

the diaspora potrezebie

Alumni Newsletter of the American Community School Beirut

Volume XLVI Number 1

Our 46th year of publication

January 2024

A Message from the President

Dear fellow alums

It's hard to believe that 2023 is behind us, and another year is already one month in. The ACS Development team in Beirut has been busy with new initiatives and strategies to increase alumni engagement.

Smaller gatherings were planned in the Middle East, Europe, and the US, making it possible for those that cannot make it to the larger triennial reunions, to attend and connect in a smaller setting. I was able to attend the one in NYC last November; it was a great mix of alums from different eras who all found common ground. The next ones are being held in London, Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco. We hope to see you there.

Your Alumni Council has started work on the 2025 Triennial Reunion, and we are still looking for volunteers interested in hosting in their home city. In addition, we are doing our annual Fundraising for ACS as well as the Alumni Association. This year, proceeds will go to:

- The school's Annual Fund, whereas we had been focused on more urgent matters for the past few years.

- The Alumni Association General Fund, which covers the cost of printing the POT and support for the Triennial Reunions.
- The Malcom Kerr Endowment Fund.

Donations are accepted by check, as outlined in the letter sent last month, and online. I hope you will choose to donate if you can, as your donations are tax deductible.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the loss of Linda Handschin Sheppard '69. She was so dedicated to the ACS Alumni Association, humbly giving of her time and expertise. She helped me tremendously, and I will miss her greatly. There will be more about Linda in the next issue.

My best

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The Diaspora Potrzebie

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Websites

ACS at Beirut: www.acs.edu.lb
ACS Matters: www.acs.edu.lb/page.cfm?p=1326
Al Mashriq The Levantine
Cultural Riches from the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean
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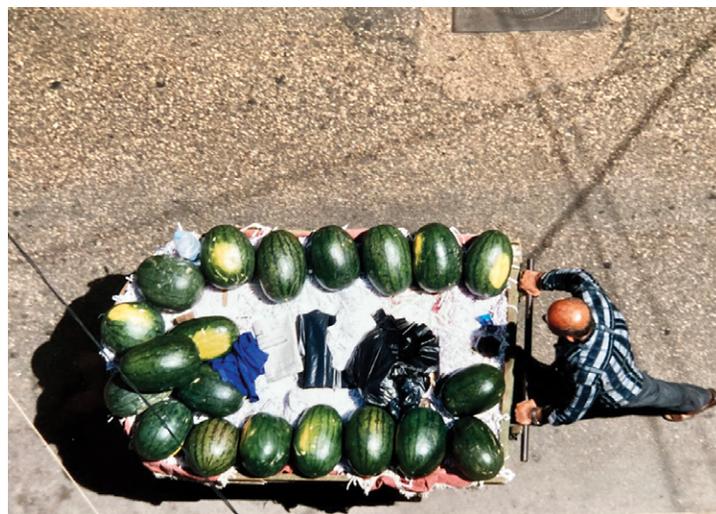
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Message from the Editor

We are into our 46th year of publication!

When I contacted Linda (Handschin Sheppard '68) about the possibility of taking over as editor of the *Diaspora Potrzebie* as it was about to be shut down, one of my reasons was that "we can't just stop in an odd year, after so many years!" (It was the 43rd year of publication.) I insisted that we make it at least to 45, and preferably to 50 years of publication, before pulling the plug. And here we are. Linda has, very sadly, left us, but she has been with me all the way in what has become a very enjoyable part of my life now. We would like to dedicate our next issue to her memory, and I ask those of you who knew her well and want to honor her in this way to contact me: alice.ludvigsen@gmail.com

Gina mentions the ACS mini-gatherings taking place, and I feel so privileged and happy to be able to attend the upcoming one in San Francisco. You will most probably get a report on it in the next issue of "the Pot". We are also continuing our "Teacher Stories", which I hope you will enjoy. Please send news and stories. Without your contributions, there would not be much to read... Thank you!



One of my favorite pictures from Beirut, taken from our balcony on Makdessi Street. The Watermelon Man, his shout ringing out in the hot sunshine: "3al sikkeen, ya bateekh!" (To the knife, oh watermelon!)

In Memoriam



John Michael Kelberer '69

Obituary John Michael Kelberer (1951 - 2023)

Our dad, John Michael Kelberer (Michael), passed away on December 28, 2023, in Bellingham WA, after a two-year long struggle to hold onto life in the face of cancer. In the end, cancer didn't win; instead, Michael succeeded in using these precious last two years to heal wounds in his relationships, create bonds

with people that will supersede death, and cement his legacy on earth as a complicated person who enriched our lives and will be dearly missed. He passed surrounded by the love of friends and companions he made along the way, having finally realized in the last years of his life that he did, indeed, need and love people.

Michael began his remarkable journey on February 23, 1951 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, but due to a set of ambitious parents, spent his childhood growing up in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon as his father, our amazing grandfather John Jacob Kelberer, climbed the ranks of Saudi Aramco. His early years were dominated by women: his mother, our beloved grandmother Arlyne, and his six younger sisters who survive him, Mary, Margaret, Barbara, Elizabeth, Kristine, and Annie. This was a trend that would continue throughout his life, as Michael was a gentle soul in whom women could find safety and comfort in the face of so much male brutality. He remembered his early years fondly, and his stories made it seem like his childhood was one long adventure. As have many generations of Kelberers since, he spent blissful childhood summers at our family cabins on Rainy Lake, Minnesota, learning to fish, swim, and boat with the best of them, despite spending most of his time living in a desert. During these stateside summers, he also cherished time with his extended Kelberer and Evenson family members and cousins with whom he had great friendships.

In his later youth and early adulthood, Michael struggled with addiction, but he fought for and kept his sobriety, one of his proudest accomplishments and an incredible part of his legacy, having inspired so many around him to also seek help in their darkest moments. He gave his children the gift of never knowing their father in active addiction, a crowning achievement for any parent who struggles with this disease.

After graduating from the American Community School (ACS) in Beirut, Lebanon in 1969, Michael moved to the United States where

he studied business and economics at Haverford College. After completing his bachelor's degree, he returned to Saudi Arabia and worked for several years with ARAMCO (now Saudi ARAMCO) and continued to have many travel adventures with friends. He then moved back to Minneapolis, Minnesota, completed an MBA at the University of Minnesota, and worked for US Bank before purchasing and running a local paper, The Phoenix, focused on recovery.

