

# **Hala Atalla: A Humane Life**

**Memories of the late Dr. Hala Atalla (1943-1995)**

edited by Ilham Abu Ghazaleh and Penny Johnson

Women's Studies Center

Birzeit University

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This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of our colleague, Dr. Hala Atalla. Any proceeds or donations for this memorial volume will be used for the Hala Atalla Scholarship at Birzeit University, which supports women students at the University. The Women's Studies Center also strongly encourages support of the Hala Atalla Educational Fund, which support post-graduate education and training for Palestinian women in the field of human development.

The editors would like to thank Siham Atalla, sister of Hala, for her support of this project in so many ways and for the photographs of Hala.

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**A Letter from the  
President of Birzeit University**

**Dr. Hanna Nasir**  
President, Birzeit University

## **Dear friends,**

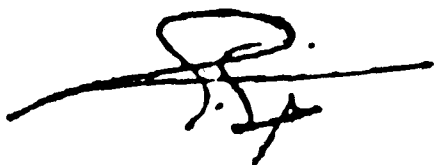
Over three years after Hala's tragic and untimely passing away, we at Birzeit University would like to affirm that Hala is very much alive in our hearts and minds -- as an outstanding teacher in the Department of Education and Psychology, a trusted colleague, a humane counselor and a wise advisor to the University and other community educational and social institutions. The students she taught and counselled through so many difficult circumstances are an immediate living legacy; her humane ideas, informed insight and deep commitment to developing human potential, education, and social services in Palestine are a constant inspiration.

Hala's greatest gift was to understand and respect the needs and aspirations of other human beings and to help them unobtrusively find their way with the insight, dignity and gentleness with which she was generously blessed. She worked in fields they are as greatly needed in Palestine as they are lacking in trained professionals and resources. Hala always tried to fill the gap, whether in educational counselling, community-based rehabilitation, mental health programs, or other key human development projects.

It is thus very fitting that the two projects launched in her name encourage the education and development of young women. The Hala Atalla Scholarship at Birzeit University, administered by the Women's Studies Center and a University committee, offers financial support to women students on the basis of financial need, academic achievement and community service. The Hala Atalla Educational Fund, supervised by a Board of Trustees composed of Birzeit University faculty members, Hala's professional colleagues and family members, aims to advance professional capacity in the field of human development in Palestine by supporting graduate study for dedicated Palestinian women and promoting educational activities that develop human potential, respect for the individual, and alleviation of psychological pain and distress, the values which informed Hala's life.

I would like to take the opportunity to encourage participation and support in these two worthy initiatives -- Hala's humane spirit is best memorialized by those acts of concern for others that characterized her life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Hanna Nasir', written over a horizontal line.

**Dr. Hanna Nasir**  
**President**

**Introduction:  
Why This Book?**

Ilham Abu Ghazaleh

Women's Studies Center

Birzeit University



Throughout its history, Palestinian society has been vibrant with uniquely creative men and women. However, the lives of these men and women have rarely been recorded. Indeed, the life and history of this extremely active society itself has barely been addressed. The silencing power of colonialism - whether Turkish, British or Israeli - has certainly played a role. The colonizer operates by the premise that recording people's history subverts the colonial narrative and strengthens the colonized society.

Women all over the world have begun to recover their hidden history and achievements. Without such a record, women know that no accumulation of knowledge for future generations to build on can be achieved. It is in this spirit and for this reason that the Women's Studies Center at Birzeit University decided to publish this memorial volume on the life of our colleague, Dr. Hala Atalla.

Since the inception of the Women's Studies Center, the colleagues involved in the Center have aimed to contribute to the recording of women's history in Palestine, or Palestinian history from the perspective and experiences of women. We were also eager to document the lives of individual women whose creative, social, developmental and political contributions to society should not be lost.

The decision to begin with this volume in memory of Dr. Hala Atalla commences with her unique and special contribution to Palestinian society over the last difficult decades. Hala was also a colleague in Birzeit University and in the Women's Studies Program initial research activities. Her contribution to the University, to women in our society, and to the society at large is a continued source of pride.

