

# ON THIS JOURNEY CALLED LIFE



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Autumn 2014

## First things first...

When greeting a friend in Arabic, it is customary to ask, “Keif halik” (how are you?). The most common response is “Alhamdullilah” (literally meaning ‘the feeling of gratitude belongs to Allah’). So, in Arabic fashion, let us begin by giving thanks to God, the giver of life, the teacher of love, the nurturer of hope.

## Yatik Alafiah- *A phrase used to thank others for their work, literally ‘God bless your hands’*

**Shukran** (thank you), my dear home community, my family, teachers, neighbors, mentors, friends, and countless others who planted and nurtured the seeds of faith, wisdom, and love.

**Shukran**, my beloved college community, my friends, campus pastors, and professors who challenged me to think for myself, to question the status quo, and to embody themes of accompaniment, community, and radical hospitality.

**Shukran**, my new brothers and sisters of YAGM, a community hastily formed, but closely molded together in Mission.

**Shukran**, Palestine, for the warmest welcome I’ve ever received. For your smiles of welcome, questions of curiosity, and patience in my ignorance, I will always be grateful.

*“...In Al Quds,  
buildings’ stones  
are citations from  
the Koran and the  
Bible...”*

*Tamim Al-Barghouti  
“In Al Quds”  
(In Jerusalem)*

*“Without hope, we  
are lost.”*

*Mahmoud Darwish*



Sunset in the Old City of Jerusalem

Photo Cred: Embassies.gov.il

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3rd Grader, Bader, and I celebrate the Olive Harvest Season Photo Cred: Danae Hudson

## A Month of Preparation

While waiting for our visas to be approved, we spent a few weeks near Dearborn, MI where we were able to hear narratives of Palestinian– Americans, learn basic Arabic, visit a Holocaust museum, and hear the story of a survivor. We also intensively studied the rich and turbulent history of the region.

## Helen Keller School

It's been a whirlwind 6 weeks with the students and teachers of HKS (it still feels like I just started!) On a daily basis, I help 1st through 7th graders learn English through interactive and nontraditional methods like games, singing, acting, yoga, and outdoor activities. Students at HKS are somewhere on the spectrum of blind to slightly visually impaired, some with other disabilities. I am surprised every day by the courage, intelligence, compassion, and sense of humor of so many students that I work with.

### Unexpected Companionship

Mrs. Manal, the upper level English teacher has been my mentor and supervisor at HKS, and in true Palestinian form, she has taken her role beyond just a professional relationship. Last week, she invited me to her home to meet her family and stay the night in Ramallah, where they live. Not only was I treated like family, I was entrusted with their genuine thoughts on what some might have seen as touchy subjects. Manal, Mais (her daughter), and I spent the evening in intentional conversation about where our faiths (as Muslims and Christians) collide, social repercussions of theology, and the role of women in society.

*Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting. -The Holy Quran 2, 264*



YAGM bonding in Chicago

In a matter of almost 4 weeks in the States, JWB (Jerusalem/ West Bank) YAGM went from strangers to community. We all bring a completely different perspective to the program and I'm so grateful for each of them! (^From left to right, me, Michael, Kanika, Clare, & Sheldon)



WE HAVE OUR VISAS!!!!!!

## Prayer Requests

Let us pray for all people in systemic conflict, that we may learn and appreciate the stories of the other, and in time, that we may shed our fear and ignorance.

Let us pray for the children of HKS, in hope of empowerment, and an end to the stigma towards disabled children.

Let us pray for all the children of Palestine and Israel, especially those whose lives have been taken by futile violence.

Let us pray in thanksgiving for the rain this season, a much needed, and extremely politicized resource.

Let us pray for the YAGM in countries all over the globe, that they may be strengthened by the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds them.

Let us pray for courageous, self-sacrificing, servant leaders who put the needs of the people before the needs of their political platform.



Who threatens who?

Source: tentmaker.org

## Life in the Holy Land

I want to make it clear that although I highlight the many ways I glimpse the Kingdom of Heaven, or the ways I experience welcoming community, life is not peaceful here. The Israeli occupation of Palestine affects daily life and disrupts individual, family, community, and social behaviors and attitudes.

As I've been reading more about the conflict through academic sources and personal narrative, it's been crucial for me to remember to apply the theoretical knowledge to the current situation of the land. So many times when we look at history, we are taught that the problems have been fixed. When you look at the facts on the ground, though, many times we see the opposite.

In my coming newsletters and blogs, I hope to convey both academic history of the conflict and stories of the people, as both are central to understanding life in the Holy Land.



Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

# Picture Stories

From upper left to right:

- The “Key of Return” at Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. Many residents still carry the key to the home they were forced to leave in 1948.
- Ameen, a 1st grader at HKS celebrates Eid al Adha.
- Kaik, a cookie that symbolizes the crown of thorns. It was first made by Christians for Easter festivities and was later adopted by Muslims for Holy Days. (Made with dates and flour).
- A mural on the grounds of HKS.
- My favorite view in the Holy Land is at Hosh Yasmin, an organic farm and restaurant in Beit Jala.
- “Make Hummus Not Walls” spray-painted on the separation wall in Bethlehem. (West Bank residents are not allowed to pass without an Israeli granted permit).
- Helping Muhammad, a 5th grader sound out the word ‘politician’ in English Braille (photo by Manal).
- Redeemer Lutheran Church in the Old City (photo by Danae Hudson).
- Mural of the Old City using recycled materials at HKS.
- Game involving subjects and verbs for 6th graders.
- Abdullah, a kindergartener at HKS paints a half sphere for an olive harvest project.
- Prayers lit at the Holy Sepulcher Church .

## Say Hello!

The fastest way to contact me is through Facebook message. Otherwise email works too!

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Be sure to follow my blog:  
[OnThisJourneyCalledLife.com](http://OnThisJourneyCalledLife.com)

Of course, I love receiving snail mail too!

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