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Issue 3 of the Friends Schools Newsletter in Ramallah

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FRIENDS SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER



VOL.3, NO.1 PO BOX 66, Ramallah, West Bank, Via Israel Autumn 1989

One Year Late, SCHOOLS REOPEN

On July 18, 1989, after a seven-month military closure, the Israeli authorities ordered the gradual reopening of all schools in the West Bank.



The first six elementary grades and the twelfth grade resumed classes on the 22nd of July. They were followed by the preparatory classes who returned on the 2nd of August, and the 10th and 11th grades who were allowed back on the 30th of August. The opening of schools was no doubt in response to international and local pressure. The long term plans of the military, however, are not known. It should be noted that the universities in the West Bank and Gaza remain closed by military order.

Palestinians received the reopening order with mixed feelings. Although parents were pleased that their children could go back to school they were skeptical as to whether the authorities will keep them open for long. Palestinians view the school closures as another form of

collective punishment in an attempt to blackmail the society into submission. The Israeli argument that the closure of schools was necessary for security reasons does not hold. Are first graders really a threat to Israeli security? The authorities said that they feared that open schools gave students a place to demonstrate.

Why then were they opposed to alternative forms of education such as in the home where students did not congregate?

Shortly after the Intifada began and in response to the school closures, popular committees arranged neighborhood classes. Students met outdoors, in homes, mosques and churches for study sessions with parents, teachers or older children. Popular education differed in content and style from place to place. The absence of direct Israeli supervision gave Palestinian educators an excellent opportunity to experiment with a new curriculum that is more in touch with the Palestinian history and culture. This was a breath of fresh air to many educators who always felt that the Jordanian curriculum, which is taught in all West Bank schools, was out of date

and inappropriate. Popular education continued for some time till it was declared illegal by the authorities and outlawed. Any student, or teacher found participating was subject to harassment and arrest. More frustrating was the authorities' refusal to allow the distribution of home study packets for parents to teach their children at home, a program which was initiated by some private and UNRWA schools. The Israeli crackdown on popular education had a chilling effect. While some communities continued to defy military orders and teach, popular education in most areas was stopped. It was clear by that time that the Israelis were against any kind of education. Their aim was to pressure the community into stopping the Intifada by paying a high price, that of "education". Politically, the Israelis paid a high price as well. The closure of schools was condemned by the international community and further tarred Israel's image.

The continued and lengthy closure of schools had negative consequences on Palestinian children. With students out of school for most of the past 19 months, academic skills have been forgotten as have the normal routines of school. Educators are concerned about the effect this lengthy closure had on younger children in particular. Children of ages 6-8 are still illiterate, older children have forgotten what they have learned. Children lost the habit of serious and productive work in a structured learning environment and within a group.

Response to authority and classroom management are also a major concern for many educators. Having defied the Israeli authorities, children may be experiencing internal pressures that have implications for traditional Palestinian family and societal

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FRIENDS GIRLS SCHOOL'S CENTENNIAL YEAR 1889-1989

"Eli and Sybil Jones, Quakers from China, Main, visited Ramallah early in 1869. Seeing the Greek, Latin and C.M.S. schools for boys, with none for girls, they felt for the girls who had to carry the burdens and had no chance." (As told by Elias Audi).

It was this concern to "give girls a chance" that Eli and Sybil Jones took back to New England Meeting for Friends. There it met with care and approval, and the Jones were given the funds to open several day schools for girls. It wasn't until 1889 that enough funds were available for a boarding school in Ramallah. In that year, with only twelve girls and a Lebanese headmistress, Miss Katie Gabriel, the Girls Training Home (later renamed the Friends Girls School) opened its doors to the "girlhood of Palestine."

It wasn't easy convincing parents that girls could be educated. In spite of obstacles, the reputation of the spirit of the Girls Training Home and the caliber of its education grew. Gradually girls were coming from all over Palestine to attend the Girls Training Home.

The century of Friends Girls School's existence has been a century of war and political unrest, of changing governments and occupations, of struggle for independence and self-determination, a century of challenge and opportunity for Palestinian women.

That doubt that some fathers may have had a hundred years ago concerning the educability of girls has long since been put to rest. Graduates of FGS have gone on to university to become teachers, doctors, lawyers, political analysts, college professors, engineers, computer specialists, authors, artists, musicians, counselors, TV directors, principals, nurses newscasters, ... as well as admirably fulfilling the traditional roles of wives and mothers. They still carry the burdens placed upon them but what a chance they have been given!

