

# Friends Schools Newsletter

Spring 2008

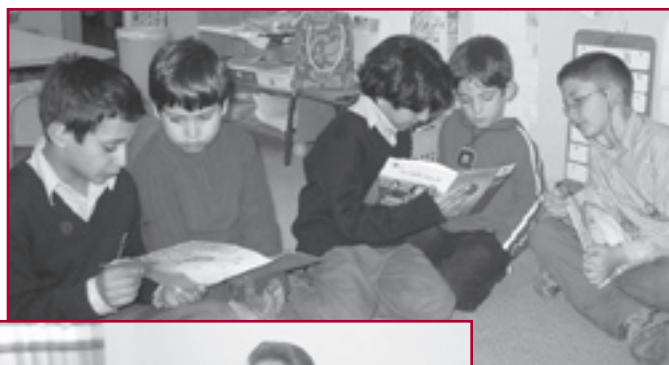


## Soul and Spirit Alive and Well at Ramallah Friends Schools

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

I participated in a class about soul and spirit in the workplace and had the opportunity to explore aspects of soul and spirit within our school setting. The messages of one particular author resonated as I read and carefully absorbed the wonderful anecdotes she shared. The book is entitled *Soul at Work*, written by Margaret Benefiel, who I was pleased to learn is an acclaimed Quaker theologian and recorded minister. The book uses a number of diverse case studies to demonstrate that by embracing individual and organizational spirituality, many gifts can be reaped, at all levels of organizational life. With that strong lesson in mind, my exploration of the Ramallah Friends Schools' soul and spirit commenced. Following many hours of reading, writing and reflection, I deduced that the Ramallah Friends Schools continue to enjoy a rich culture of nourishing the souls and spirits of its community — even if it does so subconsciously at times. What I also discovered is that it is equally important to encourage the *conscious* expression and recognition of such aspects of our work. We need to facilitate the discovery of the spirit at the school; we need to also celebrate it and to hold each other accountable for our expression of it. No time is more relevant than the present to encourage the further spiritual grounding of our school community. This is especially true for a school like ours, that insists on surviving in the midst of military occupation and consequent depression, loss of hope, economic recession, siege and violence. We can agree that a good start would be to consciously recognize and celebrate the aspects of our school that give us pride.

This newsletter highlights some of those activities through the writings of our teachers and students. With their thoughts and words (remember English is almost everyone's second language) you will see another year unfolding at the Ramallah Friends Schools and with it another set of accomplishments achieved and challenges transcended. Our survival as Palestinians depends on our ability to continue looking for and celebrating the silver linings in our work — and there are many!



Above: Reading buddies at FGS



Left: FBS Technology class

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## Reading Buddies

By Huwaida Imseih,  
Elementary School Teacher

Our elementary school began implementing the Reading Buddies program this semester. Elementary teachers are working together with pre-school teachers to encourage a love of books among young students, to develop positive attitudes about reading as a fun activity and to forge strong relations among our students of different ages.

Every week older students read with younger students in a one-on-one setting (see picture, p. 1). It is rewarding and beneficial to both students. Older buddies gain confidence in themselves as readers while learning to identify key elements of fiction. They also gain satisfaction by helping another person. On the other hand, little buddies have a chance to practice new reading skills in a small group setting. Teachers involved with Reading Buddies benefit professionally through increased communication with other teachers.

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## Plastic Bags Now Forbidden at RFS Kindergarten

By Duha Masri, Preschool Head

**T**he Friends Schools have always been regarded by society as a front leader in tackling social issues. To carry on with our school's policy of forward thinking and develop our teaching methods concerning environmental awareness, the teachers at our kindergarten have been working on environmental awareness issues as part of our curriculum for the past five years.

