# Friends Schools Newsletter Fall 2007

#### A Quaker Auditor?

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

y very simplistic reply to the question: "What is 'Quakerly' about the Ramallah Friends School?" is often: "The fact that we are still here!" For the past 14 decades and with every newly arriving Quaker missionary, teacher or administrator, the Friends family at large continues to believe in this community and have found it to be a worthy venue to live out their Quaker testimonies of equality, peace, justice and social justice. So yes, by continuing to be here serving this wonderful community, we continue to "let our life speak" through service.

Of course, being here is not enough and our collective responsibility of ensuring that our Quaker values have a ripple effect on the community remains a challenge. One of the many hats I wear as the school Director, is that of the "Quaker Auditor." Nonetheless not everything requires such audit. Some of these values have become engrained in our educational system and became "a way of life" here at the school. I find that there is an underlying, yet very strongly sensed common understanding and practice of these values among administration and staff. What we continuously grapple with however, is finding innovative ways to succeed in implanting our values in the hearts and souls of our children and youth. We would like to see that the learning from the experiences we have made available to them, will be built upon when it is time to move on to adulthood and that they will hopefully too "let their life speak" through service.

Work this year is focusing on improving the community service program at Friends Boys School (FBS). You will read about that effort as well as the long standing program at the Friends







From top: Kindergarten students learn and play in the sand; FGS students proudly display their artwork; FBS students enjoy the traditional back-to-school bonfire.

Girls School (FGS) in this newsletter. Through these programs students are provided with the opportunities to "feel" the joys of giving, hopefully to the extent that they will choose to independently replicate these feelings, by being lifetime givers and social change agents in their communities.

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Editor: Jessica McCoy

### Shakespeare in Ramallah, Palestine: A love story

By Mahmoud Amra Head of School, FBS

A group of students from the Friends Boys School have been working for almost two years on producing a docudrama exploring Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet in a Palestinian context. They began to work on the project in January 2006. Assisted by a visiting American teacher, Mr. Douglas Hart, they developed the ideas of the film.

After becoming thoroughly versed in the Romeo & Juliet story and low-budget film making, each of the students read books on digital filmmaking, completed extensive worksheets on characters and the plotline, and, memorized what happened in every single scene of the entire play. They met regularly after school, discussing the play and its themes, and how it might all be played out in Ramallah.

They are now in the final stages of finishing the production of the DVD, which contextualizes the story of Romeo & Juliet to modern-day Ramallah while still relying on the original play script and Old English.

#### **Community Service at FGS**

By Diana Abdel Nour, FGS Principal

he Friends Schools' philosophy is based on a number of principals such as offering excellent education, developing the whole child, respect for the individual and equality. Based on this and in order to provide well rounded education, the school has additional programs that help support our mission: community service, extra curricular activities and special education programs to name some. The schools are no stranger to meeting and overcoming challenges. We continually improve and update the quality of education, select students who show promise, introduce new teaching methods and introduce new programs which prepare students for higher education locally and/or abroad.

The extra curricular activities help our students be well-rounded and excel in their academic and professional adventures. This program offers a dozen activities such as karate, debka (folklore dance), choir, pottery, basketball, etc. Each student may participate in two or three activities of her/his choice. The special education program which was established twelve years ago at the Friends Girls School caters to students with special needs and learning difficulties. It is the only program available for children with special needs in this area and attracts students not only from the Ramallah area, but from other neighboring towns making it possible for students to learn who are usually labeled as failures.

A highlight of our schools' mission is "helping each person recognize her or his responsibility to society." The school initiated a community service program about fifteen years ago which aims at educating children about issues not taught in their textbooks: to learn about sectors they do not normally see and to have empathy for the less fortunate. Within this program, students visit charitable institutions such as a school for the blind, elderly homes for men and women, the school for orphans (Inash Alusra), the rehabilitation center for the injured, Al-Nahda center for the mentally handicapped children and the center for the mute children. Each class visits one of these institutions after school or around supper time. Children go with teachers and volunteer parents and take gifts and food to each resident. The gifts our children take are donated by parents, shopkeepers and people from the community. Along with our music teacher playing the piano, the students sing and dance for residents with the goal of entertainment

and breaking routine. The hosts often tell the children something about their history and the role of the institution in society. Our children learn about the needs and hardships others go through. They learn to value all the blessings they have and be empathetic with others. It hopefully makes them better citizens. Some of these institutions make a visit back to the school and do performances. It was quite amazing to see the blind children dance (debka) without making mistakes.



FGS 6th grade students visit with a resident of the rehabilitation center.

