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Ramallah Friends School's Monthly Newsletter

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Designed by: Mohamed A. Daoud



December in Palestine

Most of my clearest memories as a child growing up in Palestine are of Ramallah in December. I remember when the First Intifada broke out in 1987 and we could not go to school for days and days on end. I remember when the Gulf War was still ongoing in 1990 and we were put under military curfew by the Israeli occupation for weeks and we could not even leave the house. I remember when we got snowed in sometimes- those Decembers were lots of fun because snow is always such a welcome site in Palestine. I remember when the Palestinian Authority forces first arrived to Ramallah, also in December, and decorations filled the streets to welcome them and celebrate the holidays together- it was a joyous month for all of us. I remember when it was my senior year at RFS in 2000 and the Second Intifada had broken out. That December, and that year, I could never forget. Fear and death and pain changed our lives once again. Nine years ago, December began with the sudden death of my best friends' mother. A person who had been a second mother to me and a warm member of my family for my whole life in Ramallah. Since then, Decembers have been getting harder and harder. This year, December brought with it yet another wave of fear and pain. But as I hope for it to end soon, I remember that December- once such a long time ago – brought us the Birth of Jesus Christ, Prophet Issa in our beautiful Palestinian hilly town of Bethlehem. So December has not always been a month of fear and pain. That is how December is also a month of hope and giving. In this issue of OP, we want to share with you the month of spreading hope and giving to others at RFS.*

Besan Jaawan '01
Development and Communications Manager

A Spiritual Reflection on Christmas

Letter from Head of School

As we approach the season of celebrations in Ramallah, I was fortunate to recently attend the lighting of the Christmas tree in Yasser Arafat Square which is situated in the Ramallah city center, at the site known historically as the "Clock Tower Roundabout". I have always thought Ramallah was a busy town but I was surprised at the huge crowds of people that attended. There were families with young children and older people celebrating and watching as Santa rappelled down one of the buildings followed by a huge fireworks display.



Christmas Decorations in Tabari Hall, Lower School Christmas Concerts

It was an evening of great joy with Christians and Muslims together. Standing next to me was a Palestinian who commented that the celebration was very much a statement saying "We are here". In a time of tension and injustice Palestinians come together in their steadfast perseverance. Christmas is a time for families and friends to come together. A school community is in many ways like a family. RFS is a school with long term relationships between the faculty, the staff, the students and the parents that make this school unique. Our Quaker values ask us to live in the spirit of love and truth and peace and to recognize that spirit in others. Christmas is much more than just a time for people to come together. It is a time for us to celebrate and reflect on the moment when God entered human history through the birth of Jesus Christ. It is for that reason that Christmas is a time for hope and a time to be thankful. We have a lot to be thankful for - our families, our friends, for the people that care for us. We are also reminded that during this time of tension that not everyone will have a joyful Christmas. We take all of Palestine into our hearts and prayers and remember always that we are here together. We wish you a happy and safe Christmas.*

Adrian Moody

Adrian Moody - Head of School

'Tis the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

Riyam Kafri – Upper School Principal

It is the most wonderful time of the year at RFS! Since my time here as a student, December was my favorite month. Twenty some years later, it still is. RFS has a special way of spreading the season's spirit.

December begins with Christmas tree decorations. The tradition comes with rituals: putting up the tree, throwing on the lights, then adding on the decorations. On the upper campus, Ms. Odeit spearheads the activity and people walk by and lend a hand as they make their way to class or to a meeting. And with just the simple switch of the lights, the warmth of this season begins.

Last year we added a new tradition to the school, the White Gifts Family Dinner. We come together as a family, to eat, play and celebrate together. Proceeds from the dinner as well as the donations collected throughout the semester are distributed among families from Ramallah, El Bireh and neighboring villages and refugee camps. Students and teachers go from house to house delivering the gifts.

We hope to raise caring individuals at RFS and this program is at the heart of fostering caring for others within our children. Palestinian resilience and perseverance are built on social solidarity, something we hope will become a second nature to our students as they grow up and become responsible individuals.



The student council's "Secret Santa" comes a week or so after that, and the sight of students dressed in Santa hats delivering chocolates to everyone on campus lifts you up and brings you joy and hope even if just for a brief moment in the midst of all the turmoil we live in. This year, December was extra special, because I got to enjoy it as a parent at RFS. The lower school Christmas recitals started on Saturday December 16th and continued for four days. The sound of young children's voices singing, the excitement that radiates through



RFS White Gifts Christmas Dinner was a great success! The event included a Bingo game, a visit from Santa, karaoke, and all proceedings went to the Upper School's White Gifts Program.