It was in his early years in Minneapolis that he met his first wife and first love of his life, Pam Van Coevering, who preceded him in death in 2020. Marrying in their 30's, Pam and Michael were told they could never have children - so imagine their surprise when three followed in quick succession. Jake, Vicky, and Luke were his miracle babies, and for many years he raised them alongside Pam as a wonderful and active father. He played endless games of tickle monster, tag, hide and seek, and was always up for a trip to the bookstore and long hours of reading together. He coached sports teams, and attended every play, concert, art show, and parent's night. He gave us our amazing extended Kelberer family, and our shared haven at Rainy Lake, where memories with him will continue to bring us comfort. Michael's love for us kids was never in doubt, even in the later years after he and Pam were divorced, when he did the best he could to remain present while struggling with his own mental health issues. Later in life, Michael married the second love of his life, Nancy Rydholm, whom his children continue to think of as their stepmother. While the marriage did not last, their connection to each other did, and Nancy and Michael were able to reconnect and reconcile in his final year.

Professionally, Michael was an exceptional man with a dizzying array of talents and careers. He was a computer programmer, a publisher, a geologist, financial planner, business writer, and a small business consultant with special interest in helping writers and artists. Additionally he was the executive director of a treatment center. After retiring, Michael taught mindfulness, was the assistant to the Director of Northwest Mindfulness, served as treasurer of Red Cedar Zen, volunteered for AA, and did small business consulting, web design, plus various community works.

Despite all these impressive accomplishments Michael could be very modest and thought of himself as a loner. It was only three years ago that he had the realization that he was actually very socially connected with many friends and people whose lives he actively touched. He had a brilliant mind, was a kind and giving friend and a mentor to many. He had a myriad of secret skills: writer, poet, blues song writer, rock and roll dancer, ice cream aficionado, meditator and student of the Dharma. When his close friend Diane,

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one of his steadfast caregivers, asked him to describe himself a few weeks before he died, he said he was a “Relentless Optimist and a Hopeless Romantic.”

Ever the hopeless romantic, he married his soulmate, Dawn Moon, just 6 months before he passed away and finally achieved what we all long for, the giving and receiving of unconditional love. Dawn is herself an extraordinary person who came back into Michael's life during the darkest days of his cancer diagnosis, stepping in to care for him selflessly in his hour of need. She is the type of friend and companion we all hope to have to guide us to the next phase after life, and he was incredibly, singularly lucky to have her. During his cancer journey, he found joy in reconnecting with his children, his first grandchild Lily, and his six sisters. They, and all his many friends, will miss him terribly.

In saying goodbye to the life that was our father's, we leave you with words from his favorite book, *Bird by Bird*.
“Clutter and mess show us that life is being lived...Tidiness makes me think of held breath, of suspended animation... Perfectionism is a mean, frozen form of idealism, while messes are the artist's true friend. What people somehow forgot to mention when we were children was that we need to make messes in order to find out who we are and why we are here.”
May you continue to write your messy, imperfect stories in the heavens, Dad. We will see you on the other side.

(His memorial was held at the Unitarian Church in Bellingham on Thursday January 25th.)

Red Cedar Zen Community

Michael was a member of the Red Cedar Zen Community for many years. At the end of his life, the community truly rallied around him, providing comfort, companionship, meals, and spiritual connection in his last days. Donations made in his memory to the Center would be something Michael would deeply appreciate.



Linda Handschin Sheppard '68

From Gina Kano '73: It's with great sadness that I share the news of Linda Handschin Sheppard's passing. I cannot think of anyone who contributed so much to the ACS Alumni group. She was a friend, mentor and teacher. She will be missed.

Here's an excerpt from a family member's post.

“To say the holidays were bittersweet is an understatement. A week before Christmas, the boys lost their beloved Nona, Linda Handschin Sheppard, to cancer. Since Jake's birth, Nona has been a daily presence in our lives, blessing the boys with unconditional love, patience, hugs, books, activities, and outings that only the best of grandparents can bring. She was a daily source of wisdom, support, and encouragement to me, sharing my joys and easing my struggles. We love her infinitely and feel her loss so very deeply. ”

May she rest in peace.

Dear American Community School Alumni Office,
I am writing to inform you of the passing of my mother, Margaret “Dale” Penrose Harrell, a proud graduate of ACS in 1955. She peacefully left us on July 13, 2023, in Chesapeake, Virginia.

In her time at ACS, Dale forged lasting connections and cherished memories that she carried with her throughout her life. The values and education she gained at ACS shaped her character and influenced her endeavors. We would be grateful if you could share this information with the ACS community, allowing her classmates and friends to join us in remembering her.

Sincerely,
Bud Harrell

Obituary Margaret Penrose Harrell '55



The world lost a shining light on July 13, 2023, as Margaret Penrose Harrell (“Dale”) passed away peacefully to join her late husband of 63 years, Herbert Hathaway Harrell Sr. (“Herb”), in eternal rest. Dale led an extraordinary life and will be remembered by those who knew her for a legacy of kindness, empathy, and love.

Born on July 9, 1937, Dale spent much of her childhood in Beirut, Lebanon, where her father served as President of the American University of Beirut. Upon graduating from high school, she returned to the United States to attend Whitman College, where she earned a B.A. in sociology. Subsequently, Dale earned a master's degree in sociology from Duke University, which is also where she met her future husband, Herb.

In Memoriam

Dale and Herb happily resided in Chesapeake, VA for more than fifty years, where they raised their two children, instilling in them a devotion to family and a lifelong love of learning. Dale's dedication to her children was boundless and she fiercely championed their aspirations, ensuring they had every opportunity to succeed.

Professionally, Dale's commitment to education led her to work as a librarian for more than 20 years at Crestwood Elementary and Great Bridge High Schools in Chesapeake, VA. As a librarian, she cultivated meaningful relationships with students, treating each one with genuine respect and understanding. While helping students conduct research in the library, she also enjoyed sharing stories with them about famous people she met while living abroad such as Hellen Keller and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Beyond her professional calling, Dale volunteered her time and efforts to numerous causes close to her heart. For more than 25 years, she greeted visitors at the front desk of Chesapeake Regional Hospital, touching the lives of countless people with her sparkly personality during their time of need. Her passion for reading led her to become a volunteer at the Chesapeake Public Library, where she served as a long-time board member. In recognition for her dedication and service, she was recognized by the Virginia Library Association with their Outstanding Trustee Library Award.

In her spare time, Dale loved listening to music and enjoyed singing with the Great Bridge United Methodist Church choir. For many years, she sang in and helped organize community productions of Handel's Messiah during the Christmas season. Dale had a wide circle of friends, some of whom she met as a member of the Four Flags Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving history and promoting education. Dale also enjoyed keeping in touch with old friends and served as her class representative for Whitman College for more than 60 years. Dale had an extraordinary gift for connecting with people and making them feel seen and heard and her absence will be deeply felt by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

To Whom It May Concern,

I wanted to share the sad news that Anne Marie Carleton Wright passed away this week. You probably have her in your alumni records as either Anne Marie Wright or Anne Marie Carleton. Anne was a student at the American Community School, graduating in the Class of 1950.

Anne is my mother. She is survived by her husband, William Vaughn Wright, her three children (including me), and four grandchildren.