Along with many other activities, we stress the personal responsibility of the children and their parents towards being environmentally friendly individuals. In addition to composting our leftover food, we stopped using bags and plastic bottles, which became a policy. With funding from the Heinrich Boll Foundation, an educational DVD was produced based on the Friends Schools' experience and the collection of educational activities we did to help children grasp the concept. This was used at a training workshop conducted for more than 25 preschool teachers in the Ramallah District. Additionally, the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) helped in funding our two new projects that aim to raise awareness about water consumption and assisted us in the production of a children's song aimed at helping the children understand the dangers and causes of pollution. I can proudly say that in the last year we have prevented the use of over 75,000 plastic bags and 30,888 plastic bottles that would have been brought by students for breakfast. Working across the board in trying to reduce the number of plastic bottles and bags, the help and understanding of cooperative parents was essential.

The major event for this year was forming "The Environment Protectors Team." Basically any child at the kindergarten has the chance to come up with practical ideas that were tried at home with parents to help reduce pollution. The child submits details on how they came up with the idea, how it helps reduce pollution and how to spread the awareness of the idea. To date, children have come up with 150 original ideas for reusing and reducing the use of objects that cause pollution.

We hope that we will continue to succeed in carrying out our project and be able to transform it to a general public social issue. Through our kindergarteners, we aim to make a real difference concerning this matter within our community.

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## Still Learning After 20 Years of Teaching

By Suha Ghawi, FGS English Teacher

**P**articipating in the professional development course provided by the school in cooperation with Bir-Zeit University (BZU) for the past three years has been a wonderful opportunity for me. It has enriched my skills, widened my scope and allowed me to gain new teaching experiences. During these courses, I worked on many projects, some of which were evaluated as outstanding. As a result, I was asked to participate in a project carried out by Ibn Rushd/BZU to document two of my projects that would be accessible on BZU's Web site as a resource for BZU students and other teachers.

The first project follows the "complex instruction methods," which aim to include all students in spite of their academic strengths or weaknesses. This project involves collecting Palestinian folktales, translating them from Arabic to English, drawing illustrations to match with the story, recording the story on a cassette and making it into a small book.

The second project is an integration of two subjects, English and science. During this project, students will study for the first time a type of literature called "fantasy," mainly through a story about an adventure of a group of ants. On the other hand, ants are also mentioned in the science curriculum and students are expected to learn more about them. I will cooperate with the science teacher to do a joint research project including facts about the real characteristics of ants to be compared to the fictional characteristics of the ants in the story. There will also be a poster and a report about ants.

Through these teaching methods, students will learn to appreciate team work and to respect other people's contributions without underestimating anyone. They will also learn time management skills, responsibility and appreciation of ownership, as it is their own work. Despite having been a teacher for more than twenty years, I see this as a learning experience for both the students and myself. Learning is a process that never stops.

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## Writings by 4<sup>th</sup> Graders: “What I like about my school”

### Murad Haddad

I am proud to be in the Friends Girls School because when I joined it I found some friends. They told me it is known as one of the best schools. The teachers love everyone and they teach us many things. My friends and I have been together since the first grade. The school gives us afterschool activities like sports, music, art and other things. The school has big trees and playgrounds and everything is green.

### Yasmine Huleileh

I am proud to be a student in the Friends School because: 1) I like the name of my school and I'm so proud to have many friends. 2) I feel so safe inside the school campus. The guards don't let any strangers come in. 3) The teachers are very caring and kind. I feel I can ask them for help if I need to. 4) The teachers teach us very well and they are not bossy. 5) I am happy to have a school uniform. I don't have to think every morning what to wear and be late for school. 6) I am so proud my school is clean. 7) We have so many choices for afterschool activities. Every year I choose two activities. They are all beautiful. 8) All families know each other. Many mothers help each other to pick us up from school if one of them is busy. 9) Our school has swings and slides. We play and have fun at recess. 10) I am very proud to go to the same school as my father, aunts, uncles and cousins.

### Tala't Harb

I am proud to be in the Friends School because it is a well-known and prestigious school founded by Quakers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The old buildings and the very tall pine trees make my school very special. Many important people from around the world studied at my school. Both my parents and uncles studied at the Friends School, and maybe my children will study here, too.