By offering this book to the public, the Women's Studies Center hopes to keep Hala's spirit of dedication, positive work and social caring alive in our society, despite the sorrow of losing her physical presence on April 16, 1995. We hope future generations will benefit from such an endeavor.

The Women's Studies Center hopes to continue to be able to record - in happier circumstances - the lives of creative women in our society

**Hala Atalla:**  
**A Brief Biography**

Whether in teaching, counselling, research or service to community institutions, Maureen Hala L. Atalla lived a full and dedicated life, which this brief biography can only attempt to sketch. Even close friends and colleagues often did not realize the extent of Hala's service to the community. They certainly would not learn of the many key services and consultations she offered community institutions from Hala herself, who was an exceptionally modest person. Her friends only knew that Hala was "too busy," and frequently urged her to slow down and take time for herself. This was one activity of which she was incapable, activated by a strong sense of the critical needs of individuals and the Palestinian community, particularly those disadvantaged or excluded, such as the disabled, victims of domestic violence or children in distress, and those whose human potential was undermined by obstacles, such as women in legal, economic or social hardship.

Hala Atalla was born in Jerusalem, Palestine on 6 April 1943. She started her schooling at the English Mission College in Cairo where her family lived from 1948 to 1951. She attended the Friends Girls School in Ramallah, an institution which has been promoting female education in Palestine for over one hundred years. It is typical of Hala Atalla that, in adult life, she "returned" her education to the community by contributing to invigorating and improving education at the Friends Schools for new generations of students by serving as an active member of the Board of Trustees of the Friends Schools in the 1980s.

Hala received her B.A. from the American University of Beirut in 1964, her B.Phil.Ed (Advanced Studies) from the University of Exeter in 1977, and her Ph.D. in Human Development from Bryn Mawr College in 1985. Her fields of interest and expertise included Educational Psychology, Clinical Evaluation, Life Span Development and Psychological Disorders of Children

Her commitment to developing academic and research capabilities in her field went hand in hand with long years of community work in local educational institutions in Palestine. Her working career began

in 1964 as a Teacher-Training Instructor of Professional Studies at the Ramallah Women's Training Center, administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees. In 1967, she was transferred to the job of Vocational Counsellor at the same institution, where she continued until 1976.

On her return in 1977 from a year's study, Hala was employed by Birzeit University in the Occupied West Bank, where she established the first Student Counselling Services in a Palestinian institution and taught on a part-time basis in the Department of Education and Psychology until 1980. On obtaining a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr College in 1985, Hala worked as a Student Counsellor at Birzeit University. In the fall of 1987, Hala established and was Coordinator of a Special Program for First-Year Students at Birzeit University to help students bridge the gap between high school and college education. In this project, as in her student counselling as a whole, her profound understanding of the multiple problems faced by Palestinian students and her immense reserves of patience, professional expertise and human wisdom were a resource that students will not forget.

In the fall of 1988, on her return from a study tour to development education and learning assistance centers in the United States, Hala prepared a comprehensive program proposal for a Learning Resource Center at Birzeit University, upon the basis of her experience in the special program for first-year students and her conviction that the establishment of such a Center was of utmost importance given that the Israeli military occupation authorities' restrictions on educational activity and repressive measures concerning education had seriously undermined the entire Palestinian school system. The Learning Resource Center, Hala believed, was imperative to help the considerable number of new University entrants in the years to come whose preparation for university work was woefully inadequate. In 1993, with financial restraints at the University still an obstacle to launching the Center, Hala returned to full-time teaching at the Department of Education and Psychology. She continued in that post

until February 1995, when she left to the United States for medical reasons and passed away there from cancer on 16 April 1995.

