x-rated and violent websites, sleep disruption and nightmares — is becoming apparent to

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Enter the Al Nayzak for Supportive Education and Scientific Innovation

2013 is an important year in the technological advancement of the school. This year, Friends began a two-year partnership with a Ramallah-based Palestinian nongovernmental organization, Al Nayzak, which also receives support from the Welfare Association, another Ramallah-based foundation.

The initial stages of the program involve the training of seven Friends School teachers, one from each of the seven departments. As the program advances, these teachers then receive “smart boards” that allow the whole classrooms to engage in an interactive and virtual learning environment that can change at the touch of a finger.

Beyond the new teaching gadgets, the partnership also introduces a number of new learning methods into the curriculum. Each participant will be responsible for creating and distributing learning objects for their students and fellow teachers. Science students will be able to create, destroy and reassemble molecules before our eyes. Geography classes will explore the world like never before.

RFS has introduced the Tafkeer Program in the seventh and eighth grades. This program aims to enhance student capacity to problem solve in creative and tangible ways. Card games, real-life mazes, complex puzzles and, of course, chess replace traditional books and lecture learning.



Upper school students using the smart board in one of their classes

Robotic Learning?

Perhaps one of the most ambitious and pioneering aspects of our new partnership will be the creation of both a Technology and Robotics Laboratory on our campus. In the early stages, eighth and ninth graders will begin the Robotics Club that, through the use of Legos and electrical equipment, will pave the way for a permanent Robotics Lab. The program will also see the creation of a Technology Lab completely separate from the existing computer and science labs, allowing students to learn and create using wood, plastic and electronics.

Each of these programs will exponentially increase the level of student interaction in the learning process. They represent the bridge between the theory of books and the technological wizardry of classrooms. Students are no longer just learning about things; they are creating them.

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educators all over the world, including FGS teachers. For this reason we urge parents to monitor their child's computer use and disallow their child's use of Facebook.

Grade 6 -7 English Transition

Are FGS graduates well enough prepared for the Middle Years Program (MYP) at FBS? At the beginning of the year, some parents expressed concern about a possible gap between English in Grade 6 and English in Grade 7. To ensure that no such gap exists, we addressed two issues: (1) there must be a seamless transition between the elementary and middle school curricular standards, and (2) the Grade 7 English program must build on the learning outcomes of individual FGS graduates. FBS (Upper School) and FGS principals, English department heads and teachers met to follow up on these issues.

School Organizational Structure and Student Routines

In a sense, there is little difference between teachers and students at a school. Yes, teachers teach, and students learn. However, it is the responsibility of the school administration to recognize that both teachers and students have the capability to grow, mature and fulfill their potential within the school community. This has led us



Sixth grade students in their Art class

to introduce certain procedures for students such as homeroom at each grade level, a purposeful homework policy and organizational tools (student planners and lockers). We hope independence, collaboration and individual responsibility will develop as procedures and tools are utilized. Teachers are focusing on developing confidence-building. With a head teacher facilitating the meetings, teachers within each grade level gather regularly to plan for, discuss and reflect on instruction. Confidence is developed as teachers learn to trust and respect the gifts and capabilities of their colleagues. At this point not everything is running perfectly, but the momentum for capacity-building has gained pace and things are moving in the right direction.

Ramallah Friends School Projects

By Farhat Muhawi, RFS Project Manager

Prior to joining RFS in May 2012, I worked on various matters related to the protection and rehabilitation of architectural heritage in Palestine. In Ramallah we considered the two relatively large campuses of the Friends School, with their historical buildings and abundant natural ecology to be among the most significant and beautiful sites in the city.

Sadly, after the Oslo Accords in 1994 and the years that followed as a result of large scale and improperly planned urban expansion and construction, Ramallah has gradually lost its identity and charm as a summer destination in Palestine. Despite that, RFS campuses have kept the memory and identity of the place by preserving its cultural landscape. Therefore, it gives me considerable pleasure to be working within such a rich environment.

Several completed projects marked the 2012-2013 school year. At the Lower School, two main projects were finalized. Two stories (third and fourth floors) were added over the existing two completing the kindergarten building. The third floor includes five large classrooms and teachers' offices, and the fourth floor consists of a new multi-purpose hall (named after RFS attendee and supporter Mr. Khaldoun Tabari) that serves more than 750 students. The Landscaping and Soccer Fields Project was a major endeavor and consisted of two artificial turf soccer fields and the re-landscaping of the fields. This project has transformed the entire area behind the administrative building from a neglected and unused area into a beautiful, highly used, and safe space for the elementary students to enjoy. In addition to the safety factor, artificial turf has the advantages of being low maintenance, not requiring the use of massive amounts of water for irrigation.

At the Upper School, the moving and rehabilitating of the cafeteria kitchen cleared the way for the hosting in the near fu-



RFS students enjoying an art class in the beautiful green areas of the upper school

ture at the administrative building, the special needs program. Thanks to support from USAID/ASHA, the running track facility and landscaping surrounding the large artificial turf soccer field is complete, positioning RFS as the only school in Palestine with such a resource. The creation of a drop off/pick up area within the school limits allows for a smoother and more organized process of movement. Finally, the school completed the construction of an Eco-room: a one story, one room, mud brick building with many environmental elements, such as a wind catcher and recycled materials. This Eco-room will host an exhibition that will help students in Palestine better understand the importance of environmental issues and eco-building. Plans for the Upper School include building a new Middle School, using the expert services of Fielding Nair International.

Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal



Participating in MUN conferences

Our MUN (Model United Nations) club is an international academic club simulating the United Nations. Our club participated in five MUN conferences held in the countries of Dubai, Qatar, the Netherlands, India and Jordan. Representing various countries throughout the world, 50 students participated by researching key issues concerning different countries, developing a position paper and then, arguing their opinion. Through this experience, every student that is involved gains an understanding of many cultures and differing points of view.

Students Exchange Program

Scholarship opportunities are again available for the exchange program between our school and two American Quaker schools. Penn Charter School and Sidwell Friends School each have generously offered to accept a student at their schools as an exchange student and offer a full scholarship to attend their school for the 2013- 2014 academic year.

Left: RFS students participating in the MUN conferences

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A word from our students

By Ranim Amra, 11th grade RFS student

As I cautiously left the terminal with my suitcase in hand, a thousand thoughts crossed my mind. I was a 14 year-old Palestian girl in a new country and unsure of what would happen to me in the next year. My mind wondered, "What would be the new experiences and memories that would shape and mold me within the next 12 months?"

Attending Sidwell Friends School for one year was a magnificent event in my life. Despite experiencing homesickness every couple of months, I enjoyed every minute of my new school life at Sidwell. It was not easy to leave my family and childhood friends behind me, however, it did not stop me from accepting this once in a lifetime opportunity!

I was able to develop a bond and close ties with my host family, the McCoys, and I grew to love them. They made me feel included and part of their family. We went on family vacations and spent quality time together. They were always there for me and easily made me feel at home.

Although this opportunity broadened my horizons and allowed me to interact with people from different cultures and lifestyles, it was also a reality check for me. Living for an entire year in a country with no walls, barriers and checkpoints allowed me to become familiar with the feeling of how it is to live in a place with no Israeli occupation. It was a foreign feeling for me, yet, one for which I yearn every day.

This experience allowed me to become more responsible and independent. It also allowed me to be more social and to interact with different people in my community. I am more acceptant of other cultures and beliefs after living in a country with a vibrant culture and background.



Ranim with her host family

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Westtown and George School Students in Ramallah

A group of 30 students and five staff members from Westtown and George schools in Philadelphia spent three days in Ramallah with host families from RFS. The group attended classes at the Upper School, visited Friends Kindergarten at Al-Amari Refugee Camp, attended several lectures, viewed documentary films and shared sporting activities with RFS Upper School students. The partnership with Westtown School and George School is growing year after year enriching the lives of everyone involved.

Participating in Basketball Tournament in Jordan

At the end of March the girls and boys basketball teams participated in a tournament in Jordan with several other schools. The girls' team came in second place in the tournament.

Drama this Year

This year the Upper School's drama committee decided to adapt "Kharej al-Serb," a play by Mohammad al-Maghout, because of the author's dreamy, wandering suffocation and disillusionment with the reigning world. The performance premiered on March 2nd with 700 people attending and was one that will not be forgotten.



Above: Upper School students along with Westtown and George School students



Left: RFS students performing in Kharej Al-Serb

From the Director's Office

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

The Wonders of Participatory Planning

It is true: our campuses are beautiful. They have been referred to as “an oasis of peace” and “a haven.” Though we see their beauty, we wonder, nonetheless, whether we are taking full advantage of these upgraded facilities, green spaces and ecological environments to maximize and invigorate the learning of our students. Are our teachers ready to move toward a model that does away with traditional classroom settings? Where should we build our new middle school building and what purposes should it serve?

While we knew the answers to many questions, we also knew that we needed more help figuring it all out. It seems we found the right people to assist us. Fielding Nair International, an architectural firm with the motto, “Instruction before construction,” and specializing in the building of schools was contracted to help us with master planning of both campuses and more specifically with the design of our new middle school building. Walther Hetzer, the lead educator, and Ritsaart (Rits) Marcelis, the lead architect, arrived on our school grounds in April for what they termed a discovery visit. In addition to touring the schools and grounds, Hetzer and Marcelis attended several stakeholder meetings involving the entire school community. Some visioning workshops were held with students, others with parents and teachers and others with administrators and trustees. For three days our entire school community was fully engrossed in answering questions such as, “What is your preferred method of learning, how can you better take advantage of your campuses, and what does your ideal school look like?” Lower elementary students were asked to illustrate their answers to the last question.

The ultimate result was both surprising and very telling. Key issues that emerged included the need to focus more on technology in education and to make greater use of outdoor learning environments, where many students requested there be a swimming pool. On the new building design the message was loud and clear: it needs to diverge from the traditional classroom set-up and be as “green” as can possibly be. But the true blessing went beyond all of that; it was witnessing the entire school community taking ownership and actively participating in the future planning of their school.



A second grader's depiction of his "dream school"

See more photos from the visioning workshops on page 8.

Participate in the future of the Friends School, 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 2011–2012 range from U.S. \$2,500 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.

Support RFS through Online Giving!

Through an initiative aimed at saving money and resources, we have begun to shift much of our correspondence online. Donations can now be made with the click of a mouse on our **completely secure** online donation page (designed and supported by eCommerce, a U.S.-based company). Donations made through this secure site are U.S. tax-deductible; please visit our web page for other donation methods. As always, we will never share your information with a third party. Visit www.palfriends.org and click "Donate" for more information.

Friends School, Ramallah/Al-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General, November 1, 2012 - March 31, 2013

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The Wonders of Participatory Planning



Above: Students presenting their work in master-planning workshop; above, right: Walther Hetzer, PTA member Marwan Tarazi and other parents and teachers in discussion; right: Architect Riis Marcelis, School Project Manager Farhat Muhawi, Lower School Deputy Principal Frieda Khayat and Upper School Deputy Principal Jeries Abu El-Etham moving their discussion outdoor



Read the story on page 6.