For a century Friends Girls School has moved with a spirit of tolerance and love. The Moslem and Christian girls who have been part of that sisterhood know what that spirit is. They know there is a uniqueness-- a specialness--



in having been part of Friends Girls School.

"The little seed planted in love and faith (100) years ago has grown into a huge tree sending out intelligent, dependable and responsible women filling positions in all walks of life... We have every right to be proud of our alma mater. I am sure you will join me in fervent hopes that the doors will be open... for many many years to come. (An excerpt from a letter from Victoria Hannush).

This Centennial Year of 1989 may see the closure of FGS. FGS needs the financial support of its friends... of its former graduates. It is our fervent hope that Friends Girls School can survive to continue to be a leader in education for Palestinian women.

Mildred White, a former teacher and principal of FGS wrote the following Girls' School song:

Sheltered safe, among the
fragrant pines.....
Where peace and friendship
ever dwelt
proudly stands the queen of

Palestine.....
Our school, the Friends Girls
School, we love so well.

Oh hail, the blue and Quaker
grey.....
What memories still around
thee cling

Thy children still from far
away
Their praises to FGS will ever
ring.

Dear school to thee, our
praises will be
We'll cherish 'er thy spirit
kind and pure
Our love to thee, our loyalty,
ever shall endure.

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If you would like to
contribute to FGS's survival,
please send contributions to :
Principal
Friends Girls School
Box 166
Ramallah
West Bank, Via Israel.

Friends Girls School is having
printed a Centennial Booklet
containing a brief historical
sketch of the school, the
various school songs with
their music, pages of
"memories" collected from
former graduates, pictures of
all the graduating classes,
lists of all the graduates,
and much more. To reserve your
copy send a postcard with your
name and address to:
Centennial Booklet
Friends Girls School
(Same address as above).

NEW CHALLENGES FOR FRIENDS SCHOOLS

The past 19 months have been difficult ones for the Friends schools in Ramallah. The closure of the schools has had a devastating effect on the schools' educational plans. Rather than expand resources on the improvement of facilities, the upgrading of staff, and the development of new curricula, the schools have seen their income diminish as the student body has shrunk in size and many of those students still enrolled were unable to pay their fees. Major decisions must be made by the Board of Trustees as it deals with this harsh reality.

The closure of schools hurt all Palestinians, its effects on the Friends Schools have been devastating. Unlike other schools in the West Bank and Gaza strip, 37% of the student body were English-speaking, that is Palestinian students mainly from America whose first language is English. For some time Palestinian families in America have sent their children back to the homeland to learn something of their Palestinian roots and to learn the Arabic language. The Friends Schools were the only schools in the West Bank and Gaza which provided these children with a bilingual education. With the closure of schools, most of these children were recalled by their parents back to the USA to continue their education. In addition to the departure of these students, many parents found alternative education in private schools in East Jerusalem for their children, further decreasing the enrollment at the Friends.

Despite the problems brought about by the closure of the schools, the Friends schools' administration and faculty did not sit idly by waiting for the Israelis to reopen the schools. Meetings were held in search of creative and challenging educational alternatives to regular schooling. A temporary alternative was sought without openly defying the military orders. The most effective and successful program developed was that of "teaching at a distance" in which teachers prepared and distributed home study packets which allowed parents to teach their children at home without having them come to school on

a daily basis.

Naturally this and other alternative programs could not replace regular supervised teaching at a central location. But they spoke of the Friends' commitment to education despite the external obstacles. Unfortunately these efforts on the part of the Friends Schools were insufficient in retaining the student body, nor were they considered enough to justify charging full tuition fees. To further complicate the financial picture, the Friends Schools had to bear in mind the severe economic hardships being borne by the community due to the uprising. Unlike other private schools which are heavily subsidized by foreign institutions, the Friends have been 95% dependent on tuition fees.

It is therefore not surprising that the Board of Trustees finds it is being forced to make some difficult decisions if the schools are to survive. At present there seem to be three alternatives: 1. To close both schools entirely; 2. To merge the boys and girls schools or 3. To continue with the present situation with the hope that the school will be able to shortly regain its financial strength. In a recent meeting, the Board opted for the merger since it seemed the most fiscally responsible and most beneficial in the long run. The idea of merger is not actually a new one; it had been on the agenda of the Board of Trustees for quite some time. The present situation forced the Board to an early decision despite the fact that a study had not been completed, as had been hoped, to measure the applicability. Beginning with the next school year, 1989-1990, which is due to start in January 1990, the administration, staff and students of the two Friends Schools will be merged.