Hala Atalla's concerns did not stop at the boundaries of a campus or her academic responsibilities and co-curricular activities there. She gave unstintingly of her knowledge and person, utilizing her integrated approach to psychological health and development to assist and serve a variety of local and international social, educational and developmental institutions working in Palestine, among them the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, The National Committee for Mental Health, The Central National Committee for Rehabilitation (Research Committee), the Women's Legal Aid and Counseling Center, the Quaker Service Legal Aid Committee, the Friends, Lutheran and Evangelical Schools, Tamer Institute for Community Education, the Family Planning and Protection Association, the YWCA and YMCA, UNRWA, the British Council, Diakonia, the Abu Rayyeh Center for Rehabilitation, Al Nahda, a center for mentally handicapped children, and Inash al Usra, a Palestinian charitable society devoted to family assistance, the welfare of women and children, and the training of young women.

These organizational efforts never diminished Hala's attention to individual distress. If there was one person to whom all people troubled and in distress could always turn to, and on whom they could always rely, that person was Hala Atalla.

**Hala Atalla**  
**A Humanitarian**  
**and Outstanding Academic**

Ilham Abu Ghazaleh

Women's Studies Center

Birzeit University

Exceptional people's personal and professional accomplishments are seldom acknowledged during their lifetime. This, however, was not the case with Dr. Maureen Hala Atalla.

The Palestinian community - with its close-knit family and social ties - has always been quite good at identifying and acknowledging the exceptional people within the community. The Palestinian community therefore realized Hala Atalla's outstanding abilities and contributions in the field of counseling in Palestine, her empathy for people in general, and her dedication to the psychological and professional development of young men and women. Throughout her career, overwhelming numbers of people, both students and adults from various walks of life, came to Hala with their problems. The numbers increased beyond measure as Israeli occupation and the hardships of the Intifada took their toll.

Hala's genuine concern for people is best exemplified by an incident that occurred during the last month of her life. Hala was at the time in the United States and was suffering from cancer of the brain, affecting her ability to find the right words to express her thoughts. Siham and Hiyam, her sisters, recount that Hala therefore often opted not to ask for something she needed in order to avoid the ordeal of searching for words. This excruciating process, however, did not deter her from laboring very hard, at intermittent periods over a number of days, in order to portray to her sisters the family circumstances of a particular student, the psychological effect of these circumstances on him, and consequently, their adverse effect on his academic performance. An exhausted Hala relaxed only after she listened carefully to her sister's telephone conversation to ensure that her sister relayed an accurate message to those concerned. It takes a special person to think of a student, his problems and his future as one is facing imminent death.

There are numerous touching stories told by people whose paths have crossed Hala's. I would like, however, to mention an incident I always remember when I think of Hala. At one time in the early nineties, after having lived under Israeli occupation for over two decades and the hardship of the Palestinian intifada for a number of years, I was

suffering from depression. This was the result of the cumulative effective of the terrible daily practices of occupation that I had witnessed and my feeling of utter helplessness in the face of the brutal and inhuman actions of the Israeli forces against all sectors of society. As Hala and I walked together down the street, perceptive Hala, in her usual quiet and composed way, suggested: "Ilham, why don't you and I co-counsel each other?" I returned home marvelling at the sensitivity, grace and modesty of this wonderful and capable academician.

Recognition of Hala's exceptional personal traits, her total commitment and her academic and professional abilities in the various developmental fields was acknowledged as well by the many Palestinian organizations on whose Board of Directors she was invited to serve. Members of those boards acknowledged her leadership role and her ability to steer discussion in a way that enabled them to conceive of problems and issues from a different and more fruitful perspective.

The question that comes to mind is what influence in Hala's life made her the very special, intuitive and compassionate individual she was. Was it her family and home? Or was it Palestinian society with its shared history and collective plights and memories?