Details are in her obituary, which I've attached to this email.
Regards, Audrey Meyer

Obituary Anne Marie Carleton Wright '50



Anne Marie Carleton Wright, 90, of Chapel Hill passed away peacefully on November 6, 2023 at her home in the Carol Woods Retirement Community. Anne was born in Beirut, Lebanon on April 10, 1933 to missionary & educator parents Alford and Mary Carleton. She spent most of her youth living in the Middle East, mainly Syria

and Lebanon, graduating from the American Community School in Beirut and matriculating at Oberlin College in 1950. After graduating from Oberlin in 1954 with a BA in English Literature, she moved to Cambridge, MA where she met and married William Vaughn Wright. Their long and happy life together included several years living abroad in Holland, Germany, and England, as well as extensive travel adventures to far-flung destinations in the United States and overseas.

Anne threw her time and talents wholeheartedly into her family, while simultaneously engaging in extensive community service and leadership with the Girl Scouts and Girl Guides, Chapel Hill Hospital volunteers, American Red Cross, and more. She received the Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service in 1998. Anne was a long-standing active member of the United Church of Christ of Chapel Hill, where she sang in the choir for many years and at times taught Sunday School and served as a Deacon. Anne sought out and appreciated the many joys in her life, especially spending time with her family and friends and enjoying the splendor of nature outdoors. She was a kind, warm, and gentle soul, she genuinely loved the world and was proud both of being an American and of her international upbringing.

Anne is survived by her loving husband of 68 years, William Wright; daughter Audrey and her husband William Meyer of Falmouth, MA; son David and his wife Shirley Hensel of Greenville, SC; daughter Wendy and her husband Tyler Thomas of Sunset Beach, NC; grandchildren Ashley (Meyer) Scheurich and Dylan Meyer, Neil Wright, and Drew Spear; plus, many extended family & friends.

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In Memoriam

John G. Shiber - Faculty 1967-72



I thought that you should know that my husband and former teacher at ACS, John G. Shiber, passed away in September. He taught high school Biology courses there in the mid-late 1960s and always spoke very highly of the school, its students and faculty. I have written below a brief synopsis of John's journey through life. You are welcome to use all or any part of it in "Diaspora Potrzebie".

Those students & colleagues who knew him well would attest to the fact that John was a dynamic, effective educator and scholar. After his years at ACS, he entered the PhD program at Purdue University and received his PhD in Biology & Science Education in 1973. He then joined the Faculty at the American University of Beirut/AUB as a biology professor. While there, he also did creditable research on coastal invertebrate ecology, resulting in numerous scientific publications. He left Beirut during the Civil War and helped establish The International College Spain, in Estepona (presently in Madrid). After two years in Spain, he moved to the USA, where he eventually secured a professorship in biology at the Kentucky Community & Technical College System-Big Sandy (eastern Kentucky) District and remained until retirement.

Throughout his life, John was an environmental advocate and researcher, having had nearly 80 technical publications on heavy metal contamination of coastal, river, and domestic tap & well water, as well as in nationally-available food products, in international journals. He was a lifetime member of the American Association of Science/AAS and joined the Kentucky Academy of Science/KAS in 1991, where he presented at least one technical study at every annual meeting until he retired in 2015. During that same time, he also authored over 70 newspaper articles & editorials on human health and social issues and produced two nationally noteworthy volumes of essays by non-traditional students describing their challenging journeys to higher education. As Chair of the college's Multicultural Task Force Committee, he arranged concerts by guest pianists, choirs, & theatre groups and coordinated events such as international

doll festivals, international food-tasting, Native American & Alaskan heritage displays, etc... all in an effort to increase cultural awareness among students and the community he served.

As founder of the college's Community Biology Club, John succeeded in engaging students and the outlying public in activities like free weekend lab classes for children, Saturday morning science games, weekday Zoology Lab tours for local school children, state park clean-ups, water-sampling projects, and even annual live animal shows! As one of his high school teachers at Beirut's International College once remarked, John had "a fertile imagination"! And he used it superbly in his many years as an educator.

John was a Palestinian, the youngest of 7 children, born in Jerusalem. His father was a respected architect and land owner there. During the "Nakba", when John was 10 years old, his father received a midnight phone call from one of the Zionist gangs (Stern), giving him and his family 48 hours to leave Palestine or be killed. So, they left, never to return. Even though his father had the means to establish the family in Beirut, he was never the same again. It was a pain that he and all his family carried for the rest of their lives.

Nonetheless, John had an extraordinarily rich and meaningful existence, which included producing (with my help, of course!) two delightful and talented children: Linda-Dalal, who is currently OB/GYN educator and MIS surgeon at MetroHealth Hospital in Cleveland OH, and Tony-Saba, MArch, AIA, who has recently opened his own architectural design firm, called "commoncraft", based in Brooklyn, NY. We are brokenhearted by John's death, but so, so proud to have been a part of his life!

Sincerely,
Elaine Washburn Shiber

Editor's Note:

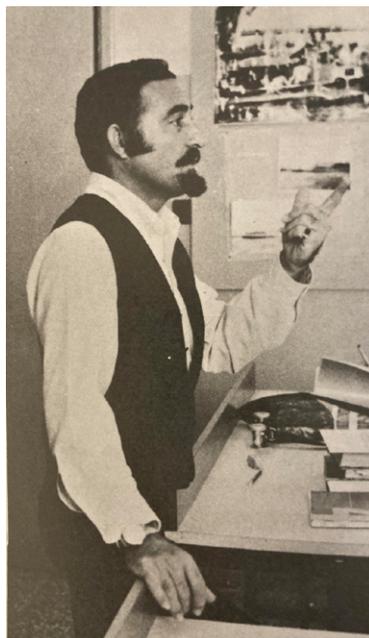
I asked Elaine to tell me more about how she met "our" Mr. Shiber, whom I remember well, and whether there was a cause close to his heart where donations could be made. Here is her reply:

I'm so happy to know that you remember him! We have set up an Endowment Fund in his name at the KCTCS/Big Sandy District, where he taught for 25 years. It is a perpetual scholarship for non-traditional science/biology majors, since he understood how very difficult it is for older people to juggle their obligations in order to

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seek and obtain higher education, especially in this Central Appalachian region.

As for how I met John, it was when he was at Purdue University, as a Teaching Assistant and PhD student. I went to Indiana from Massachusetts to visit my brother, who was also seeking a PhD (in a different study area). Having become company for his wife and a convenient babysitter for his kids, he urged me to stay longer, so I agreed and went looking for a part-time job. At the time, work opportunities in my area of expertise (banking) were meagre, so I took a job waiting tables at the local Holiday Inn until something better came along. One evening, John came in with a few friends and sat in my section. When I was taking their orders, I was trying to place his face. It looked so familiar. Then it dawned on me, and I blurted out, "You look just like Charles Aznavour!