(For further views on the merger see page 4)

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SCHOOL LOOSES

ITS FIRST MARTYR

Saturday, August the 19th, was an exceptionally sad day for the Friends Schools. The body of Amjad Jibril, a Palestinian American grade 9 student, was found on the previous evening. Amjad had been missing for three days. The circumstances of his death remain unclear.



Amjad was last seen by friends and family on the evening of Wednesday the 16th of August when he left his home to attend afternoon prayers at a nearby mosque. There were clashes and heavy shooting following the prayers and Amjad did not return home that evening. Amjad's mother reported his disappearance both to the American consulate and the Ramallah Police. The family had no news about the whereabouts of Amjad for three days. A shepherd found Amjad's body on the evening of Friday the 18 with a gunshot wound in his chest. Amjad's uncle identified the body and a speedy burial was arranged in accordance with Islamic traditions.

News about Amjad's death spread around the school early the following day. The school administration called for a three day mourning. Students and faculty then proceeded to Amjad's house to give their condolences. Amjad is the first martyr of the school since the beginning of the intifada.

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VIEWS ON MERGING FRIENDS SCHOOLS

The present difficult situation and the financial difficulties that the Friends Schools are facing have speeded up the decision-making process regarding a matter which the local Board of Trustees has been discussing intermittently for the past two years - the merger of the Friends Girls and Friends Boys schools into one co-educational school housed in two campuses. The following interview with Ms. Abla Nasser, from the FGS, and Mr. Mahshi, from the FBS, reflects the views of the principals of both schools concerning this merger.

Q: How does the administration of the Friends Girls school view the merger?

Nasser: We have serious reservations regarding a complete merger at this point. Merging administration is a positive step, but we feel there are drawbacks to complete merger of staff and students. The merger will mean the closing of FGS after a century of service to Palestinian women. This school has been renowned for the opportunities it has given to women to develop their self-confidence, their leadership skills, their independence and their talents. In a society like ours, it has been valuable to have a women's institution where girls can have a positive environment in which to develop into the women they can be. We are terribly uncertain that the merger will provide the kind of environment that is best for our girls. We wonder if the anticipated gain will balance out the loss to FGS students.

Q: In the outside world women are in constant competition with men. Wouldn't F.G.S girls be better prepared for the outside world if they are to deal with boys at an early age?

Nasser: Ideally, and if the change was gradual, that would be true. But what we are afraid of is this sudden change. Due to social traditions, girls would probably defer to boys especially within the classroom setting. For example, girls may be reluctant to express them-

selves freely in a mixed class, reluctant to take part in discussion, reluctant to assume roles of leadership, etc. Consequently, girls may not be getting the educational experience they have had and do need.

Q: How do the students, and the teachers feel about the merger?

Nasser: Their opinion really hasn't been officially asked. Most of the teachers have expressed feelings against the merger. Some out of loyalty to the tradition of FGS, some out of question as to what it will mean job-wise to them, some because of no experience in teaching mixed classes and reservations about discipline, some because of strong feelings that all-girl institutions give, educationally, a superior education to girls than co-educational institutions do. Students have mixed feelings. Some, from conservative families, do not want to go to a co-educational school. Most feel comfortable being in competition with themselves, and feel they would probably hold themselves back when in competition with boys. There are some for whom merger does not matter. There have been strong feelings expressed by upper level girls stating that they would be losing opportunities of leadership and opportunities of developing their talents and skills. They feel that preference will, naturally, because of society's traditions, be given to boys. They see merger as a step backward for FGS women, not a step forward. They see it as a loss of their independence and a loss of their opportunity. Many FGS alumni feel the same way. There has been a good feeling of tradition ... of loyalty and of family at FGS. There was a feeling of sisterhood over the hundred years of FGS' existence. This chapter is being closed and that is sad. As one recent graduate said: "It's ironic. FGS survived the Turks, the Mandate, the Wars of 48 and 56 and 67, twenty years of occupation.... but couldn't survive the Intifada."

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NEWS BRIEFS

Mr. Farid Murra, a math teacher at the FGS was released two weeks ago after being detained for 9 months without charges.

Two of FBS grade 10 students are at present in detention. Sinan El-Kheiry and Husam Abdel-Al were picked up at 12:30 midnight on Thursday the 15th of October. No charges were brought against them till this date.

