

Friends Schools Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2009



Memories of Butterflies

By Duha Masri, Head of Preschool

Does a butterfly remember the experiences and memories from when it was a caterpillar or in a cocoon?

The ability to recognize the development and improvements that are occurring in a particular place, such as the Friends Kindergarten, as the individuals who contribute to it are evolving and the world around it is changing is what paves a path for possible continuous enhancement. This recognition is the light that guides us in reaching our goals, that aim to nurture our relationships and experiences, maintain our commitment to our students for providing them with long-term opportunities for exceptional education and stressing the importance of democracy and equality to all.

I base this approach on the testimony of parents that only 26 years ago were students in my class at the Friends Kindergarten. At the time, we only had three classes, lower KG, and two for upper KG. Nowadays, we are pleased to maximize our resources so we can provide more educational opportunities, as there are three classes of lower KG and three classes of upper KG, and the upper KG classes are no longer based on traditional learning but now are based on active learning.

The active learning aspect is what enhances the sense of community between our students, parents and teachers. This goes in harmony with our mission that is guided by the Quaker core values for social responsibility. In the past five years, it has been a priority of our projects to spread social awareness in regards to democracy and the environment, not only to our students but also to the society as a whole.

We are committed to this role as individuals, families and institutions, that we must maintain the understanding of democracy, free thinking and accepting differences as a part of human nature. We maintain and encourage diversity through storytelling and songs that deal with various social issues that are facing us, for instance, environmental awareness.

Second, we value projects that will enlighten students through active learning about entitlement of personal views as different as they may be. Most importantly, we learn how to understand and accept these differences without becoming passive. For instance, we have been holding annual elections for a new King or Queen for the animals for each academic year. The nominees are presented with their qualifications to lead. Based on that, students will vote for the candidate that they view will serve the community with leadership, honesty and integrity.

Parents that volunteer in these projects note, "We did not get the chance to do this when we were our children's age; we want to come back and have the chance to do it." Hearing this allows me to be certain that the experiences and memories that our children are building to expand their social responsibility to their community and the world as a whole will be implemented on various stages as they grow up and become the butterflies of the future.



Above: Knar Mardirossian's Kindergarten class practices English by describing the plants, the weather and the playground.

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Editor: Rebecca Mason,
RFS Development Officer



Lower School Renovates Retaining Walls

By Diana Abdel Nour, Lower School Principal

The Palestinian environment is one of dynamic nature which undergoes constant changes that require all parts of society to adapt. Individuals along with institutions must have adequate capacity to respond to these changes in an effective way. A "learning organization" is one that is fully aware of the need to constantly search for answers and methods to respond to surrounding changes. Responsiveness to community needs will no doubt ensure sustained existence at a competitive level.

The Lower School (FGS) has always strived to work on developing its academic programs, activities and teachers' development along with the school's facilities. Education research has proved that the physical condition of a school can make a difference in student achievement.

Since the FGS is over 100 years old and three of its four buildings are at least 70 years old, there is an essential need to constantly renovate and expand in construction. Unfortunately, due to limited resources and the tight budget the school develops/renovates one area at a time. Facilities have been developed on a gradual basis since the school's budget does not allow for major comprehensive development plans; therefore each year one project is implemented.

We believe our students are entitled to a safe learning environment and the benefits of outdoor play for children cannot be understated. A recent paper by the American Pediatrics Association affirms that

play is "integral to the academic environment" and directly correlates with many positive improvements in the classroom. In short, children learn through play. Accordingly, renovating the playgrounds and the re-building of the sanasel were listed as one of the school's priorities for this year. *Sanasel* is the Arabic name for small retaining walls that are built around yards with different levels. In fact, building *sanasel* is one of the distinguished traditional stone structures in Palestine. People used to build it with their own hands, using stones to segment and demarcate the different sections of the land.

During the summer holiday, the FGS *sanasel* have been rebuilt in a way to match and maintain the old style of the school. Along with the *sanasel*, some landscaping was done to the yards to make them safer and nicer for the children to play. Different levels/heights for the *sanasel* were kept which added a beautiful touch around the renovated area. A clear pathway was made in between with interlocking tiles. More sand was added to the playground area for children to enjoy. In addition, the football yard was covered with turf to make it safer and more enjoyable for playing.

All the above changes have resulted in a beautiful, spacious campus that is safer and more enjoyable for our children. The school community, parents and teachers are enjoying the new landscaping which has positively affected the morale and changed the atmosphere in the playgrounds area. It brings joy to my heart to see the children enjoying the new renovated playground area. They deserve it! 🌸



Above: A retaining wall, *sanasel*, is a structure that holds soil or rock from a building area. It also prevents down slope movement or erosion and provides support for vertical or near-vertical grade changes.