Mr. Shiber in the Biology lab, ACS Yearbook 1972.

Ever heard of him?"; to which he replied in his inimitable way, "Of course! He's a good friend of mine. I know him very well! He's in Beirut right now, and I could introduce you to him if you like!" Of course, he did not know the famous French singer but that was his come-on line, and it worked! Lol. The rest is history!

About a year later, I joined him in Beirut, when he deemed it to be safe enough for me to make the journey, via Damascus. He was teaching at AUB by then, but the Civil War continued to rage, so I didn't really get to know the city as you likely did. I returned to Massachusetts about two years later, as soon as there was a window of opportunity, and he followed a year later.

Two days following his death, on September 23rd, would have been our 50th year together.

Alumni Notes

Matt Hunt '70

First time all together since 2018.

We gathered in Houston in early November to celebrate sister Karen's recognition by the Texas chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness. A grand time was had by all.

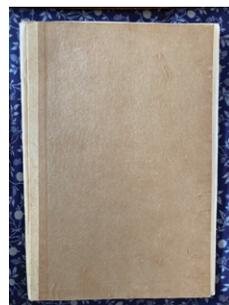


L-R: Karen '75, Matt '70, Kris '72, and Clifford '74

From **Don Maxwell '68**, I received this wonderful but very nondescript-looking book in the mail, an ACS yearbook for 1947-48. I will try to scan it for distribution to interested ACS'ers. Here is some of the preceding correspondence:

Don: *Alice, I have come by an ACS yearbook from 1947/48. My sister Denise found it among some of our family stuff but we have no idea how that came to be. Mr.*

Richard S. Ford was the principal and Theodore Norris was the head of the school board. This is before the school moved to its present location on the Corniche.



I want to send this to someone who can archive it. Who do you think?

Alice: Dear Don,

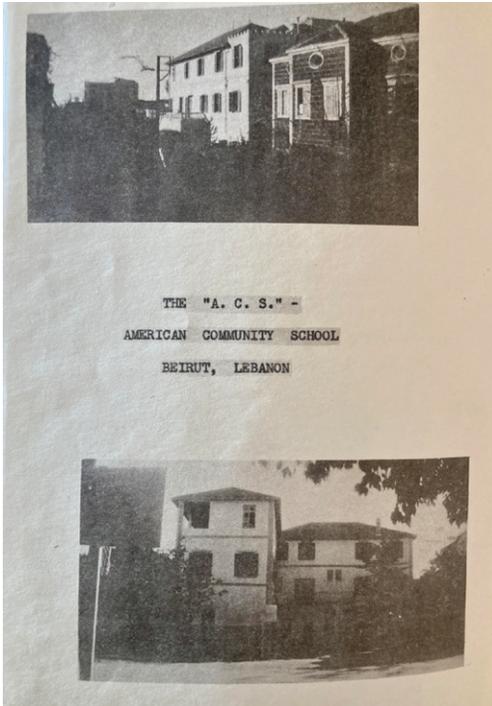
We just got home from a week away last night, and I found the yearbook in the mail. THANK YOU! What a little gem. And what fun that ACS kids in 1948 were just about exactly the same as we were. Even having a play interrupted by the Beirut electricity grid. I will figure out what to do with it, and in the meantime it has a loving home.

Don: *Once again, it is a mystery how my family came to get it. My sister Denise said it was among some papers belonging to my father that were stored at my grandmother's house. This would mean he came by this yearbook*

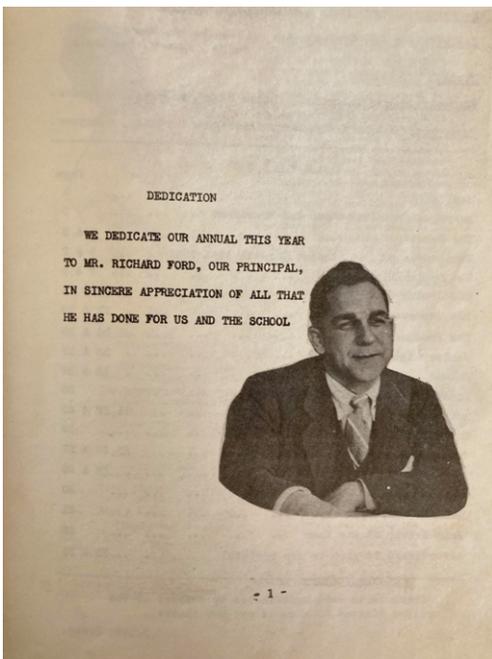
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Alumni Notes

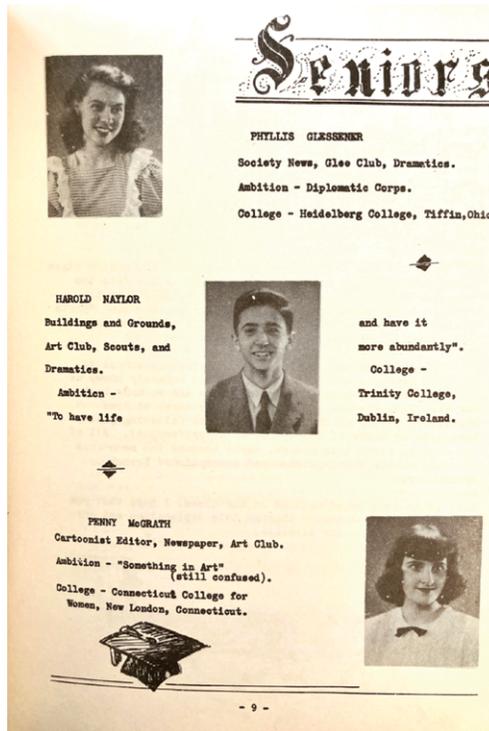
when he was a very young man in Cairo in the late forties. All of this seems unlikely but we don't know of any other explanation of how or why it came to be. I think we should just leave it as being a mystery.



THE "A. C. S." -
AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL
BEIRUT, LEBANON



DEDICATION
WE DEDICATE OUR ANNUAL THIS YEAR
TO MR. RICHARD FORD, OUR PRINCIPAL,
IN SINCERE APPRECIATION OF ALL THAT
HE HAS DONE FOR US AND THE SCHOOL



Seniors



PHYLLIS GLESKNER
Society News, Glee Club, Dramatics.
Ambition - Diplomatic Corps.
College - Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio.