Best wishes and sincerest thanks to the following teachers who have left Friends Schools this year: Yvette Assousa (FGS), Ajia Dahdah (FGS), Seham Halteh (FGS), Olga Hawit (FGS), Nawal Khatib (FGS), Mary McKone (FGS), Paula Massad (FGS), Carolyn Quffe' (FGS), Hania Soudah (FGS), Sandra Hamad (FGS), Majida Hussein (FBS), John Canar (FBS), Jennifer Bing (FBS), Rasheed Rasheed (FBS), George Darraj (FBS), Ghada Tarazi (FBS).

THANKS

The Friends Schools wish to thank all those who have donated generously and have helped the two schools survive during the past two difficult years. Special thanks go to: Individuals and groups, Quaker and non-Quaker who have responded to our emergency funds appeals, Friends United Meeting, Friends World Committee for Consultation, International Christian Committee (for the Relief of Arab Refugees), The Jerusalem Fund in Washington D.C., The Middle East Council of Churches, Quaker Peace and Service, The Ramallah Federation in the U.S.A., The World Council of Churches.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is still difficult and your continuous support is highly needed.

ONE YEAR LATE

(Continued from page 1)

relationships. Educators are worried that children might have problems responding to school authority once they are in class.

Graduating students preparing for universities are also a major concern. With the West Bank universities still closed, most students are deprived access to higher education. The few students who can afford to study abroad are not qualified due to the long closure of schools. The short time left till the matriculation exam which is to be held in November means that not all the material will be covered which leaves those students at a disadvantage. If the current situation continues, not only will the present generation be affected but future generations as well.

SCHOOL LOOSES...

(Continued from page 3)

Amjad was born in the US in 1974 and was sent by his parents to study at the Friends Schools. Like other Palestinian Americans Amjad's parents wished for him to study the Arabic language and to learn something of his Palestinian roots. Amjad started at FBS as an English-speaking student but in 1986 he was transferred to the regular program upon his request.

Amjad was a good student with a high average. He liked to read and to play sports. Amjad was planning to study computer science when he got to college. The memories that Amjad left at the FBS will not be forgotten.

VIEWS ON MERGING

(Continued from page 4)

Regarding the merger Mr. Khalil Mahshi had the following to say:

Mahshi: In general, I view merger as a positive step. It will benefit the Friends Girls and Boys Schools in the following ways:

1. The two Friends schools have lost 400 out of their 1000 students since the beginning of the Intifada. In some classes, therefore, we have very few students. Financially, we cannot afford to run two similar or identical programs in the two schools with these numbers. Merger saves a good part of our running expenses. We have already merged girls and boys in grades 11 and 12 for the 1988/89 school year. I think it advisable to do the same in other grades with small numbers of students. Actually, we have to do so if we are to survive through this very difficult period in the life of the Friends Schools and the community.

2. It is my philosophy that the role of schools is to prepare our children for life in our community and in the world at large. In the Palestinian community, women and men work together in the same institutions and in various areas and fields, they study together in most universities, and they mix together at home and in the community. What is even more important at present, is that women and men are struggling together, side by side, to end occupation and for the liberation of our people. This mixing has become the trend which is prevailing and increasing in the modern world. We should prepare our children for it at school. Therefore, I think it is only natural that the Friends Schools adapt to the real world after 100 years of their existence. If one day our community reverses this trend, then we should consider going back to segregation again. Personally, I hope that this will not happen to our community because I believe that segregation is not

natural. It is something which is enforced on human beings.

3. Following from the previous point, I think that merger is going to make our girls better prepared to compete and to be equal in the real life after school. If they learn how to compete in school and to fend for themselves they will be able to do so in real life. I do not believe that protecting girls in a school for females is necessarily a good thing for them. I certainly appreciate and understand the emotions of people who value the role that the FGS has played in the advancement of Palestinian women. I think that these people are highly committed to the good education of women at all times. If merger is going to harm the education of women, or men, then it should not be implemented.

4. I think that merger will enable us to use our scarce human and financial resources more efficiently. It will, hopefully, prevent duplication in the development of physical and educational facilities. These will become more specialized in each of the two campuses to serve the age group attending school in that campus. For example, instead of building two identical labs or gymnasias, one will be built to cater for the needs of lower grades in one campus and another for the needs of upper grades in the other campus.

I can go on and cite more reasons and more examples. But I do not think that space in the Newsletter allows me to do so. Therefore, I will end by saying that we should look at merger objectively and rationally and not only emotionally. If it serves the advancement of education in the Friends Schools for all our children, then we should implement it either gradually or immediately as we see fit, possible, and realistic. I personally tend to believe that it does and that it will make Friends Schools still stronger and better in the long run.