Right: Lower school students enjoying the new playground.



Lower School News in Brief

Best Soccer Player in the Ramallah Area

The Palestinian Ministry of Education chose Friends School student, Mohammad Badawi, to represent the Palestinian soccer team which competed in France. Mohammad has already been awarded "Best Player in the Ramallah Area." The team took first place, beating the following countries: Italy (6-2), Germany (5-1), Russia (6-0) and Sudan (4-0). Congratulations to Mohammad who scored eight goals!

Other Ways of Learning English

By Joviana Stephan, third grade English teacher

During the first week of school, a third grade student stood up and asked with astonishment, "Do you really mean that each Saturday we will not bring any English books or copybooks?" I nodded and explained a new initiative for the year; to devote one English class per week to learn English away from the curriculum and text books. "Other Ways of Learning English" exposes students to different and creative methods that will strengthen their abilities and sharpen their skills in English through creative writing, analyzing stories, show and tell, using specially designed worksheets, poetry, acting, singing, listening and reading comprehension. I believe that these activities will offer the students a unique opportunity to express themselves freely, develop and encourage critical thinking and open a new horizon for learning English.

Eat Healthy and Stay Fit

By Reem Dajani, first grade English teacher

In First Grade, one of our main themes is to eat healthy and to stay fit. Every morning, we talk about healthy food and the benefits it has for our

The Middle Years Program

By Mohammad Habbas, MYP Coordinator

After many years of work and preparation, the Ramallah Friends Schools was accredited by the International Baccalaureate Organization as an IB candidate school for the Middle Years Program (MYP). The school is now pursuing accreditation as an MYP world school. These schools share a common philosophy: a commitment to high quality, challenging and international education that the Friends School believes is important for its students.

As part of the school preparations to deliver the MYP program, the school's head and five other teachers attended an MYP official workshop the first week in July 2009, hosted in Basel, Switzerland, by the International Baccalaureate organization.

The MYP provides a holistic education, which means that the education of the adolescent should expose them to as many different subjects, skills and experiences as possible. Students should have the opportunity to show their various strengths, gaining both a sense of personal achievement and an understanding of global issues.

The MYP places students at the center of the learning process which provides them with an awareness of their own methods and practices, and develops skills to continue the learning process throughout life. MYP offers a context for learning through five areas of interaction. These areas are woven throughout every MYP subject, and they create a process of learning that helps students see and understand the connections between what they study in school and what they have experienced in their lives.

The school plans to introduce the MYP gradually. We began this year with grade seven. In subsequent years a new grade will join the program each year through grade 10.

We hope to attain the status of an authorized school within two years, linking the MYP to our already successful IB program for grades 11 and 12.



Above: Mahmoud Amra, Upper School principal, and teachers, Samah Hussein, Mohammad Salamah and Fadi Abu Farha attended the MYP workshop and conference in Basel, Switzerland.

body. The students name all the healthy foods they can think of. We also talk about salad and its benefits. We "make a salad" every day, by imagining we go to the market, buy a head of lettuce, a kilo of tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet peppers and lemon. We wash the vegetables and start to chop them and put them in the bowl. We put a bit of salt, not too much, olive oil and lemon in the bowl. We mix it and eat it. Delicious! We talk about junk food and how too much of it causes cavities. Daily, they come to school and share with the class the healthy food they ate. They do mention when they ate a bit of junk, and that they quickly brushed their teeth afterwards.

Theme-based Learning in Preschool

By Knar Mardirossian, lower kindergarten English teacher

The English language is introduced to our preschool children through different themes. A field trip is arranged for this fall to take the children to a farmer's market during the "Farm Theme." This will not only engage them in hands-on learning about farm produce but will also assist them in learning about making healthy food choices.

Wall Murals

By Tatiana Starovounova, Lower School art teacher

This year, the art department in our school will participate in a wall mural project in association with the USAID Model School Network (MSN) Program, involving both children and their parents. Because children are stimulated by a creative environment, we will make the wall mural a beautiful gift for the school. Through this mural, we aim to make the learning experience more vivid and alive. Children will create a mural showing their own country. Using the Palestinian environment around them and a bit of their own creativity, children have come up with a wonderful idea for the mural, bringing a

bit of Palestine closer to the school. Parents will be helping to establish this project, working along with the students on weekends and during their free time. Teachers will participate as well, creating a team working experience. Learning was never this fun and creative!

Parents Workshops

By Adele Jaraiseh, Lower School counselor

Again this year, the school will be providing parenting workshops for parents of our students. A total of 130 parents have expressed their interest in participating in these workshops, which are conducted by the school counselor. Each group is comprised of 15 parents. They attend four sessions held over four consecutive weeks. The curriculum was generated from the parents' needs with the goal of empowering parenting skills. Some examples of issues discussed are dealing with anger, helping children to make friends, motivating children, reward and punishment, helping children express their feelings, dealing with family crisis and teaching responsibility toward home and work.