Another way to educate the kids and nourish their values is via the white gifts program which has been a school tradition for decades. This program encourages all students to donate from their pocket money and bring things from home to sell. They also conduct fundraising activities where each grade (1–6) holds a bake sale to raise money for the poor. This past year we were able to collect over \$4,000 through which 93 impoverished families from the community were helped around Christmas. The goal is to teach children how to help others who are less fortunate, to be giving and not selfish.

This year an environmental awareness project was implemented jointly with GTZ (a German development organization). Highlighted activities were paper recycling and making compost to reduce solid waste. Students from sixth grade toured the city and trained in photography. The pictures taken by the kids will be on display.

We also work on teaching our children life skills through counseling classes given to grades 1–6. They learn how to respect others, how to deal with the disabled and elderly, how to take care of themselves and other life skills.

This year the school is focusing on problem solving as one of our objectives for the school year. For this purpose we have hired Mona Halaby, an educator specialist and a book writer, to train our teachers and students on problem solving. Over the year, Mona will be training the entire staff on holding class meetings that are designed to teach our students how to solve problems peacefully to help create positive relationships.

As educators, we have a professional mandate to address the needs of children. The elementary school is a place where we help students to communicate, to know, to think, to build character, to cultivate excellence and on top of that to be good citizens. The Friends Schools shape students who have not only mastered the skills to read, write and acquire knowledge, but also to believe in themselves and their abilities.

We always do our best to implement the school's principles and provide a solid foundation upon which our students grow to be strong and sensitive members of their community and the world they live in.

Ramallah Friends School Class of 2007



#### **Community Service at FBS**

By Mohammad Saleem, FBS CAS Coordinator and Math Teacher

riends Boys School in Ramallah is the only IB school in Palestine. Part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum is completing a course in community service. Each student must finish 150 hours of the CAS program (Creativity, Action and Service) in order to receive his or her diploma. The CAS program is a community service that the students complete during grades 11 and 12. The students do their activities inside and outside the school. They perform a variety of acts of service to assist people who need help: elderly people, children and people with disabilities, and the Friends School arranges partnerships with charitable institutions, clubs and municipalities to coordinate these service opportunities. Friends Boys School in Ramallah also arranges many other service activities, such as clean-up campaigns, painting, picking olives, summer camps, tutoring and first aid.

Community service is one of the core values that we believe in at Friends School and is one of the most important programs that we implement. The Friends School is planning to expand the community service program to the earlier grades at the Friends Boys School as well. Students from grades 7–10 will work some hours inside the school and some hours outside the school. Inside the school, students will take care of yards, clean them during the breaks, ask the students not to hurt the trees, plant new ones and prevent vandalism. Each student will work two hours in each semester. Outside the school, each student grades 7–10 will work five hours during the year.

The students in Friends Boys School are very happy with this program. Their attitude is positive, and they appreciate all the ways that they can contribute to their community. They enjoy learning about ways they can make a difference, become ready to work and help people. They are eager to work as volunteers in charitable societies and work for people who need help in the community. This year the Friends Boys School students will perform 3,240 hours of community service work. It is a great gift to the community, and the students are doing a great job.

#### International Friends (and friends) come to Ramallah Friends Schools for 2007–2008 Academic Years

Ramallah Friends Schools have a long history of welcoming international volunteers wishing to be of service to the Palestinian community and hiring qualified international teachers to join the staff as way opens. In 2007–2008, Ramallah Friends Schools are pleased to welcome Mona Halaby, Margaret Hawthorn, Stephen Lassiter, Jessica McCoy and Brian Phelps to their campuses.

Each volunteer has been asked to share a bit about his/her journey to Ramallah and first impressions of life at the Friends Schools. Here are their stories.

#### **Mona Halaby**

I moved to Ramallah for the 2007–2008 school years as I have accepted a position at the Ramallah Friends Schools (The Girls School, or elementary campus) to train the staff in the facilitation of class meetings and helping students with conflict resolution. It is my area of expertise; I have written a book, *Belonging: Creating Community in the Classroom*, about my work in the United States. Helping children learn how to negotiate their own conflicts using non-violent communication tools is at the heart of my work.

I am overjoyed to be spending a year in Palestine. The last two visits helped anchor me deeper into Palestinian life, and I have often wished I could spend an extended time here in order to immerse myself in my ancestral home and contribute to my country's growth and development. In addition, I am delighted at the prospect of finishing writing my book on the Palestinian women in my family from the late Ottoman period to the British Mandate.