MY LIFE IN THE FRIENDS GIRLS SCHOOL

THE OLD BELL

The saddest time in my life was the hour when I felt I was going to leave my old master. He was so kind to me that he dusted me every day and never disturbed my quiet except a few times when customers asked to see me sing.

This sad incident took place twenty years ago before the World War. Early one beautiful April morning an elderly lady marched into the store in Jerusalem where I was, and asked for a bell with a loud voice. I was scared nearly to death when my master told her that this bell, as he pointed to me, made the biggest noise in the store. It was not long before I was forced to leave my throne, come down and sing to the lady the best I could. She wrapped me in a piece of paper, carried me to a school in the country, and there unwrapped me and placed me on a window-sill. I was very angry and disappointed at such treatment, but I endured it all in patience for my old master's sake.

It was about noon-time when a lady came and woke me with a thunderous voice. She was followed by half a dozen small children who were coming especially to see me. They were very glad when they saw me, and each held me in turn, looked at me inside and outside and asked me to sing. The last little girl dropped me on the stone floor with a tremendous sound, so that all the girls and teachers in the place ran to see what happened. They were all surprised and happy to see me. I felt glad for the moment to see so many friends gather around me, for in the old shop I had had to stay alone.

I was left on that window-sill for days, nights, months and years, without much love, care, or comfort. Girls, and even teachers began to dislike me as I grew older, because I annoyed them. Sometimes when they were fast asleep I woke them. Sometimes I disturbed them when they were in the midst of an exciting story or game. Sometimes in the midst of exams I rang at times that displeased people. I got used to this life at last, and grew really fond of the school-

girls, for I found that they were rather loveable in spite of their noise. Then came the World War, which changed everything.

Suddenly the school was thrown into great excitement, and then the teachers and girls packed trunks and boxes and went home, for the school was to be closed. Soon I was left alone among the soldiers of the Turkish Reserve who occupied the school building.

Time passed very slowly for many months. I missed the cheerful chatter of the school-girls, for the only sound I could hear from the world was the distant booming of great guns. Then one day I heard the captain giving new orders to the soldiers. The order that thrilled me most was one to prepare to leave the school before sunrise next day. How glad I was to hear news of their departure, for now I should rest from the clamor of their arms as they drilled every morning.

I knew little of the events of the outside world until after General Allenby came. Some months after he had taken Jerusalem the school reopened and welcomed in a group of girls who were very timid and never ventured to break the rule about speaking after I rang. Many times however, in the winter season they used to condemn me for waking them and forcing them to leave their warm and cozy beds, or for annoying them by cutting short their conversations. At these times they heartily wished for my destruction, although when they were hungry they used to long for me to ring.

Years later the school began accepting small children, very lively and mischievous. I can remember the hard time I had when Mary Haddad tried to snatch me from Margaret Bishara, who was holding me with pride and happiness, as if she received a box of food from home. This snatching and the hot temper of little Fuad, which led him to throw me here and there, led to my destruction. For I was exhausted; my body was so weak that my voice grew fainter and

fainter, so that it was difficult for the girls to hear me from a distance. My tongue was changed, but still matters grew worse, and at last I was replaced by a new bell with a very brazen clamor.

So I was placed in the girls' museum, where I can look through the glass doors at everything that happens in the Red Hall. Luckily for me a great many entertaining things go on there, some things that nobody sees but me. I can see everything without having to work any more.

I have no right to mention all the things I have witnessed in the Friends Girls School, for the girls trusted me with their secrets, and respected me in my youth.

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"My Life in the Friends Girls School: The Old Bell" is a story written by two Friends Girls School students: Jamileh Jimian and Hilweh Kasses who graduated in 1931. The story traces part of the history of the school during that time.

NOTE

The Friends Girls School is having printed a Centennial Booklet (refer to page 2). Booklets cost \$10 each plus postage. Initially only 500 copies are being printed. Be sure to reserve your copy!

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Friends Schools Newsletter
P.O. Box 66
Ramallah
The West Bank
via Israel

FRIENDS GIRLS SCHOOL IN 1898



Students in the dining room when F.G.S. was a boarding school



Timothy Hussey (F.G.S. principal) and wife Anna Hussey with students and teachers.



Students in chapel in what is now the science laboratory



Principal J. S. Hussey and wife Anna Hussey with students and teachers.