Hala's parents and family must have had a profound influence on her. All who know Hala's family remember a peaceful atmosphere where love, dialogue, and respect for the individual and concern for others prevailed. The three daughters grew up observing the way their parents related to the community, and, in particular, to the less fortunate within the community. Like all Palestinian families to varying degrees, Hala's family suffered as a result of the 1948 occupation of parts of Palestine. They lost their home in West Jerusalem and their father was without work for nearly three years. Struggling to start a new home and a new life and to retain a life as close as possible to their accustomed way of life, despite financial difficulties, did not stop Mr. and Mrs. Atalla from helping the less fortunate in whatever way they could. The daughters recall that, when



things got bad during the cold winters, they were reminded by their parents of the difficult conditions of people in refugee camps. They were constantly reminded of the importance of dealing with all people with sensitivity and respect. Mutual respect, dialogue and sharing within the family and the community seem to have been instrumental in molding Hala's personality as a child.

How was Hala's personality affected and influenced by virtue of her being a Palestinian, the plight of Palestinians in general and her family's special circumstances resulting from a long history of occupation? Hala was born on 6 April 1943 in Palestine under the British Mandate, a Palestine shaken by unrest as a result of Jewish colonization under the banner of the Zionist movement - a prelude to the subsequent tragic events of occupation and exile for the Palestinian people that continued throughout Hala's life.

Like all Palestinian children at the time, Hala must have sensed and internalized the pain and suffering of those around her in her formative years. As the situation worsened with daily reports of conflict, unrest, murder, arson and massacres, many Palestinians were displaced in an attempt to avoid the area of conflict. Some even went to neighboring countries. Hala's father, who wished to stay in Jerusalem, wanted his wife and daughters to have a safe haven in Lebanon or Egypt while the conflict raged. Mrs. Atalla, however, felt that her place in those difficult times was with her husband. The decision to leave was made when a car exploded on their street terrifying all, particularly the four-year old Hala. Mrs. Atalla therefore took her daughters to Egypt, carrying a small suitcase, for what they believed would only be a fortnight. That was the last they were to see of their home. So at the age of five, Hala had experienced her first losses - loss of her home, the treasured toys of a child, and the absence of a father she adored, who managed to make contact with his family only a year later.

In Egypt, as a part of the Palestinian community there, Hala was trying to understand what had turned her world upside down. Hurting from her losses, she must have been deeply aware of her mother's

sorrow and that of the Palestine community in exile. This, in spite of the fact that her mother, although hurting inside and struggling to help support the family through embroidery, tried to retain a semblance of normalcy. In King Farouk's Egypt, with its wealth and opulence, the Atalla girls were trained to face their new reality. Their mother took them window shopping to appreciate the beautiful clothes and toys and taught them to discriminate between what was possible and what was not.

How did all this influence Hala's personality and sensitivity? It certainly taught her to act only after careful consideration, rather than to react hastily. Was it this that people sensed in later years and that made them seek her advice and listen to what she had to say? Perhaps her extreme sensitivity and ability to internalize matters and deal with them was the cornerstone of her strong belief in the inner strength of the individual and his or her ability to develop and change the self and the environment.

One of Hala's greatest strengths as an academic was her ability to adapt the concepts, thoughts and theories of Western education and culture which she acquired from her studies abroad and her avid reading, to make them more meaningful within a Palestinian context. This, I believe, is one of the reasons her Palestinian community, institutions and individuals alike, took Hala to their hearts. They observed her sharing with them her educational wealth and developing it to meet the needs of her country and its future development.

As a result of successive occupations, Palestinian society faced many obstacles in developing its own institutions. Hala worked hard towards that end. Unfortunately, she left the world at a time where her country and her people needed her the most.

How can one portray the life of a person whose adult life, cut short by death, was devoted to the development of Palestinian individuals, institutions and society? Hala's last 'link' with home were the messages and cards she received from many of her students on Mother's Day (21 March) in recognition of her care, compassion and willingness to give unstintingly of her time, and the flowers, cards,

and telephone messages from family, friends, colleagues and students on her fifty-second birthday, ten days before she passed away, on April 16 1995, far from the home to which she was never to return. The Israeli authorities refused permission for her body to be returned home for burial. So Maureen Hala Atalla is buried in West Chester, Pennsylvania, close to the home of dear friends she had often visited, which she considered home away from home during her years of study at Bryn Mawr University.