UKG Parent Involvement Annual Baking Activity

their eyes on stage washes over you with happiness. The effort teachers put in to get six hundred plus children on stage without any significant errors speaks volumes about the dedication and the love that circulates. The week ends with a visit from Santa, and as a parent, I am thankful that our small children get a small taste of happiness that Santa inevitably brings with him every year.

At the request my twins Basil and Taima, who wanted their mother to donate her time for an activity with their school. I volunteered with the Upper KG for the Christmas cookie baking activity. It is important to note here that this activity isn't entirely about making cookies. If you look underneath the surface, there is a lesson on measurements, and how different things come together to make new things. The children were inquisitive, curious, excited and so creative. Every step was an adventure that prompted a healing amount of oohs and aahs from them. While I may have been nervous the night before, and was wondering where will I muster the energy to work with twenty children the following day, when I left that afternoon, the thrill these children passed on to me was overflowing. And I felt extremely lucky and blessed to have such an opportunity. RFS does put you in the mood for the season in so many ways. And we do it including everyone, mirroring the plurality of Palestinian society, and the diverse social fabric we are all made off. We try to be a beacon of hope when hope seems so far away at times. Perseverance and resilience is what keeps us steadfast in Palestine, and RFS has definitely stood the test of time over almost one hundred and fifty years. Much like Christmas Cookies, each and every one of us is an ingredient, and with a pinch of love, a dash of giving and lots of dedication we come together to make RFS what it is.*



Alumni in the Spotlight

By Lama Murra – Alumni Relations

This month, the Olive Press was honored to interview Ramallah Friends School 1973 alumna, English Literature Professor at Birzeit University Wafa' Darwish. Darwish visited the Lower School Campus (FGS) which she graduated from more than 40 years ago. While touring campus Wafa' told the OP about different memories she shared with classmates and school's faculty, she shared with us her favorite spots and explained about her love for the campus, the school and that period of her life.

Wafa' started attending the school in 9th grade, three years after fully losing her sight. After such a tremendous change in her life at a young age, she became a member of Friends Society, which according to her absorbed her needs, understood her and accepted her as she was at a time where others outside of this community couldn't. Wafa' told the OP about her experience when she first came to the school:

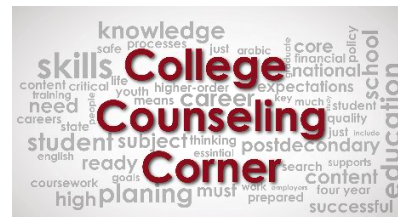
"It constituted a turning point in my life, am not praising the school, it's just that I was drowning at that point and all of the sudden I found myself at the shore of safety and security, it was very healthy, very welcoming, very loving environment for me at the Friends, everybody was supportive, which I wasn't used to then."

She also expressed how emotional it is for her to visit the school, where as she told the OP "I had a life time experience at the Friends, after the trauma I experienced at a young age it allowed me to pursue my higher education at the American University of Beirut for my Bachelors and Masters and PhD at the Hebrew University."

Wafa' told OP that RFS' commitment to accepting everyone had affected her "I always appreciate how much this school gave me, especially when I was offered a room to stay in."

Wafa' published different papers mainly in the topic of African American Literature. She recently published her own biography "Not Done with Life yet," in which she wrote about RFS and the role it played in her life.

"The school not only makes you fall in love with it, but also with Ramallah." Darwish*



By Chris Akel – College Counselor

UPCOMING DEADLINES:

January 1-15th: Most Regular and Final Application Deadlines to Colleges and Universities in the United States.

January 7th: Applications for any 9th graders to apply to the 2018-19 Exchange Program for Sidwell or West Town

January 15th: UK Application Deadline (final for most universities).

Early January - early February: Most Canadian college and university deadlines for Fall 2018.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

11th Grade Meetings: Starting in mid-January, all 11th graders will be required to meet with Chris for an initial College Counseling Meeting. This meeting is mandatory, and Chris will be sending out meeting times and dates towards the beginning of January. There will be pre-work for 11th graders to finish, including reading through College Counseling expectations and finishing a personal survey.