### Nadia Abdulhadi

I'm proud to be in the Friends School because it is a great school. I understand everything in class. It is the most fun school I have ever gone to. I wish I could stay at this school until I graduate. When there is a problem between my friends and me, the teachers always help us. And when I have a problem about the homework that we have to do, the teachers help me understand what I have to do. I love the Friends School. It is the best.



Left: After school ballet group

Below: The winning soccer team from FGS

## News in Brief *By Diana Abdel Nour, FGS Principal*

- In order to keep the school's teachers updated with the latest teaching techniques, the school provides teachers with training workshops. In February all teachers attended a workshop entitled "Students with Difficult Behavior," which was conducted by child psychologist, Linda Cozzarelli, from California.
- On March 20 all teachers attended an all-day workshop on "Progressive Education."
- The school has hired Mona Halaby, from California, to train all staff and students in problem solving. The aim is to help our students solve their problems peacefully.
- The school is offering a series of workshops on parenting for RFS parents. Workshops began in October and will continue until the end of the school year. These workshops are being conducted by Mona Halaby and Adele Jarayseh, school counselor. The aim is to keep parents on the same page as the school.
- In December the school held Christmas parties for preschool, lower elementary and upper elementary. All students participated and parents enjoyed watching their children sing and perform.
- Students and staff raised around \$4000 for the white gifts program. This program is one of the school's traditions. It aims to teach our students to help others who are less fortunate. The money was raised through various activities such as bake sales and from the students' pocket money. The money raised was distributed to 93 impoverished families in Ramallah and the El-Bireh area.



- Under the Community Service Program, our students have visited a number of social institutions in Ramallah and El-Bireh, such as the School for the Blind, homes for the elderly and the rehabilitation center. In these visits, students take flowers, food and gifts for the residents of these institutions. This program aims to teach our children empathy.
- The FGS soccer team participated in a series of soccer competition games with six other private schools in Ramallah. We are proud that our team was the winner and got the championship.
- Teachers and students are working hard preparing for three major events that will take place in April and May. All parents will be invited. These events are: English Day (plays, sketches, biographies, etc.), Open Day (physical education performances and competitions) and Music Day (singing and dancing). Because each child in the school is important, we make sure that all students are able to participate in these events.

## Exchange Opportunities for our Sophomores

While our students are wrapping up their year at George School, Westtown and Sidwell, new ones are being nominated for next year. We are happy to announce that Penn Charter, Pennsylvania, has announced that it will also provide an annual exchange opportunity to one of our sophomore students, starting next year. Such exchanges are life-transforming opportunities and we are very thankful for our sister Quaker schools in the U.S. for their friendship and message of hope.

# Storytelling Experience Shared Aloud

By Samah Hussein, FBS English Language Teacher

In favor of implementing storytelling techniques as part of the English language activities for seventh graders this year, my goal was not to create storytellers, but to assist students in developing language skills.

The students were asked to articulate different stories that represent the speaker's unique creation. By participating in storytelling, students have a creative, rewarding and experience-based venue for understanding how words are chosen to express ideas and how they are ordered to make sentences. Storytelling also helps in showing the relationship between people, actions and things in the context of time and place. Since storytelling is a skill that can be taught, 12 students from the seventh grade were chosen to tell their stories to the students in the FGS and to seventh grade students at the Evangelical School in Ramallah.

Their performance incorporated the spirit, energy and soul. In an hour of storytelling, the 12 students delivered their messages of how storytelling develops listening skills, enhances verbal expression, creates mental images and highlights verbal reasoning. What could be more fun than sharpening phonological skills by listening to stories and playing with words through rhyme and by blending in an interactive context?

## Arna's Children: A Movie to See

By Jenin Meri, Grade 9

Arna was an Israeli Jewish woman. But she was not what Palestinians expected from an Israeli Jewish woman. She loved Palestinian people and she helped them. When I saw her movie, I was surprised. I thought — what a wonderful woman she was! At the beginning of the movie, she stood with her friend telling Palestinian people not to stop at the check point. She was wearing a kuffiyeh [Palestinian head scarf] on her head because she was bald from chemotherapy. It was a wonderful scene. My heart was beating very quickly, not because I was scared, but because it was a very touching moment.

