



Quaker Education in Palestine since 1869

The Ordinary Beautiful: Another Day at the Lower School

By Rose Hilaneh, fourth grade teacher & Elizabeth Todd, Friend-in-Residence



Top: Fourth graders enjoying the traditional Palestinian food; middle and bottom: fourth graders singing and performing wearing their traditional clothes

Fourth graders with focus and enthusiasm, sang songs and performed dances they had learned. Teachers, parents, grandparents and visitors watched in delight, snapped pictures and applauded with enthusiasm. This event was orchestrated by teachers Rose Hilaneh and Sabira Abu Nassar.

This good day was the culmination of a curriculum unit: *How We Express Ourselves*. It included art, music, performance, games, clothes, artifacts, holidays and values. The students read books, wrote essays, visited historic sites and discussed how and why culture changes over time. It isn't easy to teach intangibles like heritage and expression, but these teachers succeeded.

Parents and grandparents were involved. The unit sparked intergenerational conversation: sharing, stories, questions. For the culminating event, fathers and mothers came to support their children. And they brought traditional foods — an extravagant feast of time-honored, delicious dishes.

It was easy to see why parents and teachers felt proud seeing what these children had accomplished and how well they had behaved. Each child was at their best, conversation was inspired, and no one was eager to leave. In a culminating act of community goodwill, many people even helped clean up. The extra food was repacked and sent to an elder care home in the community. It was a good picture of Palestinian cultural values: beauty, relationship, collaboration, respect and sharing.

This celebration illustrates many things that happen at the Friends School. Teachers are creative and hardworking, kids are eager to learn and demonstrate, and families step up to support kids, teachers and their community. A curriculum unit turns into a celebration and reminds us all that heritage is alive, and we are all a part of it.

Friends School Newsletter

Spring 2015



Westtown Friends Visit

We were pleased to welcome another group from Westtown Friends School on campus and into our community. Each year, these Friends host Upper School students for a study year abroad and each year they come to Ramallah to visit. Thank you, Friends!



Ramallah Friends School
 Quaker Education in Palestine
 since 1869

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Photo on the cover:
 Upper School students at their Chemistry lab

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Celebrating Dr. Seuss at Lower School Library — A Seussical Week!

By Carmen Popescu Abdul-Hadi, Library Activities teacher

March 3rd marked the 111th birthday of Theodore Geisel, better known as the beloved Dr. Seuss. He is a very important author in children's literature, and one who has had a great part in charming generations everywhere into reading.

As we celebrated Dr. Seuss' birthday in the library, we underscored the importance and joy of reading to all 600 kids on our Lower School campus.



Students dressed up for the crazy hat day

The entrance lobby and the stairs to the library were decorated with footsteps containing words from the *Foot Book*. It was a funny way to line-up before going to classes and to provoke curiosity. Truffulla trees (from *The Lorax*) grew in the

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Lower School News in Brief

By Kenneth Hulslander, Lower School Principal

Staff development

The teachers and support personnel from the Lower School Learning Support Program are currently attending a training program at the Joud Center in Ramallah. This training, *Diploma in Special Needs*, is an extensive program designed to help our staff support the Lower School students with learning needs as well as physical restrictions. It covers basic knowledge in Dyslexia, ADHD, autistic spectrum disorder, developmental delay disorders, mild hearing impairment, gifted & talented, and planning for intervention for students with behavioral problems. The six individuals who are taking the class are responsible for 300 theoretical hours and 240 practical hours of work. As of now, the Friends School is the only place in the West Bank with a comprehensive program for students with special needs.

Lower School Holds Elections

Sixth grade students held elections for student counsel and representatives: a culmination of a project in which they explored different political systems and human rights. One of the highlights was a visit by the esteemed Hanan Ashrawi, Friends School graduate and internationally recognized member of the Palestinian Authority, who spent over an hour talking to students about their responsibilities in a democracy and answering their questions. Then, during the election, candidates made speeches and met with school administrators. Parents volunteered to ensure that the process felt as real as possible. A parent from the Election Committee provided real ballot boxes and explained the voting process. Local press covered the election. We are proud that this curriculum is part of a program created by Ms. Duha, our PYP coordinator, and a dedicated team of teachers. The curriculum has been adopted by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, professionally printed, and used in schools across Palestine.

