

Yalla, let's go

YAGM newsletter two

Yalla, is the Arabic word used to express “let’s go,” “hurry up,” and “come on.” You get the idea. I hear it constantly from my teachers on the way to class, my host family encouraging me to accelerate my Arabic learning, my trainers at the gym and friends calling me to spend time together. It feels like my time here is already going by so fast. Although I know that in a lot of ways, it is just getting started. Life here is beginning to feel less like a grand trip and more just like, life. I feel at home. The weather is beginning to get a bit colder (right now colder means 60s, sorry Midwest friends). As I get more comfortable, the people in my community continue to invite me deeper into their lives. This is such a gift. My heart is both filled and broken by time spent alongside people here. Everyone so graciously shares their stories of joy, struggle and pain. Often all I can do is sit and listen. I want express again how grateful I am for you at home following my journey. I have found so much grace already in my time here and for that I am so grateful.



PEOPLE

Oh boy do I love school. Anyone who has talked to me lately has probably heard me gush about how much I love my student. I am truly so lucky to get to work in a school environment with such great teachers and administration that show me how to lead and love kids. The students and staff at my school have welcomed me as I have shakily found my way in the classroom. I am grateful for their patience as I learn in my new setting and surely make mistakes. I'm only at school two days a week, which has made name-learning pretty tough, but I could recognize the smiles of my students from a mile away. Classrooms here are definitely different than what I'm used to and certainly have their challenges. Despite that, I find myself constantly smiling when I'm at school. My students have begun opening up to me more and I look forward to learning more from these amazing kiddos.



MEET MY BOSSES:

This is Georgette. She's the principal of my school and an incredible lady with some amazing leadership skills. She is strong, smart, aware, caring, authentic and honest. Each morning she stands by the school gate and greets all the kids as they walk in. Her concern for students expands way beyond academics and she works to support kids in their academic, spiritual, emotional and Palestinian identities. I'm so grateful to be welcomed into her life and see the strength that Palestinian women carry.



PLACES

I am very lucky to be placed in two wonderful work sites. I spend two days a week at each place and often wish I had twice as many days in my weeks so I could spend more time at both places.

Evangelical School in Beit Sahour - At school I work as an assistant to the English teachers in the 5th-10th grade classes. I work with the kids on grammar, vocab, writing, speaking and reading comprehension. The classes are packed and often noisy, but I find myself walking around school with a giant grin on my face all day. The students are so smart and sweet and I love working with them and the teachers I assist have been amazingly supportive. I also get to help with some administration work and am building a new website for the school (stay tuned).

Environmental Education Center (EEC) - The center is one of my favorite places in the West Bank. The center looks out over a vast view of the Wadi Makhrouf. The center is home to many native plants and animals as well as a bird ringing station. The center does so much work in educating and protecting the natural environmental in Palestine. There are many ecological challenges that exists in this area and many problems further agitated by effects of the occupation. It's a huge task to take on, but everyone at the center works so hard to educate and inspire sustainable change in the community. I spend most days here editing proposals and reports in English and feeling so filled by the awesome work that the center does, despite it's small size. I also had the opportunity to go on some awesome Palestinian identity and eco-justice school trips. Being able to learn about historic and important places alongside the kids is truly a gift. I also get to work on some cool social media strategy and content to promote the work of the center. (You can follow the work of the center [@EEC_Palstine](#))



Simon is my boss at EEC. He has worked at the center for many years and works harder than anyone I know. He does everything he can to make sure the center is doing the best work it possible. He has one thousands things to do in a day, but still takes time to make sure I'm taken care of. We've become friends over our frequent coffee breaks and chats about the world.



THINGS

Through my communities and the YAGM program, I have had a bunch of cool learning opportunities. I am so grateful for welcoming communities that allow me to learn in new ways and go deeper into life in the Holy Land.



BIRDS, BIRDS, BIRDS

“Bird ringing is used to study bird migration and the process begins with fitting an aluminum ring on the bird's leg, marked with the location and the number. Our ornithologist, Michael, makes a detailed measurement of the bird keeping in mind the golden rule: the bird's safety comes first. On the ring one can find the country's name and a specific serial number that correlates with the bird's file, which includes all of its measurements and related information. Bird ringing data is useful for both research and management projects. The individual identification of birds makes it easy to conduct studies on dispersal and migration, behavior and social structure, life span and survival rate, reproductive success and the population growth-rate of birds.”



ABOUT OLIVES

“Everywhere you walk in the holy land there are olive branches that reach out to you. The subdued green color decorates open spaces along sidewalks and in yards. The rolling hills are defined by terraces lined with the trees. They are strong and many are hundreds (sometimes thousands) of years old. The olives on these trees are harvested and pressed for rich bounties of oil. The trees are a symbol of peace, growth and steadfastness. Under occupation they have developed an identity of resistance.”

[Read More](#)



ABOUT FOOD

My cohort and I had the joy of learning to cook some great food with some great people. The women who taught our class are living in Aida refugee camp. They started the cooking classes as a way to raise money for a support center for children with disabilities. The center provides occupational and speech therapy, rehabilitation and exposure in the community. It was so fun to hear their stories, eat great food and laugh with them.

[Learn More](#)



ABOUT SPACE

We also had an incredible opportunity to explore Al Aqsa in Jerusalem. We learned that the place is more than just beautiful buildings. “These places aren't for you, they are for everyone,” our guide proclaimed, addressing the tensions that often arises around the religious site. He pointed out one of the mosque windows toward his house. The land, he said was heavily disputed, leaving him without any sort of passport or national identification. “All we have is the land as our identity.”

HEY USA

I VOTED! It took a lot of applications, emails and confusion but I figured it out, just in time. Luckily I could submit my ballot over email in Kansas. To the right you'll see a photo of student elections at my school. The kids go through all of the steps of voting just like in a real election to teach them good habits for the future. I have seen people use their voice in so many cool ways here.

Fun fact: America elected its first Palestinian-American into congress in the midterm election. How cool!



I can only hope that my year here will give me a fraction of understanding what life is like for the people here. I won't every be able to fully understand their experience, just as my friends and family at home won't be able to fully understand mine. Every conversation I have had here, I find I begin to lose my voice. Every time I talk to people outside of this context, I realize the gravity of the situation here. Each experience I share usually has to be followed by a history lesson to better understand the situation. Understanding life here is hard, and will continue to be. It's tough, but meaningful and speaking with people from the US gives me an opportunity to process my experiences here in a different way. I know the colder weather and holiday season may bring on some new challenges and feelings. I am so excited to be spending this year in the Holy Land, but I will sure miss my familiar traditions. The best gift I could get is a phone call or video chat with you, so don't be a stranger.

If there are specific topics you would like me to share about in these newsletter please let me know! I am so excited to share my journey and your interest means the world. Thanks for reading.

All my love,

Genna

more genna things:



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