Arna helped the children of the Jenin Camp. In the beginning, they thought she was a bad woman and that she might kill or shoot them. But when she talked to them, they felt safe. She was just like their mother. She brought them books and let them draw on the walls and express their feelings!

Her son taught them drama. The boys who were in the drama lesson were all later killed by Israeli soldiers. When they showed up in the movie, they told the camera about their dreams. At that moment I started crying. The children loved Arna very much, and when Arna got them surprises, their smiles were as big as the world.

Arna visited my grandma in Jenin more than once, because she wanted to support my grandma when my aunts went to prison. She was so good to my family, they all loved her. After I saw the movie, I went home and phoned my grandma and asked her about Arna and the stories they shared.

In the last scene of the movie, Arna died. It was a very sad moment, so sad that the children and whole families in Jenin Camp cried — and I did, too. The last thing I want to say is, God bless her.



This essay was written as part of a six-week writing workshop held by Margaret Hawthorn for our students. Margaret is a recent graduate of Earlham School of Religion, a Quaker seminary on the campus of Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. She was in Ramallah for the fall semester 2007-2008 to do a field education project entitled, "Bringing Out Under-heard Voices." In addition to offering writing groups at RFS, she worked on her own writing project — collecting stories about people's lives in Ramallah.



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# The Friends Schools' Version of "Romeo and Juliet"

By Mahmoud Amra, FBS Principal

**I**n Fair Palestine, a Story of Romeo and Juliet" is the title of a film produced by 36 Ramallah Friends Schools students. The students attempted to retell the story of Romeo and Juliet by mixing it creatively with the life of the Palestinian people and the difficulties facing them, such as the restriction of movement between cities, towns, villages and camps due to the Israeli checkpoints and the separation wall. The students tried, through this movie, to deliver a message to the world that Palestinian people love life, despite all the crimes of the occupation.

About two years ago, Mr. Douglas Hart joined the faculty at the Friends Boys School as an English language teacher. Mr. Hart discovered that many of the students have creative energies in acting and film making. He encouraged them to make a film independently. A group of students started to meet regularly and agreed to adopt the story of Romeo and Juliet as a basis for the scenario of a film. After much discussion, they decided to integrate documentary and drama styles of film making. The film deals with different social aspects of Palestinian society such as love, friendship, early marriage and others. The first showing of the film was attended by over 1,000 people from Ramallah and El-Bireh.

The film trailer can be seen using this link:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHNndYQ79nQ>

## News in Brief By Mahmoud Amra, FBS Principal

**FBS students participate in two MUN Conferences** — The participation of FBS students in Model United Nations conferences is gradually becoming a tradition. This year, five students from grades 11 and 12 participated in the MUN conference organized by the Amman Baccalaureate School in Amman, Jordan in November 2007. Over 500 high school students from all over the Middle East participated in this conference.

Another group of five students went in January 2008 to Doha, Qatar to represent the school in the MUN conference.

**Girls Sports** — One of the goals of the physical education department at the school for this year was to focus more on girls' sports. The department, therefore, organized basketball and soccer tournaments for girls of all Ramallah private schools. The FBS team won first place in basketball and second place in soccer.

**Science Fair** — The science department at FBS held its annual science fair on March 17, displaying science projects done by students in different grades. The fair was visited by many parents and students from other schools.

**Marathon – "No for Smoking, Yes for Sport"** — Over 500 students, parents and others in the Friends Schools community participated in the marathon that was held by the Parent Teacher Association and the physical education department at the school. This activity was organized under the slogan "No for smoking, yes for sport." All participants ran through the streets of Ramallah and El-Bireh wearing t-shirts carrying the slogan.