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*Celebrating Dr. Seuss at the Lower School Library,
continued from page 2*

library! Kids dressed up on different days: Crazy Socks Day — for *Fox in Socks*; Wear Something Green Day — for *Green Eggs and Ham* and Crazy Hat Day — for *The Cat in the Hat*. Stories came alive and experience invited kids to read the stories!

Students enjoyed reading Dr. Seuss' books (many of them for the first time), eating a Seuss-tastic sweet snack, watching animations and movies based on Seuss' stories, and crafting (the cat's hat and ribbon, for instance). Hearing about Dr. Seuss and his books, students activated their prior knowledge to thoughtful discussion. Then they enjoyed a musical day led by two young musicians from the Franco-German Center.

The simple and often "goofy" Seuss books are powerful tools for young learners. The vocabulary and rhyming are reasons why these classic tales are so fun, memorable and thought-provoking. Books by Dr. Seuss also contain a fair bit of philosophy. They are a fun way to talk to kids about important lessons in life: being yourself; choosing your own direction in life; making the world a better place; love; friendship and joy; reading and learning; imagination and creative processing; success, appreciation and gratitude; perseverance. These are all gifts we want for our kids.

Along the way, we had a Seuss-tastic time! And now, in the new Dr. Seuss section of the library, the shelves are empty almost all the time! Read on kids!



Lower School students on the crazy socks day

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White Gifts Collection

Every year, the Lower School collects funds for the needy families in Ramallah. Each year we have a successful collection. However this year, we had a very good year with a total collection of more than 34,000 shekels, allowing us to help a larger number of families and assist one of our disabled students acquire some needed services. We felt especially fortunate with the success, considering that a large number of our parents were only receiving a small percentage of their salaries from the government due to Israel blocking tax transfers. But creativity and generosity made it possible.

Lower School Has Talent

This spring, we are starting what may be a new tradition at the Lower School: an annual talent show. After the winter break, a number of students wanted to prepare something for our Open Day held in May. There were so many requests that we decided to do a competition to see who would get to perform. Presently we have 24 groups who have done their own choreography, written poems in English and Arabic or have chosen to perform songs. Now we have invited judges from outside the school to see the top talents. We are looking forward to the presentations!



*Lower school students during the
white gifts activity*

A Life-Changing Experience: The Fourth Annual Palestinian Model United Nations Conference

By Dina Hanania, RFS 12th grader

If I had to pick one simple phrase to describe the Fourth Annual Palestinian Model United Nations Conference (PalMUN), I would spontaneously describe it as an ultimate success. As the Secretary General of the RFS Model United Nations Club for the term 2014-15, I was more than just honored to have helped to catalyze and witness such a magnificent event. The Model United Nations Club has developed to become a center of our personalities. For once, amidst a seemingly unfair world, we were able to realize that cooperative hard work is the only essential backbone of success.

The Fourth Annual Palestinian Model United Nations Conference held at the Ramallah Friends School this winter was the final fingerprint of the 2014-15 MUN Club. The event was solely designed for students and by students. For the past three years, countless successes have been recorded. The first, second and third Palestinian Model United Nations conferences were successfully held. As we stood on the shoulders of the past giants, we aimed to further raise those shoulders. Stemming from a similar vision, we have relentlessly worked to expand PalMUN. This year, we effectively succeeded in expanding from a conference with five committees into one with eight, hosting more than 380 participants from the country and the region. We started from a base that has brought pride to our community. Similarly we have successfully proceeded, carrying on with the club's legacy.

The Model United Nations Club started at the Ramallah Friends School in 2006. Since then, the club has grown into one of the school's most competitive and active organizations. Today, our club is one of the most dynamic Model United Nations Clubs in the entire country. Over the past few years, more than 170 delegates from our school have traveled near and far to participate in international conferences

in various locations including Amman, Athens, The Hague, Cairo, Doha, New York, Istanbul and Chennai.