Left: Lower School soccer team (Mohammad Badawi holding trophy)

Looking Back to Move Forward

By Betsy Brinson and Gordon Davies, RFS volunteers

Sometimes it is important to see where we have been in order to set a course for the future. Where have we been, what have we done and where should we be going? What successes have we achieved and (blush!) what didn't come out as well as we'd hoped?

In William Faulkner's play, *A Requiem for a Nun*, a character says, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."



We're Betsy Brinson and Gordon Davies, members of the Richmond, Virginia, Friends Meeting in the United States. With great encouragement and support, RFS Director Joyce Ajlouny has made a place for us in Ramallah this year to help build the archives and historic records of the Ramallah Friends Schools.

Betsy is a public historian — a collector and teller of stories that help people understand their communities and their lives in order to act more effectively every day. Her award-winning film, *Living the Story*, documents the struggle to end legal segregation in one state (Kentucky). She is the primary researcher for a new book, scheduled for publication early in 2010, that tells the stories of American men and women soldiers who refused military service in Iraq.

In addition to collecting oral histories from RFS graduates, teachers, administrators and others, Betsy will be gathering photographs and other artifacts that will contribute to a "living memory" of the Friends Schools.

Gordon has worked primarily in higher education, directing the efforts of two states, Virginia and Kentucky, to coordinate their universities and colleges in ways that best meet the needs of people, regardless of their social and economic circumstances. He has consulted widely throughout the United States and in several other countries. While at the RFS, he is helping Betsy while doing some teaching and administrative consultation at Birzeit University.

We are glad to share in the rich and productive life of the Ramallah Friends Schools.



Above: Upper School teachers and students are finally able to enjoy a state-of-the-art learning environment in their new classrooms building.

Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School principal

In general, the school year 2008–09 was smooth with no major interruptions except for the ongoing construction work at the school. The number of students this year and last year (520) was the highest ever and many applicants could not enroll at the school because of the lack of vacancies.

There were several achievements this year in different fields.

- On the level of academics, a plan to implement the Middle Years Program was discussed by the Board of Trustees and approved (see article by MYP coordinator, Mohammad Habbas). The initial application was submitted and the school has now received the status of a candidate school.
- Art classes have been introduced for grades 9 and 10, and the college counseling program succeeded in establishing relations with many new colleges which offer fresh opportunities for our seniors.

A Different Kind of Suffering: Lessons from my summer in Kenya

By Tareq Khalaf, RFS Senior

What is suffering, what is happiness and what is satisfaction? These are some of the questions that my recent trip to Kenya helped me explore.

I spent three weeks in a beautiful country amongst new friends in the summer of 2009. My workcamp in Kenya will never be forgotten. I went as a volunteer with the Friend's Peace Teams' African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI). My friends at home thought I was losing my mind, but the adventurer spirit in me was determined to venture out to Africa, alone, to the world of the unknown and help others who are less privileged. I was grateful for the support of my parents who encouraged me and bought me my air ticket, and off I went.

My mission was to help continue to build a school in a western rural part of the African country. I was told that the school, once completed, will serve many underprivileged children in that area and will give them a chance at an otherwise hard to attain education. The school will also give these children a healthy and safe environment to be in where they can enjoy their childhood instead of working in the streets at that young age. So, sleeves rolled up, my work began as I joined eight other volunteers from the U.S. and Europe and several Kenyans for three weeks of hard work — and lots of fun as well. (As I write this, I learned that the school building is functional; however, it requires some support to connect it with electricity.)

What I didn't expect while I was there was for this trip to change my life. My experiences represented a very significant turning point in my life, a point where I opened my eyes wide and took a very deep look at the world I live in. I was given a chance to observe a wonderful and colorful culture, where people know how to appreciate the simple things in life. What I found most wonderful about the Kenyan



people was their ability to be satisfied and happy with the bare minimum. I can gladly say that after having been to Kenya I have become a simpler and more easily satisfied person. I surprised myself, for example, when I returned home and never mentioned again to my parents what I have reiterated so often in the past — that 'I desperately need a new cell phone' — and gladly settled with the shabby but fully functional one I've had for the past three years.