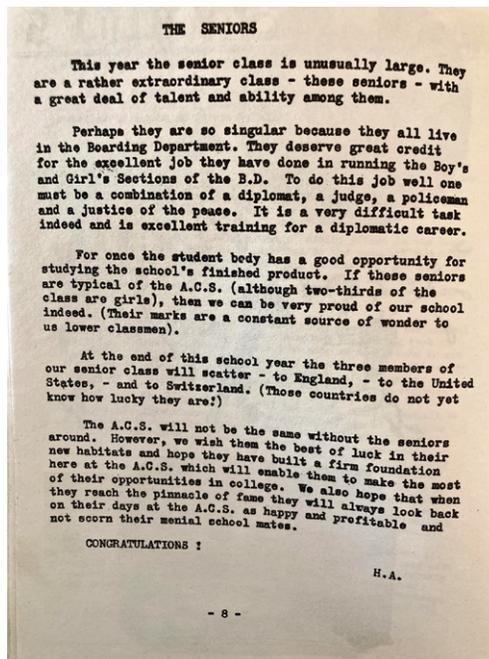


HAROLD NAYLOR
Buildings and Grounds,
Art Club, Scouts, and
Dramatics.
Ambition -
"To have life

and have it
more abundantly".
College -
Trinity College,
Dublin, Ireland.



PENNY McGRATH
Cartoonist Editor, Newspaper, Art Club.
Ambition - "Something in Art"
(still confused).
College - Connecticut College for
Women, New London, Connecticut.



THE SENIORS

This year the senior class is unusually large. They are a rather extraordinary class - these seniors - with a great deal of talent and ability among them.

Perhaps they are so singular because they all live in the Boarding Department. They deserve great credit for the excellent job they have done in running the Boy's and Girl's Sections of the B.D. To do this job well one must be a combination of a diplomat, a judge, a policeman and a justice of the peace. It is a very difficult task indeed and is excellent training for a diplomatic career.

For once the student body has a good opportunity for studying the school's finished product. If these seniors are typical of the A.C.S. (although two-thirds of the class are girls), then we can be very proud of our school indeed. (Their marks are a constant source of wonder to us lower classmen).

At the end of this school year the three members of our senior class will scatter - to England, - to the United States, - and to Switzerland. (Those countries do not yet know how lucky they are!)

The A.C.S. will not be the same without the seniors around. However, we wish them the best of luck in their here at the A.C.S. which will enable them to make the most of their opportunities in college. We also hope that when they reach the pinnacle of fame they will always look back on their days at the A.C.S. as happy and profitable and not scorn their menial school mates.

CONGRATULATIONS :

H.A.

From **Floyd Mitman '72:**

I don't know if you are the person to whom address this, but a recent

issue of The Pot asked for remembrances of teachers at ACS . . .

I only attended ACS for fifth and six grades (1964-1966) and the two teachers I remember best were Mrs. Englesby (sp?) and Mr. Priddy. Mrs. Englesby, my fifth grade teacher, was a red haired Canadian lady who preferred that we use proper English spellings for various words (e.g. colour). It was a hard habit to kick. Mr. Priddy, my sixth grade teacher, had a beard, which seemed exotic for those days. A non-teacher

I remember was Mrs. Baker (the mother of a student) who coached our softball team (whose sponsor was Pan Am, where her husband was a pilot).

I enjoy the Pot and look forward to every issue. I have quite fond memories of walking up and down the AUB stairs on my way from and to school, as well as of eating shawarma and playing foosball on Bliss street on my way home.

Regards,

Floyd Mitman

ACS '72 (would have been)

Teacher Stories

Barbara Shipka, Faculty 1970-1972



September 6, 1970: I had just turned 24 the week before. I was feeling a lot of excitement and anticipation as I boarded an Olympic Airlines 727 (capacity about 150) at the Athens airport for the last leg of my journey from the US to Beirut, Lebanon – with only eleven other passengers. I was on my way to begin a new adventure as a teacher at The American Community School (ACS).

About 30 minutes after takeoff, the plane circled back and landed in Athens again. Something had happened. We knew that. But what? I later learned that five commercial airliners had been hijacked by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). One of the planes had landed in Beirut before going on to Dawson Field in Jordan. Thus, the airport was closed. So no flight to Beirut for us and no sense of when we would fly. We were taken to a hotel near the Athens airport.

In that moment, through this circumstance of the unknown, a bond was formed. Twelve total strangers became, at a minimum, distant friends. The only other woman on the flight was merely passing through Beirut on her way to South Africa to join her fiancé. She and I shared a room. Two of the ten others, brothers, were former students at ACS. It turned out that they had attended the school where I would be teaching and they effused about how much they loved it.

There was no internet in those days and I had scrounged our local libraries looking for information on Beirut before leaving home but didn't find much. I guess there was not much call for it in the US Upper Midwest in those days. So I was starving for whatever these two could tell me about Beirut and, even more, about what daily life was like in this place. They told me about their favorite shawarma places, Johnny the Armenian money changer who always prescribed Turkish coffee before business transactions, what sidewalk cafes on Hamra (the main street of West Beirut) had the best French coffee, and where to get the best fresh flowers. They also told me about how it was possible to ski in the mountains in the morning and swim in the Mediterranean Sea in the afternoon. Very exciting!

We were told to stay in the hotel because we would likely receive very short notice of when our flight would leave for Beirut. Consider: no cell phones, no TV, no Internet, no email, no CNN. Nonethe-

less, we managed to entertain ourselves. We shared meals together, played cards and charades, completed and then passed our novels around, told stories. . . . Reflecting, I notice that we had fun. More than we would have had if we'd been glued to 'unfolding events' over which we had no control anyway.

A couple of days went by. Then, at 2:00 am of the third night, we got a call telling us to be in the hotel lobby by 3:00 am. We were bussed to the airport where we boarded the plane. We landed in Beirut at sunrise. Even as we were walking across the tarmac toward the terminal and customs, the plane that brought us from Athens took off again.

"Seen any hijackers lately?" I asked the customs agent with a nervous smile. (It was a different time. . . .) With a laugh and a twinkle in his eye, he said, "Are you kidding? They aren't even up yet!" With that, I knew I'd be okay.

I smelled the jasmine and felt the early morning heat. The trip had been an emotionally challenging odyssey even before getting to



Athens. So it was comforting to finally be arriving in my new home! Every time I traveled over the next two years, I returned to the beautiful smell of jasmine. It became a sign, an affirmation, that I was home.

In terms of my companions on our fearless adventure, even with all that we had experienced and shared together – the immediacy and intimacy, the anxiety and anticipation – we went our own ways. I never again saw anyone with whom I shared this unforgettable and unique experience.

As I came out of Lebanese customs at about 6:30 am, a short, young, smiling man called my name. He said, "My name is Moussa. I work at the school. I was asked to pick you up and take you there. I'm happy to meet you!" I wondered how he knew my arrival time when I didn't even know. Would I trust that he was telling the truth? I had never heard of him and wasn't aware that he would be at the airport to pick me up. I could have said no. There were plenty of people and public taxis around. Yet, I decided to trust him.