The importance of Model United Nations in Palestine stems from our perception that it is very essential for Palestinian youth to be part of the international community. This year's theme, *Tearing Down Walls*, is inspired by the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. At PalMUN, we aim to revive international history with proper relation to our current context. Ours is a world that is divided by inestimable walls, both metaphorically and literally. The metaphorical walls (including walls between races, genders and religions) are walls that leave undesirable prints on our world. Closer to our reality as Palestinians, we are caged within a physical wall that confines us in unclear borders that were forcefully drawn around us during the past 65 years. At PalMUN, we undertake diplomacy as a sole powerful weapon. MUN teaches students diplomacy in an enchanting way. It arms a complete generation with cultural knowledge. Over the weekend, we formed an army of young diplomats, one that is ready to lead a tangible change in the future.

As the club continues to thrive, its members are mindful that most Palestinian high school students do not have the organizational and financial resources to participate in Model United Nations conferences. PalMUN provides these students with the opportunity to do so. We have invited students from all over Palestine and the broader region to join us, once again, in this year's conference. Although this endeavor was at times difficult due to the strain of occupation, we were determined to make it happen. We hope PalMUN will not only become an annual tradition, but reach the same level as the top conferences in the region and the world.

Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

***I Know I Can* Summer Camp**

The school announced the next *I Know I Can* summer Academies and students started to register. These summer Academies serve to enrich students' English language skills and (for upper grades) prepare them to succeed on the SAT.

Shindig Summer Camp

Friends Meetings in the UK sponsored two students from the Upper School to attend the Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig that took place in July 2014. They are also interested in supporting two students to participate in the camp next summer. Our college counselor is working on selecting two students for this activity. The process consists of announcing to students of grade 10 and 11, receiving applications, receiving feedback about the applicants from their teachers and interviewing the candidates.



Upper School students at the PalMUN conference

Dance Performance

The dance group at the school held its yearly performance on Friday, April 3rd. After several months of hard practice, the group amazed the 700+ audience at the cultural center in Ramallah. The audience was impressed by the skills, discipline and seriousness of the group with around 30 girls under the leadership of the well known dance trainer, Mr. Sharaf Dar Zaid.

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On Track to Improve Sports for All Students

By Tamara Awartini, Upper School Sports Coordinator

It is challenging when the mindset of some students is, "It's just sports" and/or "Why bother?!" Sports are becoming main tools for development in the entire world. Therefore, we at the Friends School are developing our curriculum and programs: striving to reach the level where mindsets are changed, where sports become a way of life, a tool to address different social issues, to enhance health and overcome bad habits. This can happen when students devote the same energy and thought as they would to any other subject.

Over the past three years, we have developed a sports program that complements our classes. Students choose recreational activities such as skating, Frisbee, chess, tennis, table tennis, volleyball, handball, fencing, gymnastics, American football, baseball, martial arts, self defense, as well as high level fitness, circuit training, track and field, Zumba, aerobics, body shaping and yoga.

Physical and Health Education criteria are applied in the sports program ensuring that the activities are beneficial and educational. Our students complete a cycle that begins with knowing and understanding, to planning for performance, to applying and performing, and then reflecting and improving performance. The whole cycle enlightens and involves the student.

Athletes try out for school teams and practice throughout the year to take part in local and regional tournaments. Our girls and boys basketball teams have taken part in the Arab Basketball Tournament in Amman for the past four years, gaining great game experience and building confidence. The girls came in 2nd place three times and 3rd place once. Also this year our football under-16 boys team, took part in the Middle East Triangle Schools Tournament in Amman, winning four games and losing in the semifinals. However, they were given the best team award.



Upper School students during their sports practices

Our girls and boys basketball teams, football teams and athletics team took part in local tournaments and won first place in District. Teams in table tennis and chess took part in local tournaments. Handball, gymnastics and volleyball intramural teams were created.

A new initiative this year was getting all our 10th graders certified in first aid in cooperation with the Red Crescent Society. It was successful and the students learned a lot in the course, so we plan to make it an annual part of our curriculum.

Last but not least, Open Day this year will be filled with different exciting activities: a marathon, all-star games in football, basketball and handball, chess and tennis tournaments, and a new show in self defense.

In these ways, we are on track to develop sports as a way of life and an essential part of Friends education for girls and boys. More exciting programs await our students next year!