**Class of 2008 is College Bound** — As we prepare for the 2008 commencement ceremony scheduled for the 1st of June, we are in awe as the news of our graduating class college acceptances is being gathered. These are some of the results so far: Amherst (2 students), Brown (1), Harvard (2), MIT (3), Yale (1) – all these came will full or near full scholarships. Many other wonderful universities are on the list, including Guilford and Earlham, who continue their decades-long friendship with Ramallah Friends. We would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who made these outstanding achievements a reality. Our teachers and administrators who believed in the capabilities of their students, our volunteer parent college counselors, the universities who believed in giving our students a chance of a lifetime, and more importantly, we want to thank our students and their parents for their hard work and for making their dreams come true.



From the top: Students participate in Model UN; Girl's soccer team; FBS student and his science fair project

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## North Carolina-West Bank Connections

By Stephen Lassiter, FBS Teacher

**A**t first I was shocked. The second and third times, still amazed. But by the fourth, fifth — the tenth time, I had come to expect it. I was no longer surprised when I met a Palestinian with a connection to North Carolina, my home state.

Early in the school year I learned that the librarian of Friends Boys School, where I teach ninth- and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade English, graduated from High Point University, only a 20-minute drive from my hometown of Greensboro. While we're on the subject of higher education, I might also mention that an Arabic professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, my alma mater, hails from the Gaza Strip. One of my best Palestinian friends here in Ramallah, who grew up in Jerusalem, went to North Carolina State University. The owner of a grocery store where I shop learned how to speak English at a North Carolina community college.

A few months ago I learned that two of my students — who are Palestinian and grew up in the West Bank — were born in Greensboro. I then discovered that another Friends School student was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Small world indeed.

And then it kept getting smaller. Unbelievably, I ran into a girl at a café who I went to middle school with in Greensboro. I hadn't seen her in seven years.

Perhaps the kicker came when I was returning home for the holidays. On my flight from New York to North Carolina, I noticed that the man in the seat next to me was speaking Arabic on his cell phone. "Taiyeb, taiyeb, O.K. yulla bye," he said. Long story short, Hazem works for Cisco Systems in Raleigh and was returning home from a business trip in Germany. His family hails from Ramallah.

These connections indicate that there is truth in the cliché, "It's a small world." That world would be a better place, I think, if we kept this thought in mind more often. No man (or woman) is an island. When we consider the problems people in seemingly foreign countries face, we would be better citizens of the world if we responded to those in need as if they were our neighbors — because, although we may forget it sometimes, they are.

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## Diary of Anne Frank Introduced to Students

By Brian Phelps, FBS Teacher

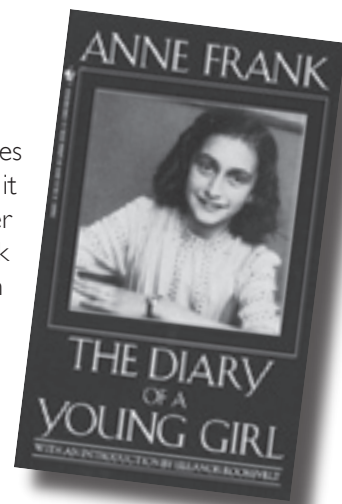
**I**knew that reading *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* with Palestinian students would be interesting and difficult for both them and myself. While the story helps give a glimpse into the human condition and has applicable lessons no matter where it is read, the *Diary* — in its message, in its plot and in its characters — has a particular poignancy for Palestinian students. I asked my students to keep journals not only to improve their writing skills, but also to help them process their feelings and thoughts while reading the story.

It was very difficult for many of my students to read Anne Frank, especially at the beginning of the story. They had a hard time differentiating between Jewish oppression in the 1940s and their current oppression under Israeli military occupation.

Nevertheless, many of my students empathized with Anne. They felt the expression of a shared human condition in her voice, and they came to appreciate her spirit. They admired and respected her optimism under such harsh and humiliating conditions. And many came to see Anne's radiance as an inspiration. For a people who have been displaced, oppressed and who have lived under military occupation for over 40 years, Anne represented the possibility to remain optimistic and cheerful in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Few students in the United States would be able to fathom what it is like to have an armed soldier board their bus on the way back from a class trip. Few American students would be able to understand the feelings of having one's dignity and land taken from them. And it would be difficult for American youth to comprehend what it is like to have their movement restricted under a military occupation. But this is the reality for our students here at the Friends School.