I have tried to give a glimpse of the life of an exceptional woman, who was appreciated by her people and community as well as people from other cultures -- for Hala really was a citizen of the world.

Hala's spirit and memory remain with all who knew her. May she continue to be a beacon to us and to future generations. I trust that this booklet will be but the first in a series recording for history the lives of outstanding Palestinian women who, like Dr. Maureen Hala Atalla, have devoted their lives to the service of the community.

*Author's acknowledgement: I wish to warmly thank Siham Atalla and Hiyam Atalla-Qubein, the sisters of Hala, who were able to deepen my understanding of the life circumstances and the character of Hala, through a number of meaningful conversations for which I am greatly appreciative.*

**Hala**

**S.V. Atallah**

Poet and Niece of Hala

# *Hala*

## **I.**

*you pass  
away  
as we reach for you*

*fingertips  
fleeting  
petals*

*you pass, trailing skirts  
of iris, lavender, sorrow*

*in spring, as you arrived  
you leave us*

## **II.**

*You were always eager,  
spring in your voice,  
bouquets and blossoms  
in your giving hands.*

*You were always young,  
April was your month,  
and now you seal it away  
like an envelope,  
so many messages creased  
and smoothed into silence.*

*Petals fall like tears.  
Daffodils mourn.*

### III.

*We must fold you away now,  
a flower  
pressed in the pages  
of a heavy book  
to dry  
growing day by day  
more fragile.*

*Turning the leaves of our lives  
we will find you  
tucked between familiar folds.*

*You will flutter  
again and again from the pages,  
falling,  
frail,  
fragrant as springtime,  
into our wintry hearts.*

# **Insisting on Change**

**Dr. Gabi Baramki**

Former Vice-President, Birzeit University

Advisor, Ministry of Higher Education

My working relation with Hala began in the early 1980s when I asked Hala if she would be willing to launch a student counselling service at Birzeit University, the first in the Occupied Territories. It was clear our students really needed this service. The pressures that the Israeli occupation placed on young people - the constant, nagging fear and tension, the disruption of family and community life, the lack of opportunities - affected students in so many negative ways, whether in their academic or personal life. Birzeit University had also changed; a larger and more diverse student body meant both less personal contact between staff and students and more students with problems in academic and social adjustment, particularly for students from conservative or deprived rural and refugee camp backgrounds.

Hala accepted this challenge and the University sent her to Britain for a specialized master's degree. Upon her return, she set out to build a student counselling service that was independent, professional and with the proper atmosphere of trust, privacy, and follow-up that could encourage our students to place their confidence in their counsellors and help them address their academic and personal problems. It was neither easy nor familiar for our students to ask for counselling assistance and it is to the credit of Hala that she inspired such confidence. Other counsellors were trained, Hala herself completed her Ph.D, and the unit became an important part of Birzeit University.

Hala, however, was not a person to rest on her achievements. She insisted on positive change and development. She worked with her academic department, the Department of Education and Psychology, to conduct in-service training for school teachers in counselling. Most schools, especially the government schools then under Israeli control, had no vision, plans or budget to hire full-time counsellors, and yet the need was increasingly acute among our children and young people. Teachers, we thought, could help fill the gap. At the same time, first-year students at Birzeit University were increasingly unprepared for University life, whether in basic skills under a deteriorating school system or in critical abilities. In the mid-1980s, Hala began a remedial program for first-year students - basically to help them overcome the damage done by an inadequate educational system. This program continued even through the first years of the intifada,



when the University campus was completely closed. In the same spirit, Hala began to develop detailed plans for a Learning Center, where students could seek peer counselling, and find innovative educational counselling and assistance throughout their University careers. The Center is still not realized, and is still very much needed.

Hala did a remarkable job; at the same time, she was constantly overworked. I often wish she had been as persistent in taking care of herself as she was with others. I think the best way to remember Hala is to continue her work by training more professionals and, more broadly, by identifying problems facing our society, and particularly our young people and students, and setting out to solve them. We have so many needs, but I would particularly target the needs of school students for social, academic and career counselling. With the Ministry of Education in Palestinian hands, there are new opportunities that we should utilize.

