



inspection tours when she ran across two little girls around six and five years old, hanging out alone on one of the streets of Ramallah, north of Jerusalem at a late hour in the afternoon. She immediately jumped out of the car to find out why those two little girls were sitting out there. Anybody else could have passed by and not paid a heed to those little girls. But the instinct of Lizzy, the social worker led her to probe into the matter only to find out that those girls were begging to make a living. She put them in the car and asked them to show her where they were living. To her horror she found out that they were living in a bare hovel with a torn sack cloth on the floor. The father was blind, and the mother was sick and shivering of the bitter cold. There was no food around, and that explained the reason

why those girls were begging on the streets. By the end of the day Elizabeth Nasir was determined to put an end to the misery and humiliation of that family. In response to her unusual appeal the Judge responded positively and allowed her to place the girls temporarily in the reformatory, in spite of the fact that it was not the ideal place for them. But there was no better option at the time, and there they would at least have food and shelter and safety, for they had already been molested and were suffering from venereal disease.

That incident was the beginning of the story of Rawdat El-Zuhur. Lizzy was determined to provide a home for destitute girls so that no girl will ever need to resort to begging for a livelihood. She was personally on the streets looking for such girls, and





friends. She was working in Jaffa at that time and had to leave just like the rest of the Palestinians as a result of the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian land and the forced eviction of the Palestinian population. She lost her home, and all her belongings and came to live in the family home in Birzeit. We were still going to school there, and I had the privilege of taking one course in European history with her. History was not one of my favourite subjects, but I must admit she made those lessons very attractive, and when I look back at that short period of her work at Birzeit I could sense that she was a born teacher. Little did I know at that time that there was going to be a special bond between us as a result of our connection with Rawdat El-Zuhur.

Shortly after it became clear that returning to Jaffa was not going to materialize within the weeks or months that we were all talking about, Elizabeth went out to seek her social work career again. The

need was great as a result of the devastation that took place in the aftermath of the 1948 catastrophe. (Nakbe) The Palestinian Territories which did not become part of Israel became by 1949 under the jurisdiction of Jordan and Aunt Lizzy was appointed by the Jordanian Social Welfare Ministry in the early fifties as a social worker and later as director of the Social Welfare Department in Jerusalem. She was the first woman to hold such a post, and it was not an easy task to be the boss in a department of mostly men employees in a male chauvinistic society. But she was up to the responsibility, and very professional in her work.

In spite of her dedication and distinguished career as a teacher and social worker, the story of Elizabeth Nasir would have ended with her retirement from the Jordan Government in 1964. But one cold wet day in February 1952 was to create another turning point which changed her life. She was on one of her





Elizabeth Nasir (1906-1987), the dynamic woman behind the story of Rawdat El-Zuhur

By Samia Nasir Khoury

The birth of a girl-child in the Arab countries has never been a welcomed event, let alone the arrival of twin girls to a family who already had five girls and one boy only. Elizabeth Nasir was one of those twins. She was born to a family of an Anglican clergyman, Hanna Nasir and his wife Sa'dah Shatara. Hanna and Sa'dah were my grand parents; they ended up having eight daughters and my father Musa was their only son. Grandfather Hanna served in many towns in Palestine, before he finally retired in his hometown-Birzeit. Elizabeth and her twin

sister Victoria were born in Nablus in 1906. One of the older aunts tells us that the famous Nablus dessert "Kenafeh" was offered at the birth of the twins. Was my grandfather really celebrating, or was he trying to make a point in favor of women's rights, or was he in reality covering up for his unfortunate mishap. As the years went by, it turned out that it was no mishap. No eight sons could have served the community like those eight women. The oldest of them Nabiha was one of the founders of Birzeit High School in 1924, which was eventually developed to become Birzeit University in 1973, the first Palestinian University and four others helped in Birzeit when it was a high school.