There certainly were obstacles in the way: My job at Park Day School (PDS) to which I was dedicated to return at the end of this sabbatical year, and my family life and commitments. But things have a way of falling into place. My school board generously granted me a year of absence and David, my husband, as usual, was extremely supportive. This offer is a once in a lifetime opportunity. There was no way I could pass it up. I felt a sense of urgency in wanting to explore this unique possibility that makes use of all my previous experiences.

I imagine there is a great deal for me to learn from a year in Ramallah and at the Friends School. I have always wanted to grasp how a Quaker education, with its non-violence principles, is implemented in the classroom. Building a better society through education has been at the center of my work with children.

The Friends School is certainly no stranger to me. Over the past five years the older students at PDS and at Friends School have written articles together via the Internet and published a joint yearly magazine entitled "Children Without Borders." The aim of the magazine is to promote international understanding and to familiarize our American students with Arab children in order to rectify the violent and dehumanizing images of Palestinians often portrayed in the U.S. media today. Two students at our school, a Jewish and a Palestinian girl, who were distressed by the escalation of anti-Arab sentiment and hate crimes after the 9/1 I tragedies, created the joint magazine idea. They wanted American children to get to know Arab children, so there wouldn't be any barriers, fears and hatred when they got older:

Since my arrival at the Friends School I have started facilitating class meetings in every classroom from second grade through sixth. I will add first grade in January, as they are still a bit young at the beginning of the year. I am using an "apprenticeship" model with the teacher by which I model class meeting procedures the first half of the year while the teachers observe, followed in the second half of the year by the teachers facilitating the meetings while I give feedback and support.

It has been a joy to work with the children. They are so eager to learn the tools to solve their own interpersonal conflicts and are responding very well to the work we are doing to build community in the classroom. I am already seeing signs of success! Leave it to the children to rule the world, and maybe we will learn about kindness and humanity!

#### **Margaret Hawthorn**

I am a member of Monadnock Friends Meeting, in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and a former FUM board member. I am finishing my studies this year at Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, Indiana. My supervised ministry project brings me to Ramallah Friends Schools for the fall semester, where I offer creative writing groups at the upper school, live at the lower school and teach flute at Kamandjati, a music school for children of very low income families.

Recently I had the opportunity to accompany some Friends School students on a community service trip. Here are a few of my observations!

Tariq smiles broadly and wiggles the toes on his right foot to a lively beat. He waves his arms, clapping his hands enthusiastically to encourage the guests to sing more, louder, don't stop! As part of an ongoing community service project, Ramallah Friends School sixth graders are making their Ramadan visit to the Abu Rayya rehabilitation center in Ramallah. They've taken their places at the front of the room to sing a medley of traditional Palestinian songs for patients in wheelchairs, staff and family visitors. Tariq and another young man attend the event in their hospital beds.

When the sixth graders segue into the Palestinian national anthem, patients place their hands over their hearts. I see one man wipe his eye with his shirt sleeve. Tariq, too, seems deeply moved. It is the one time in the evening that the smile subsides and his face grows serious. As with every nation, Palestine's children are the hope of its future.

As I stand beside his bed, Tariq makes an effort to communicate with me in English. He arrived at Abu Rayya about four months ago. Although his family originally came from Gaza, they have not lived there for many years. He had only returned recently to work on a newspaper when he was shot in the back. As he talks, the big, toothy grin doesn't leave his face. In a setting of potential despair, Tariq looks radiant.

I want to ask the source of his optimism. Is it the small movement in his right foot that gives him hopes he will walk again? Is he that happy the children have come to visit? Or is he just indomitably cheerful, a soul gifted with contentment? His English is rudimentary and my Arabic is non-existent, so we don't get beyond the few facts about how he got here.

The children finish singing and their teacher organizes teams for a quiz show. She places Tariq and the other young man in bed on rival teams and divides the children between the two. The game resembles a combination of "Name That Tune" and Palestinian Trivial Pursuit. Although the other young man displays impressive knowledge of Palestinian pop music, Tariq carries the day with his familiarity of facts about Palestine. The sixth graders hardly have a chance to get a word in.

At the end of the game several children disappear to visit a patient who wasn't able to leave her room. One boy takes advantage of the smooth floor to kick his roller shoes in gear and glide the length of the hall. When they return, Tariq is holding court with the students who stayed behind. Initially hesitant to approach him, they have been drawn by his smile and are now fast friends.

When we leave, it's not clear who has benefited more from this time spent together—the patients or the children, who seem reluctant to go. It's late and they have school tomorrow, but a day of sleepy heads in class seems a small price for the contribution they have made and the lessons they are learning about compassion.

#### Stephen Lassiter

First Impressions—"Thank you again for your enthusiastic interest in working at the Friends School in Ramallah. I am sorry for the long employment process that you had to go through. I would like to inform you herewith that we decided to offer you a position at the school."

