

## Riyam Wasfi Kafri-AbuLaban



Shortly after reading an article entitled “Rayya” in the May 2012 issue of *This Week in Palestine*, then Prime Minister Salam Fayyad was so moved by it that he actually invited the author to meet so that he could congratulate her. The article that brilliantly personalizes *Al-Nakba* is no doubt one of the most powerful pieces published in the magazine.

Riyam Wasfi Kafri-AbuLaban is the eldest of three children (who all work in the field of education) who were brought up in a house of wisdom and knowledge. Her father holds a PhD in electrical engineering from Dresden University, Germany, and was a member of the founding faculty of what is now Al-Quds University. Later he helped found the engineering program at Birzeit University. At 84 years old he still teaches part-time at Birzeit University, his home for almost forty years. Her mother is an amazing self-made woman who has over forty years of experience in education. She started teaching at the age of 18 and continued her career in education with a bachelor’s degree in Arabic from Lebanon and a master’s in educational leadership from Birzeit. Her career includes fourteen years at Ramallah Friends School and a ten-year principalship at Al-Mustaqbal Schools. She just published her first novel.

Riyam holds a BA in chemistry from Earlham College and a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. With teaching and writing as a passion, Riyam taught not only chemistry at Al-Quds Bard College but also writing courses. She considers the classroom to be “our (the students’ and my) piece of this world. For an hour, nothing outside the classroom matters, and what happens inside becomes the only focal point: how we learn together, how we connect with each other are the only things that matter.”



For Riyam, teaching is meditative, a higher order of connection and an honorable opportunity to see young people grow. Her students describe her as the relevant principal who has watched the latest season of *Grey’s Anatomy* and also read the latest article on any topic they might ask her about.

In 2015 Riyam was offered the high-profile principalship at her alma mater, the Ramallah Friends Upper School. She leads 60 teachers and 700-plus students. She also teaches Theory of Knowledge, a thinking and writing course that, in her opinion, lays the foundation for a smooth transition to college.

“During the past three years, I have learned that it takes a village to raise a child, and that village includes teachers, counselors, parents, and classmates. When I took this position, I was not prepared for the amount of love I would feel for students and colleagues. But the best thing I have learned is that a sense of humor is essential for this job! And the ability to laugh with colleagues and students at the end of a tough day prepares you for the next day!”

Riyam contributes to *This Week in Palestine* and is a former TWiP content editor. Along with teaching, she cooks and writes, and loves to read Dr. Seuss stories to her children. When asked about her favorite gift, she responds by saying she always appreciates receiving a new kitchen utensil, a cookbook, or a food memoir.

She has recently started her own food blog where readers can find previously published articles from TWiP as well as new pieces ([www.onourkitchentable.net](http://www.onourkitchentable.net)). You can also follow Riyam on Instagram (@onourkitchentable) as she shares her latest cooking adventures.

“In leadership positions, people often feel lonely and are advised to find sanctuaries where they can collect themselves and center down. Mine are cooking and writing. The kitchen has become my lab, where I experiment and create memories for myself and my family,” says Riyam. “Writing allows me to tell my story and the stories of others through food. What defines humans and sets them apart from other species is their ability to cook. . . Kitchens are filled with memories, politics, history, and much more; to tell those stories is to take a magnifying glass and focus it on our humanity.”

Riyam is married to her biggest supporter and best friend Ahmed Abu Laban, Ramallah City Director, and they are blessed with twins, Taima and Basil.