Even today, problems emerge in the course of work and I think to myself, "This issue could have been solved if Hala was with us." One person with professional skills and humane vision makes such a critical difference in our society, and the loss of such a person leaves a tremendous vacuum. We will always miss Hala, but it is our responsibility to address the unmet needs of our society.

# **Subjects, Not Objects**

**Ramzi Rihan**

Director of Planning, Birzeit University

From 1973-1976, I was the University's first Dean of Student Affairs. I felt close to students and began to identify the need for a professional student counselling service at Birzeit University. Many of us on the faculty served as informal counsellors, listening to student problems and doing our best to assist. In so doing, the realization grew that the University needed an organized and competent professional activity. Perhaps this awareness was not general - there are always those who take a "sink or swim" approach - but it was shared by a number of concerned faculty and administrators and the first student counselling service at a Palestinian university was born.

When Hala returned from her studies in 1977 and launched student counselling at Birzeit, I found that we agreed on several basic principles that informed Hala's later work at the University. The first was that students were subjects, not objects. The second was that for students "growing up" in a university setting, a university education was about human development, not simply about knowledge competency. The third was an activist conclusion to the first two tenets: it is the mission of a University to do something about it - to assist in the human development of our students. This third principle is critical: one might agree with the first two, but conclude that it is not the University's business to get involved beyond providing instruction. Hala believed otherwise; a University should be actively committed to the overall development of students. Her involvement started with the conviction that students were human beings, and not simply objects for knowledge transmission.

When Hala began her work, she had an immediate presence on campus. In a very quiet way, she managed to become an important presence for students and faculty. She deeply respected the integrity of each student and knew how to express concern without intruding. She approached students as multi-dimensional human beings with problems to match. An academic problem could be rooted in personal dilemmas; a social problem could be the result of financial crisis. Hala began meetings with new students, which included academic orientation and "how to" advice: how to apply for student aid or where

to go for a medical problem, for example. But she went beyond that. At times we reviewed the admission applications of new students for indications of students who might need special help: students with a handicap, a recent death in the family, family members in prison or exile. Hala might send them a note to pass by for a chat; she was proactive without being intrusive.

Her days were long at Birzeit; she would pursue a problem until she could solve it. And sometimes our days were full of troubles: one day I remember students taken for Israeli interrogation who were badly beaten; at the same time another student collapsed on campus and was sent to hospital. He was a very bright student - the hope of his family - and I remember calling Hala when I heard the terrible news of his death. And counselling could sometimes extend beyond the campus and students to families in distress or crisis.

Looking back, I am amazed how Hala seemed always able to locate the right person for the task at hand. I remember a student with academic difficulties in physics; Hala located two students who tutored him with great success. Physics is my department and I wouldn't have known to suggest them. At present, both are getting their doctorates in physics abroad. Of course, none of us knew the extent of Hala's casework; she was very discreet and kept the confidence of students. At the same time, she was able to mobilize a supportive group of faculty when a student required other assistance or when university structures or policies needed to adapt or respond to student problems.

Hala went for her Ph.D. at the request of Birzeit University, as part of the University's policy to upgrade faculty and expand services. She returned with many new ideas and capabilities. Her interests also widened beyond the gates of the campus and many community organizations requested her counsel. She had a tremendous sense of responsibility; she was intellectually curious - always reading - but grounded in practice. Her broad approach was humanistic, but she never mechanically cited theories; each situation had to be

understood in its specific context. In other words, we had to try hard to figure it out ourselves.

Her interest in assisting first-year students expanded into a program of orientation which didn't stop at logistics, but aimed at a personal orientation of students to academic and university life. When the University was closed by the military authorities, at the beginning of the intifada, this became, like other University teaching, a clandestine activity to keep learning and the University alive. This period also spurred her to develop a model for a Learning Resource Center; she saw students struggling to learn without adequate assistance and she knew students coming after them would be suffering the aftereffects of school closure and deterioration. She worked hard to develop a proposal and convince the University that it was a critical project.