It was already hot. I was tired and feeling disoriented. Nonetheless, he decided this would be a good time to give me an off-the-beaten-path tour of some of his favorite parts the city. We left the Western familiarity of what I later came to know as Ras Beirut and drove in chaotic traffic for some time. Then we began winding through the back streets of a very modest neighborhood. Finally,

Continued on page 10

Teacher Stories Continued

he stopped, parked the car, got out, and came around to my side of the car. He smiled, opened my door, and invited me out.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"I want you to meet my mother," he said. "She is expecting us and has made breakfast for you." Indeed, she had made a traditional Egyptian breakfast called Fool Mudammes. It is fava beans prepared as a porridge. I had never heard of fava beans before, let alone eaten them.

After a pleasant visit, we got back into Moussa's car and he drove me to the school. I checked in, found my room in the dorm where I would be a counselor, and immediately fell asleep. My new home.



The Mediterranean Sea was just a block away and we had a great view of it from our classroom which was less than a block away from the dorm. What a bonanza!

Once I arrived in Beirut, I settled into the school, my classroom which had an entire wall of windows facing the Mediter-

anean Sea. My dorm room (I was a counselor) was across the courtyard. I met another staff person who, it turns out, was from the same Minnesota town as I was. Our parents lived about a mile from each other and we even went to the same high school. Yet, we had to come to Beirut to meet. She invited me to go horseback riding with her. As we rode along some trails just outside of the city, we came to a fence line. I found what was on the other side of the fence to be shocking. It was a Palestinian refugee camp. I had no idea! I remember feeling embarrassed and indulgent that I was able to leisurely go horseback riding – which I paid for – while clearly the people in the camp were living in such poor conditions. That was my first and last horseback riding experience in Lebanon.

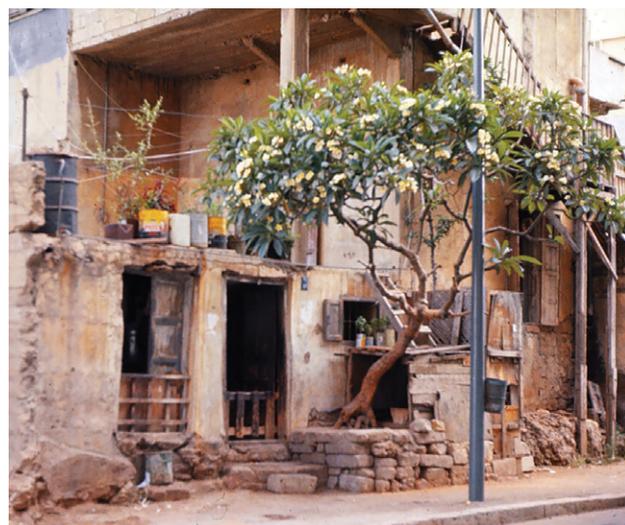
I also learned that there was a significant conflict between the Jordanian government and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization). There were hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in Jordan at that time. In mid-September, Jordan announced that the Palestinians were no longer welcome and that they had to leave. Where could they go? Many came to Lebanon. In late September, amidst his role as mediator between Jordan and the PLO, Nasser, then president of Egypt, died suddenly. This sent the whole region into limbo as to what would happen next.

As for me, I experienced my first lockdown. We were not allowed to leave the school compound and school was closed for several days. Before that, shortly after I arrived I had received notification that I

was to keep a bag packed and ready to go in case of evacuation. My instructions were that I would be transported to the port where I would board a boat for Cyprus. During those days, I joined other staff in the staff lounge almost every hour on the hour to listen to BBC news. When I look back, I notice that I was not scared. It was all a breathtaking adventure!

I learned that one of the staff was Palestinian so I introduced myself and asked her if she'd be willing to tell me her story. I thought it might help me understand what was going on in this conflict. What I remember most was that she told me her family had left Palestine in 1948 following the formation of Israel. They were squeezed out. From Wikipedia: "...around 700,000 Palestinian Arabs or 85% of the total population... fled or were expelled from their homes..." She talked about how her family had lived in a rural Palestinian village for about 1000 years. They had a simple life on a small property that included their home, a few olive trees, some goats, a donkey, and a vegetable garden. Their history, their comfortable day-to-day existence, their long-held relationships, and their sense of dignity over centuries all vanished. They eventually settled in a village in the south of Lebanon.

I remembered the refugee camp I had witnessed on the edge of the city and that the energy I had picked up from the people there was despair and helplessness. I thought of the young PFLP hijackers, some of whom were about my age. And I remember musing about how if my family lost everything and lived in a camp where there was little or no hope of ever being self-sustaining again, might I have entertained the possibility of becoming a hijacker myself? As Christiane Amanpour said in closing Amanpour and Company on PBS one night recently: "Hopelessness engenders radicalization."



(All photos by Barbara.)

To be continued...

ACS Scholarships

Interviews with Tareq Azaqir and Hussein Balouza

by Cat Essoyan '73

November 20 and December 21, 2023

I had a couple of great interviews with two recent recipients of scholarships to ACS, Tareq Azakir and Hussein Balouza, both of whom had been attending public schools in Lebanon before this year and are now juniors at ACS. I started by asking them how they were selected for these scholarships.

Tareq said, at his public school in Verda, Beirut, there were no school clubs but there was an NGO which is connected to the Lebanon Model United Nations (LMUN.) It used to take part in the MUN at the Lebanese American University (LAU) but last year was the first time that it went to ACS. It was also the year that he and Hussein attended the LMUN at ESCWA with ACS. He told me it was a once in a lifetime experience for him. Both Hussein and Tareq won diplomacy awards at the LMUN at ESCWA last year. Two weeks after the LMUN, they were both invited to ACS to meet with the headmaster, the high school principal, and the dean of students along with a couple of ACS students. The ACS team asked about their skills and hobbies. Tareq said he had done some programming and he played clarinet. Hussein had been doing some cooking. Then Tareq asked the ACS team about how best to prepare to get into university as a public school student. The ACS team answered the questions the students posed.

Two weeks after this meeting at ACS, Tareq and Hussein were invited back to a second meeting with two students and two staff members and were told they were being awarded a scholarship. It was a complete surprise, Tareq remembers his heart beating fast. He had received a scholarship to IC earlier, but had not been able to take it. At the time his mother told him not to worry, there would be other scholarships. She was very excited to learn he had received the ACS scholarship. He said he learned his mother was right (I had to agree with him that is a good lesson to learn!) Tareq

lives in Zkak el Blat in Beirut. Hussein lives in Dahiye on the outskirts of Beirut so he said he had not had much opportunity to socialize before starting at ACS. He said he changed schools four times prior to ACS. He was in one school for 8 years but it was then bought by another party and the school tuition increased ten-fold so that they could no longer afford it.