Upper School News in Brief continued from page 4

MUN Conference

Our students participated this year in five conferences in Amman, Turkey, Netherlands and Greece. The PalMUN conference was held this year in January at the school. Over 250 students from our school as well as other Palestinian schools participated. The Club is preparing a detailed report on the conference.

Students Exchange Program

The school announced again scholarship exchange program opportunities in partnership with Westtown School and Sidwell Friends School for next school year. Penn Charter Friends School and George School have apologized for not being able to offer us a scholarship next year. The two Quaker Schools will accept one student each and provide scholarships for them to spend the academic year 2015-16 there. Two candidates were selected for each school and the school will interview both candidates to select one of them.



Tenth graders during their English class

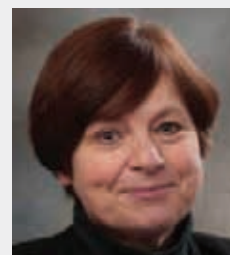
From the Director's Office

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

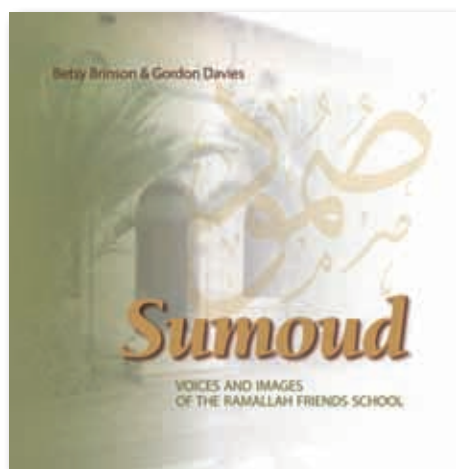
Volunteerism can come a long way and can often result in unexpected and profound accomplishments. When Betsy Brinson and Gordon Davies arrived from Richmond, Virginia, in 2009 to volunteer with us for one year, we certainly did not anticipate the result. Through their readings of school history, Betsy and Gordon noticed that the story had been mainly written from the perspective of the American Quakers who served the school. Not much has been documented that explored the experiences and perspectives of Palestinians who have studied or served the school. In addition, they felt that the beautiful old and new school pictures needed to be shared widely. Hence, ideas emerged between Brinson and Davies to work on a book that would combine the pictures with 52 unique oral history accounts. As a result, *Sumoud: Images and Voices of the Ramallah Friends School* was finally published in late 2014!

While a delightful read of funny, tragic and life-changing experiences, *Sumoud* is also an important literary publication that colorfully records our precious history for generations to come. My hope is that this book will serve to further confirm the remarkable impact that the Ramallah Friends School has had on the lives of its students, teachers and the community at large throughout nearly one and half century of resilient and profound service. As an alumna myself, I share the realization of many graduates that their personal devotion to the Quaker values of equality, service and peace came from their days spent at the Ramallah Friends School.

In another exciting news, the RFS Board of Trustees is happy to announce the appointment of **Nancy Sanderson Swartz** to the position of **Dean of Academics** overseeing the educational program on both campuses. This is a newly-instituted position that we know is going to help streamline and upgrade the educational program. Nancy comes with a diversity of experiences in international education leadership with special emphasis on the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Nancy will arrive in Ramallah at the end of May 2015. *The full announcement can be found on our website.*



Nancy Sanderson Swartz



Sumoud can be ordered from Friends United Press (shop.fum.org) or on Amazon.com. Because its publishing costs were secured by generous donations, all revenue from sales are directed to the RFS Student Financial Aid Fund. The hard-cover book is sold for \$35.

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



U.S. \$ Gifts: Tax-deductible gifts should be made payable to Friends United Meeting and sent to: **Global Ministries, Friends United Meeting, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1926, or online at www.fum.org.**

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, 5 Dene Terrace West, Wylam, Northumberland, NE41 8AZ or Brian Morphy at QUIET, Tel: 01295 720019; e-mail: brianmorphy@fiscal.co.uk.

*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2013-14 range from U.S. \$2,800 to \$3,100.

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

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Kindergarten kids enjoying their break;
Upper School students playing chess



Friends School Newsletter