Aunt Elizabeth, along with my father were the only two of their family who pursued their university education, and Elizabeth graduated from the American University of Beirut in 1933. The mere fact that she, out of all her sisters was able to persuade her father, in spite of his limited resources as a clergyman, to send her to the AUB, is an indication of how determined she was to pursue her higher education. In fact she was one of the first Palestinian women to obtain a university degree.

Although Elizabeth's first years of work were in the teaching profession, in Tiberias, Hebron and Jerusalem, she eventually pursued a career in social work just like her twin sister Victoria. I still remember how much fun we had when we visited with them as they were working in Jerusalem. They had a fantastic sense of humor, even if the joke was at their own expense. Both were short and plain, but they had such strong personalities and were so dedicated to their work, and never seemed to be short on friends or boy friends. They were continuously teasing each other about who was the bad carbon copy of the other.

1948 was a turning point in the life of Lizzy as she was known to the family and most of her

Purpose Statement

Rawdat El Zuhur is a non-governmental non-profit women's organization that supervises Rawdat El-Zuhur elementary school and kindergarten. It aims at bringing up a new generation that is:

- Aware of the principles of good citizenship, and concerned for the environment.
- Capable of thinking creatively, and analyzing logically and critically, offering and accepting positive criticism, and excelling in performance
- Equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to assume leadership in a democratic society which they would develop and preserve

Rawdat El Zuhur achieves this through the provision of equitable, qualitative, and holistic opportunities for pre-school and primary education.

Management

Rawdat El Zuhur is managed on two levels: a voluntary board and a paid administrative staff. The board is composed of nine to eleven members elected every three years by its general assembly. The board supervises the overall running of Rawdat El Zuhur school.

The daily management of the school is run by a principal and staff who attend to all the administrative and technical issues.

The Vision

We see Rawdat El-Zuhur as:

- A distinguished school in terms of its quality services in the field of pre- and basic schooling.
- A school that provides equitable opportunities for the children of Jerusalem, and is characterized by its relationship with the society in general and parents in particular.
- A school where research, reading, use of modern technology and computers, form an essential component of the learning process, just as music, arts, sports form an essential component of the extracurricular programs and activities.
- A school where teachers are able to deal with individual differences among students, and to provide a safe and innovative climate for students and children.

Our vision is for Rawdat El-Zuhur to become a model school in terms of location, space, and physical infrastructure, as well as in the effectiveness of its management, and teaching methods and staff.

Highlights in the history of Rawdat El-Zuhur

- 1952 Founded by Miss. Elizabeth Nasir as a home for destitute girls.
- 1968 The first stages of shifting to formal education.
- 1969 Admission of boys.
- 1970 Addition of a new wing to the building and putting up a tent to provide extra space.
- 1971 The completion of the development into an elementary school.
- 1979 Establishment of a kindergarten section.
- 1986 The retirement of Elizabeth Nasir, founder and president and the election of Samia Khoury as president.
- 1986 The establishment of the Elizabeth Nasir Trust Fund.
- 1986 Introducing teaching of French.
- 1991 The inauguration of the second floor added to the original building
- 1992 Introducing a special course for the sixth grade in “dialogue” and training in democratic procedures.
- 1992 Introducing a special program “Farah” for the mothers of the children.
- 1994 The establishment of the Alumni Club.
- 1995 Introducing teaching of musical instruments under the auspices of The National Conservatory of Music. (NCM), now named after Edward Said (ESNCM).
- 1996 The renovation of the school play ground.
- 1996 The establishment of a computer laboratory for the use of all grades.
- 1997 The building of a website and joining the electronic mail.
- 1998 The development of “Farah” program.
- 1999 The remodeling of the kindergarten.
- 2001 Upgrading of the computer laboratory.
- 2002 Celebrating the 50th anniversary with a musical during graduation in June, and honoring school partners.
- 2003 Finalizing the strategic plan.
- 2003 Ending anniversary celebrations with an open house, photo and art exhibit and other activities.
- 2003 Retirement of Samia Khoury and the election of Ranya Baramki as president.