After the meeting in which Tareq and Hussein were informed about the scholarships, they had to

take exams in math and English. These covered a number of areas which they had not studied before. ACS invited them to attend summer school to strengthen their skills in these areas. Tareq had already secured a paid summer internship at a company on Hamra but he gave that up as he believed the ACS scholarship was more important. They were in summer school every day until 2 pm. ACS provided them with taxi transportation to and from school. The regular semester started ten days after the end of summer school so Hussein said he felt they were already familiar with the layout of the school and found it easier to navigate than other new students. A big challenge for him is that all his education prior to ACS was in French and now he is learning it all again in English. Tareq studied in Arabic in the public school he attended. Both of them learned their spoken English primarily from public and social media.

Another challenge they faced was that other students were already in closed groups of friends, almost like family, as they had been at ACS together for some time. Initially it was easier for Tareq and Hussein to make friends with other new students. Both of them are active in extracurricular activities, with ACS covering the costs of transportation back and forth from home. Hussein joined the chess club. He was also in swimming but the season is over now. In addition, he did badminton, which goes until 8:30 pm so he is up pretty late on those days with his hour-long commute and working on his homework. Tareq was amazed at the wide range of extracurricular activities available at ACS so he did a lot of different ones. With the encouragement and support of an ACS teacher, he is now setting



Tareq Azakir at the LMUN

Continued on page 12

ACS Scholarships Continued

up a programming club to teach programming which will start in the second semester. He has been a commentator at ACS

football matches. He took part in an AI competition at AUB in which he won the highest honor, and he is now going on another AUB AI program. He also did swimming and got a silver medal. He joined the basketball team. Both Tareq and Hussein participated again this year in LMUN and Tareq earned an honorable mention.

I asked them what they like about ACS and what they think could be improved. Hussein said he is loving everything. He mentioned that there is a lot of free time between classes which was not the case at his old school. He now has five classes a day as opposed to eight before. Both Tareq and Hussein are looking forward to the Week Without Walls in April where students can go for a week to one of 11 destinations overseas or 3 in Lebanon. Hussein is excited about the option of Greece, where there will be scuba diving lessons, pottery, learning traditional Greek recipes and going to a private island for a day. Greece is also first choice for Tareq but he would also like Venice or Thailand. He said he is passionate about diving but he would also love to visit the museums in Venice. I was impressed by the range of choices - in my days we were excited to go on the French trip over spring break! Tareq said he has met amazing people at ACS who have shown him how fun it is to hang out together. He also said the ACS teachers are very friendly and when you run into troubles as a student, they treat you as a parent would. Hussein added that the teachers at ACS love their jobs. I asked if that was not the case at his old school and he said there they weren't getting paid (due to the dramatic drop in the value of the Lebanese pound). Hussein said he has not done much socializing in the past but after swimming recently he went with a group of 12 friends to an all-you-can-eat chicken wings restaurant and they had a blast. They both appreciate how friendly students are in ACS as compared with other schools in Beirut.

Tareq said that in the beginning he found the system and way of teaching at ACS foreign and different than the Lebanese Baccalaurate he had been following. Hussein said in the beginning it was difficult to find the offices of certain staff members, he said there is a map but it is not very clear.

I asked them what careers they were aiming for. Hussein said he would like to go to university,

ideally outside of Lebanon, and that he would like to go into game development. He is taking a coding training and he would like to make some games. He is also reading books by famous chefs to further develop his cooking skills. He made pancakes for the swimming club on its last day and they enjoyed them and gave him some tips. Tareq would like to go to a good college. If he can get

into a top university overseas he would prefer to go there, otherwise he would be happy to go to AUB, which is a strong university. He would like to research quantum mechanics and try to devise a way to teleport. He wants to study physics and computer engineering. He mentioned devising a robot which can look after children. I said it is pretty nice to look after one's children oneself but he said if a robot can do it, it would free him up for other global challenges. He would like to open a robotics company or develop a luxury electric car. He said even if he starts out in Lebanon he believes he will work internationally. He says he believes life is fun, it is a journey with its ups and down.



Hussein Balouza at the LMUN

I mentioned I was on the ACS Alumni Council and how important ACS was to me and asked if

they thought they would keep in touch with ACS after they graduated. Tareq said ACS gave them an opportunity and a scholarship and if in 30 years he meets students he knows from ACS he would like to see them. He said he is grateful to ACS. Going to ACS is something to be proud of and he feels some of his present friends will be friends for life. Hussein said he would like to buy a house near ACS and have his kids go to ACS. He said he plans to visit ACS periodically after graduation. He said ACS flipped his life on its head (in a good way!)

It was great for me to get to know Hussein and Tareq a bit in our talks and I wish them every success at ACS and in the future.

ACS News

The Deir al Qamar Outdoor Campus

by Peter Schoonmaker, Outdoor Education Coordinator

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the ACS Outdoor Education Center in the historic town of Deir el Qamar. The center was developed under the leadership of former Headmaster George Damon, and former Outdoor Education Coordinator Andre Bechara, and opened on 7 September 2010. Only a 45-minute drive from campus, and 700 meters above sea level, the center provides the ACS community a tranquil ridge-top pine-forest setting to explore nature on-site, as well as the natural and cultural heritage of Lebanon's Chouf District.

On any given day, students may be catching frogs in reserve's pond, playing in the pine forest, counting migrating pelicans and eagles, measuring rainfall variation, visiting the historic town of Deir el Qamar, hiking from Kfar Qatra Lake through olive groves and pastures to the campus, or trekking through the Chouf Cedar Reserve, up the road from the Education Center.

One of our signature experiences is overnight camping, where students learn basic outdoor skills like tent and fire craft – the latter always ending with smores and stories. With a fully fenced



2-hectare pine forest and orchard, and a 140 m² purpose-built building with meeting space, kitchen, bathrooms and showers, the ACS Outdoor Education center provides a safe and secure space for the ACS community to reset from the cacophony of the coast and reconsider our relationship to nature and each other.



The Mentor Program

This is a 12 week program is led by the Development and Alumni Office guiding ACS students and alumni as mentors through conversations focused around the transition phase post graduation.

Nabila Kesrewan is the coordinator of this program, and can be contacted at nkesrewan@acs.edu.lb

Week 1: Orientation

Week 2: Career Exploration

Week 3: College Social Life

Week 4: Transition Period

Week 5: Internships & Career Development

Week 6: Progress Check-in

Week 7: Networking and Soft Skills

Week 8: Senior Goal Setting

Week 9: Campus Life

Week 10: Staying Connected Back Home

Week 11: College Transition Preparation

Week 12: Closing Ceremony

Continued on page 14

ACS News

Here are some of the alumni who are mentoring students at ACS, and some received comments about the program:

LIVES IN WASHINGTON D.C.