For weeks I had been anxiously awaiting some type of notification. Finally, on the morning of June 18,I received this email from Mahmoud Amra, the principal of the Friends Boys School.

"About 70% of your load will be teaching English Language, History and Conflict Resolution, and the remaining 30% will be coordinating the Model United Nation program at the school."

Amazingly, I was able to sleep the night before classes began on August 28. Having just graduated in May from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it would be my first time stepping into the classroom not as a student, but as teacher.



Left to right: Margaret Hawthorn, Mona Halaby, Stephen Lassiter, Jessica McCoy and Brian Phelps

I had been warned. Another Quaker from my home meeting—New Garden Friends Meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina—had taught at the Friends School when she graduated from college. While she offered me sage advice about living in Ramallah, teaching and disciplining the students, my worst fear was that I would learn more than they would. (It was supposed to be the other way around.)

I can say with some confidence that my worst fear has, in fact, been realized. While I try my best to create engaging lesson plans and spend hours grading papers (I've gotten it down to about I2 hours per class), I am inevitably learning more by living in Ramallah and listening to them than they are learning from me.

#### Jessica McCoy

I am a member of Charlottesville Monthly Meeting (Charlottesville, Virginia) and five-year attendee at Morningside and Fifteenth Street Monthly Meetings (New York, New York). As a Friend and self-described "citizen of the world," the peace testimony has held a solid grasp on my heart and has been central to every job I've held. I have served many roles since graduating from college in 1999 with my BA in Elementary Education, reading/language arts specialist, a preschool teacher, a theater producer/director/designer and after-school theater educator working on plays and play writing with peace and social justice themes, a fundraiser for grassroots peace and justice organizations and have been trained in conflict resolution skills with a number of different organizations. Each of these jobs was a piece of the puzzle, and I was passionate about them all.

For the past several months, I have been seeking a way to combine all of these passions into one. I started a non-profit, People for Peace and Understanding, to develop after-school programs that use drama and language arts as a vehicle to get young people living with conflict to communicate their experiences, to empower them to create a different world by helping them to develop conflict resolution skills and to become active in their community. When the opportunity arose to become a teacher at the Friends School, I jumped at the chance to work with the students, and I hope to develop some of the program modules that will make up the core programs of People for Peace and Understanding with the children of Palestine.

My role at the Friends School is to assist the students at Friends Girls School with their English skills, to provide support for fundraising, develop the ethics curriculum at the lower school and I also do after school programs in language arts and drama three days week. Thus far, I have been very excited by the students at the Friends School. They are bright, lively and show a desire to learn and to be a positive influence in the world—as evidenced not only by the environmental education and community service programs at the schools, but also by the example shown by RFS alumni. I have also developed a deep appreciation for the administration's openness to trying new things and their willingness to think outside the box. I am looking forward to a great adventure this year!

#### Brian Phelps

Walking into the Friends School on the first day, I knew I had big shoes to fill. Over 50 years ago, my grandfather walked through the same doors with similar anxiety and enthusiasm. Except, my grandfather entered the Friends School not as a teacher—but as a student.

My grandfather is a Palestinian from Jaffa, a town on the Mediterranean coast of what is now modern day Israel. During the violence in 1948 that led to the creation of the state of Israel, he and his family fled to Ramallah. My grandfather attended the Friends School and learned some of his first English there. He eventually immigrated to the United

States, and after a successful career as a computer engineer he is now happily retired in southern Florida with my grandmother.

This story is, of course, an oversimplification of my grandfather's life. It would be difficult to document the hardships of a refugee and an immigrant in the space I have here. However, this short account tells a powerful story—one of the power of education.

The Friends School provides for Palestinians something intangible that no amount of governmental foreign aid can provide. Sure, foreign aid can build schools, provide textbooks and purchase technology. However, it cannot teach critical thinking, motivate students toward public service or inspire them to care about the world around them.

That is why I am here at the Friends School. Yes, I am here to teach students English—an increasingly global language that can open doors of opportunity for them. But I am also here to inspire my students and push them to achieve more than they think they can. I am here to instill in them an appreciation for learning for the sake of knowledge. And I am here to teach them skills that will not only help them write better essays, but that will help them in all of their life's endeavors.

I want to be the teacher who helps enable my students to live out their dreams—whatever they may be. I am here to encourage them to start right now at the Friends School, just like my grandfather did a half century ago. I am here to be an inspirational teacher.