However, instead of resigning to defeatism, our students exude the same resilience as Anne. They are intelligent, vibrant and optimistic — just like Anne. For many of them, Anne Frank was a reminder of all that they can be, an affirmation that despite all the atrocities happening in the world, a life driven by hope, morality and determination will provide more fulfillment than one of despair and fear.



# An Appeal for Further Support: Drop in Exchange Rate Leaves School with Huge Deficit

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

As some of you may already know, the U.S. dollar exchange rate against the local currency (New Israeli Shekel) has dropped to rates not seen during the past decade. This drop of around 18 percent caused yet another sharp economic recession for the entire West Bank and Gaza. Our school was not immune to the effects of this devaluation and felt the brunt immediately. The purchasing power of our teachers' salaries — who are paid in U.S. dollars — dropped sharply and the school's Board of Trustees could not see any other solution than to compensate staff for some of their loss. Starting in September 2007, these subsidies will cost the school around **\$200,000 annually of monies it does not have.**

We are also not able to raise tuition fees too much as parents are also going through similar hard times due to the drop in the U.S. dollar. **We are therefore appealing to our friends and supporters everywhere to continue praying for us and for considering furthering their support to our school.** The list of donors mentioned in this newsletter clearly confirms that, indeed, any donation counts. The ultimate annual result of our appeals continues to leave us touched by the generosity and big hearts of our friends around the globe. Thank you! Support can also go towards our student Financial Aid (Scholarship) Fund. Information about how to contribute can be found below:



FGS teachers with  
Principal Diana Abdel Nour  
(second from left)

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



Yes, I would like to contribute to the Ramallah Friends Schools:

Scholarships and Child sponsorship\*

General Award (any amount) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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**U.S. \$ Gifts:** Tax-deductible gifts should be made payable to the Ramallah Friends School and sent to: **Global Ministries, Friends United Meeting, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1926**

**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@hvmail.co.uk.

\*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 Jumana Thalji in the Director's Office at [jthalji@palfriends.org](mailto:jthalji@palfriends.org) or Tel: 011-972-2-2952286, [www.palfriends.org](http://www.palfriends.org)



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## Donor Thanks

Friends School, Ramallah/El-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General  
October 1, 2007–March 31, 2008

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

Ajlouny, Samia  
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Severance, Shannon R.  
Shaheen, Frank  
Shaum, Esther May  
Shinn, Larry D.  
Smallwood, John M.

Smith, Stuart E.W.  
South Central Yearly Meeting  
Southwest Friends Financial Corp.  
Spray, Dr. Louise  
Stanley-Green, Della  
Stratton, John  
Suko, Kate Foreman  
Sullivan & Worcester, LLP  
Sunderland, Esther W.  
Taylor, Sadie  
The Presbyterian Congregation  
of Newtown, Pennsylvania  
Thompson, Eric E.  
Todd-Williams, Mary Ann  
Tokyo Monthly Meeting  
UK donors/QUIET  
USFW First Friends of Whittier  
USFW Indiana  
USFW International  
Van Hoy, Mark L.  
Vaughan, William  
Verick, William  
Votaw, Donald & Shirley  
Wabash Friends Church Missions  
Wallace, Carol A.  
Wells, Anne W.  
Wenner, David R.  
West Knoxville Friends Meeting  
West Richmond Friends  
Westover, Chris  
Wheatland, Barbara  
Wilderness Friends Meeting  
Wilmington Yearly Meeting  
Winchester Friends  
Wood, Wilbur  
Wriggins, Sarah  
Xavier, Marjorie  
Yabroudi, Anwar & Eman  
Yale, Dr. Charles A.  
Ziadeh, Farhat J.