6-11th Grade College Events: This spring, we have a strong lineup of virtual, in-person, and alumni college presentations and tours. Please remind students to check their emails and all events are open to parents and families as well! More to come in 2018

12th Grade Application Update: We have officially been accepted to 33 colleges/universities, in 3 different countries, and with \$1.5 million in total scholarship so far, before any Regular Deadline in the world! If your student is in 12th grade - or you know one - congratulate them on the hard work this holiday season!*

"Happiness does not result from what we get, but from what we give" – Ben Carson

By Odeit Asfour Dar Yousef- Upper School White Gifts Program Committee

There is nothing in life more fulfilling and joyous than the value of giving, and we cannot even begin to imagine the impact it has on a community as a whole unless the children of that community are raised with that value. Our vision at RFS is based on Quaker values and ethos, which contain the value of giving to others who are less fortunate. By raising our students to care for others, we try to instill this value not only in their lives while at school, but we hope for them to carry it with them wherever they go after graduating from RFS, so that they can maybe instill it in others as well. I would like to share with you a story about one of our graduates who took the value of giving, which we taught her, after graduating from RFS and finishing her university studies and she organized her own campaign to help Syrian refugees in the country she is now residing in. Working as a school teacher, she organized a White Gifts Program and even added it to the curriculum she was teaching – outside of Palestine, by organizing a number of school events and activities with her students aimed at collecting money and giving it to Syrian families. Our hearts were filled with pride and love when we received a letter from our graduate thanking us for instilling this value in her life when she was an RFS student, and she actually said that if it wasn't for our activities in the RFS White Gifts Program, as well as the Quaker values and ethos she gained at RFS, she would have never been able to pull off such an amazing campaign.



Mrs. Odeit & Mrs. Samah at Upper School White Gifts Program activities.

As a teacher, the greatest form of appreciation for us is seeing that our students have gained the values and ethos we raise them to follow, and that they are teaching these values to others! That is when we can see the RFS vision being physically represented and spread around the world. We always hope that the White Gifts Program can reach all those who need help and assistance in our community and beyond. But our larger mission remains to raise a whole generation able to carry this message with them throughout their lives and spread it around the world wherever they go.*



Upper School students selling homemade food as a part of the White Gifts Program



Lower School students and parents selling homemade food as a part of the White Gifts Program.

Did you know?

RFS' White Gifts Program was first instituted after the partition of Palestine in 1948 to give foodstuffs and money to needy families and refugees who had fled the war. And it has continued ever since!*

White Gifts @ the Lower School

Rose Hilaneh & Arlette Kaoud – Lower School White Gifts Program Committee

At RFS we strive to engrave an academic and social message within our community based on the Quaker values of Equality,



Simplicity, Compassion, Cooperation and Empathy. The White Gifts Program aims to embody this message and also characterizes the soul of the International Baccalaureate Program in helping our students become caring, responsible and committed members of their community. It allows our youngest students to develop different social and life skills that are in line with the reality they live in; they learn and practice the real process of selling and buying, taking conscious decisions regarding public health on what they decide to sell and eat, and making decisions on the quality and quantity of the food they want to sell. Every year, parents play a vital role in this program by preparing delicious homemade healthy food for our students to sell at weekly bake-sales, and they also come to school and help their children in the selling

process during recess, creating a cheerful active atmosphere in which all the different members of our community come together in a positive spirit to collect as much money as possible to give to a larger number of families who are less fortunate than ourselves. And I will not forget to mention RFS staff and teachers who organize bake-sales on different days so that they can sell food to the students and collect money as well, setting a realistic model and example for our students. As teachers, we always want to show our children that we are all a part of one community and that we all work towards the same goals in representing our school values interactively and spontaneously. I am glad to share with you that this year (2017-2018) at the Lower School we were able to collect almost 42,000 NIS which were distributed to 120 families in need. And we would like to thank all Lower School parents who participated in ways more than one in the program this year, as well as Lower School staff who helped us all throughout the first trimester in organizing, selling, and running the program.*

When everything seems dark, consider you may be the light.
Quaker Proverb

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Upcoming Dates and Events

23 December 23rd – January 9th
Christmas Holiday

January 10th
First day back to school!

January 17th
US - Last day of 1st semester for grades 6-12

January 18th
US - First day of 3rd Quarter

January 20th
LS – no school due to professional development workshop

January 25th
US – Report cards distribution

January 26th, 27th, 28th
US - PalMUN Conference (no school on Jan. 27th)

February 1st- 15th
3rd tuition payment due (old students)

February 3rd
US – half day for students due to professional development.

January 2018
Ramallah Friends School Monthly Calendar

RFS NEW Monthly Calendar – Stay updated through our website
www.rfs.edu.ps

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***For more photos, videos, and coverage of RFS' Christmas festivities and activities, please visit our Facebook and YouTube pages.**