As a Palestinian, I know firsthand what it means to live under a harsh occupation that limits one from basic human needs. However, my trip to Kenya gave me a chance to view a different human struggle, the struggle of poverty and sickness. This was especially important to me because I realized that there are many struggles around the world other than my own — all are legitimate and all require my attention. I am hoping that my summer workcamp experience will inspire other students from the Ramallah Friends Schools to volunteer there as well. I am working on making sure that my experience is replicated in the future through a more lasting Palestine-Kenya connection. 🌍

- The participation of Upper School students in Model United Nations (MUN) conferences is growing each year and has become a tradition. This year, 12 students are participating in the MUN conference taking place in the Netherlands. Another six will go in January 2010 to Doha, Qatar.
- The Upper School was once again proud to announce scholarship exchange program opportunities in partnership with William Penn Charter, Westtown School, George School and Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. These four Quaker schools have generously offered to accept one student each and to provide scholarships for them to spend an academic year abroad. The four students are now attending those schools and the feedback we are receiving from them as well as from their teachers is very positive. Our students who attended Sidwell, Westtown and Penn Charter last year are now back at RFS. They shared with the students of the school their wonderful experience abroad.
- High points in activities were the Dabkeh performance and the plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*.
- The school also witnessed several development projects such as the renovation of the grounds and the new classrooms building.
- In addition to that, the newly elected PTA was active this year and has contributed positively to school life.



Above: Dabkeh (traditional Palestinian dance) performance at Friends School Reunion, July 2009.

Donor Thanks

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

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Donor Spotlight: Quäker-Hilfe Germany

We are so grateful for the continued annual support of Quäker-Hilfe Germany, the charitable organization of the German Quakers. Their funding priorities include projects that promote peace, aim to reduce conflicts and advance development and greater justice in world trade (Fair Trade). For the past five years, Quäker-Hilfe has generously supported our student financial aid program, granting over four full scholarships to female students annually. **Thank you, Quäker-Hilfe!**



Last year's student-exchange program participants, left to right: Razan Anabtawi attended William Penn Charter School; Alexandra Mukhtar attended Westtown School; Tamer Sa'adeh attended Sidwell Friends School.

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



U.S. \$ Gifts: Tax-deductible gifts should be made payable to the Ramallah Friends Schools 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 (QIET), noting "for Ramallah" on the back and saying if Gift Aid may be claimed, and sent to: QIET, Yew Tree House, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, OX15 4ET or Brian Morphy at QIET, Tel: 01295 720019; e-mail: brianmorphy@tiscali.co.uk.

*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2009–2010 range from U.S. \$1,800 to U.S. \$2,630.

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For further information and inquiries feel free to contact Rebecca Mason in the Director's Office at development@palfriends.org or Tel: +972-2-295-2286, www.palfriends.org.

Online Giving: After much thought and preparation, Ramallah Friends School has created an online donation page. This secure site will be active by mid-November and will allow our supporters to make tax-deductible donations with the click of a mouse. Please visit www.palfriends.org to make a donation!

Mastering the Art of College Applications

By Tamara Masri, RFS Senior



The day has finally come. The highly anticipated college application process. As I watched seniors graduate and head on to higher education, I dreamed of the day that I would be one of them. Beaming as I clutched my high school diploma, I would proudly walk into my ambitious and promising future. Harvard or Yale? I would ask myself, as if they were just waiting for the day for me to arrive and enrich their institutions.

Well, those dreams are over. Apparently Harvard and Yale are quite competitive. With the plethora of assignments coincidentally also due this semester, the countless tests, the (hopefully profound and compelling) college essays I have to write, staying involved with activities and remaining, on top of it all, a well-balanced, well-liked and wildly intelligent applicant, I am not so confident. My quixotic dreams have withered into small dusty fragments sandwiched in the pages of my 2009 Fiske Guide to Colleges and my dog-eared copy of *Rock the SAT*. Being yourself has never been so challenging. Can anyone really expect a human being to fulfill the requirements of an IB workload while remaining involved in "engaging activities?" Any IB student knows that the two do not go hand in hand. When I did get

decent grades, I was most definitely not very well-balanced; I can't even promise that I was fully mentally stable.

However, we manage to get along, or at least that's what I've been telling myself. Our thoughtful college counselor, Brian Phelps, serves not only as therapist to victims of the IB program, but also assures us that we will overcome this obstacle in our lives. We are all carried forward by the thought that he, at least, believes in us. (They say the placebo effect is quite powerful for those struggling with life-threatening illnesses.) Without a doubt Brian has mastered the art of convincing us that we do have great potential, so long as we are hard working and ambitious. And from what I've seen, it works.

Sometimes my dad's lists of "Up and Coming Schools You Probably Haven't Looked At" (which for him include Princeton and Georgetown) are slightly discouraging, but I have learned to accept that this is what it's all about. Perhaps it is the biggest test of all — will we sink? Or will we swim? All I can say is that I will try my best and be the best applicant I can possibly be. If I'm lucky, I will make it out alive, just as others have done before me, grateful to get my high-school diploma and ready for the college adventure.





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