#### Donor Spotlight: Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET)

Since 2001, the Ramallah Friends Schools have been the grateful beneficiary of QuIET, the Quaker International Educational Trust in the UK. We would like to thank UK Friends for their generosity in 2007, UK Friends contributed over \$60,000 to RFS! We asked Brian Morphy, the Executive Secretary of QuIET, to share a few words about their relationship with RFS and their organization's mission and history:

Friends in Britain are able to make tax efficient gifts to the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET), a charity, for Ramallah Friends Schools. Since Tony Fitt wrote of the urgent need RFS' bursary scheme was struggling to meet in The Friend in 2001, donors have contributed £170,000. Of course, not all donors have sufficient income to qualify for tax relief but that has not stopped them from sending what they are able either directly or through Preparative Meeting collections. It has been illuminating to hear from Friends who have a personal recollection of a visit to, or of time spent at, RFS. Others recall hearing Joyce Ajlouny or Colin South speaking of RFS at Meeting.

QuIET was established in 1998 primarily to take up responsibility from Britain Yearly Meeting's Quaker Peace and Service committee, for Brummana High School (BHS) in Lebanon: responsibility, or stewardship, which its trustees exercise through BHS' Board of Governors. However, QuI-

ET's charitable object is to advance the education of young people in accord with Quaker principles and thus it is able to play a small part in supporting RFS and The American Farm School in Thessalonika, too.

The Executive Committee of the Europe and Middle East Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, of which Tony Fitt was the Executive Secretary, appoints QuIET's trustees. All have a deep interest in Quaker education and some have served in a voluntary capacity at BHS as teachers, administrators or governors. Jocelyn Campbell, who may rejoin QuIET in January after a break having served two terms as Chair, is well known to BHS Old Scholars who remember her and her late husband Duncan Campbell, from when Duncan was principal at BHS from 1959 to 1962. QuIET's current Chair is Anne Bennett, formerly Joint Operations Manager at Quaker Peace and Service.

Brian Morphy, who has served briefly as Bursar at BHS, is QuIET's Executive Secretary and helps with fundraising and the administration of donations for BHS.

## Participate in the future of the Friends School, 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 2007–2008 range from U.S. \$1,540 to U.S. \$2,380.

For further information and inquiries feel free to contact Jessica McCoy in the Director's Office at jessica@palfriends.org or Tel: 011-972-2-2952286, www.palfriends.org

#### **News in Brief**

- Enrollment records make historical mark—again! This year the school broke an all-time student enrolment record with 631 students at FGS and 517 at FBS for a grand total of 1,148 students! Some of these new students came from the Gaza Strip as their families moved to Ramallah as a result of the political unrest there. The community's message is loud and clear with this level of demand—it seems that they appreciate the effort as the school continues to grow.
- USAID/ASHA approved yet another grant for the school, totaling \$600,000 that is presently being re-negotiated to include the completion of the new classroom building at FBS, overhauling the electricity system on FBS campus, landscaping and safety provisions, as well as an air-conditioning system for the indoor gym...it gets pretty hot in Ramallah! Thank you ASHA! So far the school is implementing over \$2.7 million in infrastructural development
- Over I2 teachers from FGS and FBS received training in the Middle Years (MYP) and Primary Years (PYP) programs, all part of our effort to improve the quality of our education by extending our International Baccalaureate (IB) program to the entire school population. The school plans to apply for full MYP accreditation in 2008.
- The Ramallah Friends School Board of Trustees had a very busy year last year. One of it's main achievements was to approve a Cost of

- Living Allowance policy for staff—an issue that has been under debate for the past 4 years. The Board's Building Committee has been very active in helping the school with its planning for the many construction projects underway and the Finance Committee was instrumental in helping the school find new ways of increasing income through an improvement of cash management policies as well as improved tuition collection strategies.
- Our graduation commencement was once again a big hit and the "talk
  of the town," with immaculate arrangements and superb organization.
  Our graduates made us so proud as we shared their joys on their special
  day. Thirty-two percent of our graduates matriculated to universities
  in North America. The list of these universities and more detailed
  statistics can be found on our website: www.palfriends.org
- The school Director is spending this year in the U.S. (Maryland) and will make several visits to Ramallah throughout the year. The Director is planning for a school fundraising activity in Washington D.C. area sometime in the Spring of 2008!
- Earlham School of Religion is holding a benefit concert for the Ramallah Friends School in January 2008! Quaker singer Susan Stark will be the main performer with RFS students at Earlham participating as well.



Permit No. 747



Friends United Meeting 101 Quaker Hill Drive Richmond IN 47374-1926

Please notify us of your change of address

#### **Donor Thanks**

Friends School, Ramallah/El-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General April I-September 30, 2007

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

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