Studied:
Bachelor of Arts

Career: Actor, Theater Professor

Hobbies: Board games, reading, travel, karate, horseback riding

"BETSY" VAN DEN BERG

ACS CLASS OF 1974

LIVES IN DUBAI



Studied: Business

Career: Senior Vice President at Investment Bank

MICHAEL MALKOUN

ACS CLASS OF 2007

LIVES IN SINGAPORE



Studied: Bachelor of Arts

Career: Regional Manager at Google Asia Limited

Hobbies: Pilates

NAZIHA ABOU EZZEDDINE

ACS CLASS OF 2008

LIVES IN LONDON



Studied: Business

Career: Senior Growth Specialist at Marketing Agency

Hobbies: Writing & Tennis

SHAHNAZ MAKTABI

ACS CLASS OF 2013

December 9th, 2023: Had my first 1 hour session with both students yesterday and it went great! We discussed some bits around Universities, how to make the decision between leaving Lebanon or staying, career plans and planning and more! It was a good foundational session for me to get to know them better and hopefully in the next few sessions we can deep dive into more details :) - **Shahnaz Maktabi, Class of 2013**

Elizabeth (Betsy) van den Berg, Class of 1973:

I'm mentoring two seniors, Lana Ghazale and Talia Mando. Mostly it's been me encouraging their efforts with applications and exams, although these two women are amazing and on top of their game(s). What's fun is sharing stories, experiences.

December 15th, 2023: I wanted to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to give back to my high school alumni. It was truly an honor to contribute to an educational institution that has played a significant role in shaping who I am today. Being able to share experiences, and contribute to the growth of our alma mater was a rewarding experience. I appreciate the chance to give back and make a positive impact on the current students, just as others did for me during my time. Thank you once again for providing this meaningful opportunity. I look forward to continuing to stay involved and

contribute to the success of our alma mater.

Tareq Siblini, Class of 2007

December 14th: On behalf of all of us I just wanted to say thank you for setting up this program for us. In my case I have had some very intriguing conversations with my mentor and look forward to what I will learn! **Student Nazokat, Senior in Class of 2024**

And here is a little taste of the correspondence between Betsy and Lana:

Hey Ms. Betsy,
I hope my email finds you well. My name is Lana Ghazale and I have been paired with you for the ACS Mentorship Program! I am in grade 12, I am 17 years old, and I am applying to universities in the US (my top choice is Tufts in MA!). I am so excited for this program to begin and can't wait to learn more about you during this process. I wanted to kick off the program by asking you how long you attended ACS and your favorite memory of your time here. Looking forward to hearing from you!
Best, Lana.

*Hello Lana:
So nice to hear from you! I attended ACS my Junior & Senior year of High School. It's hard to pick a favorite memory, because I have so many good ones. **School favs:** I got hooked on theatre at ACS for sure - I played the lead female role in All My Sons by Arthur Miller. I also sang with the jazz band, the choir, and traveled with the Road Show to various gigs. **Beirut favs:** walking the Corniche, going to the beach, skiing in the Cedars. Tell me about you - favorite subjects, school activities? What are you thinking of studying in college? Boston is a GREAT college town - and I know of at least 3 ACS alums living in that area. Looking forward to hearing more about you!
Best, Betsy*

Hi Ms. Betsy,
That sounds like it was so much fun! What is the Road Show? Hahaha. A lot has changed at ACS! Where did you get to travel with them? About me... My favorite subject is definitely biology; I want to be a physician in the future (very distant future, so many years until that point haha). I am very active in Model UN, I actually just had an interview on Friday for a president position at ACS's annual conference. The decisions come out next week... fingers crossed! I play soccer on the school team and I swim, but not with the school. Tell me more about your time at ACS! I'd love to see some pictures if you have. What was it like to be an ACS student in 1974? I imagine it was very different from how it is now.
Best, Lana

ACS News

Hey Lana:

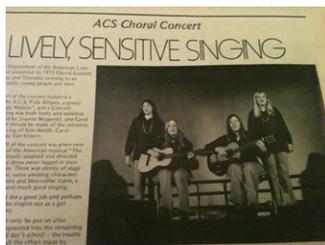
Very cool stuff here! I was almost a Biology Major in college - but Theatre hooked me more, so...

I wasn't very "sporty" back then, but I am a women's soccer fan!

Road Show was about ten singers and the jazz band. We sang American "Standards" from the big band era, and toured to a few places - I remember a golf club event, and a concert at AUB. We did get to go to Cyprus for a couple of shows as an exchange with an American school in Larnaca. It was so much fun! Some of my still good friends are from that group.

One difference is the Boarding Department (B.D.)! I was a boarding student - my dad was stationed in Rhodes, Greece, where there was no American High School. Several of the HS age kids from Rhodes lived in the B.D., so we were a pretty tight group. I understand it was converted to classroom spaces, but it's still referred to as the B.D.? Is that the case?

Another difference was that most of the students were U.S. or European citizens, as well as Lebanese-American. The war years following my class year really changed the population of the school. Educationally, I have to say it's mostly the same - a great school with high standards. Not a lot of photos on my computer - but there's a clipping of an article about the "ACS Folksingers" in concert - I'm the one



photos on my computer - but there's a clipping of an article about the "ACS Folksingers" in concert - I'm the one



on the left with the guitar! Also a choir performance - I'm middle row 3rd from right. This last pic is (L-R) of my class-mate Jay, me, Nabila and Barbara Porter (who is a Trustee and an Alum)



at a recent gathering in DC. I'd love to see some photos of you at ACS! GL with the conference!

Hey Ms. Betsy,
The Road Show sounds so cool! Also, it's crazy to think that you attended ACS when BD was actually BD hahaha. Yes, we do still

call it BD but it's now entirely classrooms and teacher's offices. Living in campus would be really interesting, though. We have quite a lot of international students, but some have left because of the war in Palestine.

The photos are so nice! You look really cool with that guitar haha. I had the chance to meet Ms. Nabila last year when I was helping out with the Class of 2023 graduation, I really liked her, she's very sweet.

We do some traveling ourselves now, but mainly with sports or for Week Without Walls. For soccer last year, I went to Qatar for 5 days. Also, for our Week Without Walls program (a program designed to give us an educational experience outside of the school buildings,



but really ends up being a vacation), I went to Cape Town for 7 days. In the past, we've also gone to Switzerland and Oman.

I've attached some pictures of ACS below. In the photo titled "Me & LJ", I am on the left and we are standing



"Rooftop Patio" is also in the BD building. The "First Aid Team" photo was

taken in the Middle School building (in the 'Rabbit Field'), as is the "Volleyball Match" (in the gym). Hope you enjoy the photos! Best, Lana



Nabila Kesrewan, Alumni Relations Officer,

would also like to bring your attention to our newly student-run podcast hosted by current ACS Junior, Ahmad Al-Shihabi. The podcast is aimed at connecting ACS and Lebanon as a community. Check it out here: <https://youtu.be/EaqXV5Jb8ZE?feature=shared> (If you are unable to click the link, type it in on your computer.)



Ahmad Al-Shihabi and Head of School, Tom Cangiano, kick off the first Yalla, Let's Talk ACS podcast.

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