Today, a building is going up on campus which has a space for such a learning resource center. For it to be transformed from an empty shell into a living center, however, requires some of Hala's persistence, humane vision and sense of responsibility. I hope that we can do it.

# **An Excellent Ambassador for Palestinian Women**

Joanne Adamson

Former British Council officer, Jerusalem

I was privileged to meet Hala during my posting to the British Consulate from July 1992 - July 1995. Our first encounter was in the Winter of 1992/3 as members of the British Council Scholarship Board, and it is from there that I retain my memories of Hala "at work." I always felt that the Board was divided into two categories of interviewer: Mr./Ms. Nice and Mr./Ms. Nasty.

Hala was clearly in the former category. She had the gift of making candidates feel at ease and brought them out of any nervousness or shyness. She allowed them to express themselves, and sometimes coaxed them to ensure they gave a good account of themselves. She was particularly supportive of women candidates but offered her advice to all without prejudice. In contrast, I felt that the rest of the Board must have appeared as ogres at times.

Hala's kindness concealed great perception; no doubt her training in psychology had equipped her with the tools to explore the motivation and character of people. We all appreciated her excellent judgement and overall contribution. I'm sure many of the candidates were thankful for her sympathetic approach.

This was the professional side of our relationship. On a personal level, I can't think of anyone else as warm and giving as Hala. Even in the confines of the Scholarship Board, I felt I wanted to get to know her better. At a dinner that I gave, what struck me was how she made other people feel at ease in her company. She was open-minded and interesting to talk to on any subject. This was not just my view, but the opinion of other guests meeting her for the first time.

As one working in politics, it also struck me at this and other gatherings that Hala was an excellent, if unassuming, "ambassador" for Palestinian women. Certainly not one to preach, she nevertheless aroused great sympathy for the lot of Palestinian women. This was not achieved through complaining, but rather through her positive approach to her own personal and professional life. I am only sorry I did not have the opportunity to see her at work in Birzeit University,

where I'm sure she was a tremendous role model for many young women.

My friendship with Hala developed through a number of subsequent meetings, including a lunch with her sister in Ramallah. Although these meetings were infrequent, they still managed to cement a friendship whose memory I treasure. I don't want to dwell on a painful time but let me merely record the deep sorrow I felt in February-April 1995 when I learnt of Hala's illness. I visited Hala and her sister Siham shortly before they left for treatment in the US. I was shocked by the change in Hala and above all by her physical decline. But what struck me most was the selfless way she continued to receive guests so warmly, despite her illness. This seems to me so typical of Hala's approach to life, always trying to contribute to those around her. Recalling this six months after her death leaves me with a great sense of loss but also with the absolute conviction that Hala was someone extremely special.

I had intended to give more of an impression of Hala's impact as a professional but I must confess that it is her warmth and personal qualities which dominate my memories of her. Others will no doubt describe her work as an educator and psychologist: I view her first and foremost as a dear friend. Let me simply say that for one who was a transient guest in Jerusalem and the West Bank, to know Hala and her family was a great pleasure and privilege. Diplomats may often be caught up in the broad issues of the day and the country they work in, but in the end it is people like Hala who make the difference.

I was asked to write a tribute to Hala, but I cannot close without recording the respect I felt, and still feel, for Siham Atalla who in those difficult times before Hala's death was so courageous and dedicated. She was determined that Hala should receive the best care, and left no avenue (including possible treatment in Britain) unexplored. My thoughts remain with Siham and with other family members and friends who have lost a very special person.

27 August 1995



# **Gentleness and Strength**

**Barbara M. Kreutz**

Dean Emeritus

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Bryn Mawr College

Maureen Hala Atalla came to Bryn Mawr College to work for her Ph.D. shortly after I had become Dean of Bryn Mawr's Graduate School. Thus I might be said to have played a role in her education. Over time, however, it was Maureen (as she was known at Bryn Mawr) who educated me.

Since Bryn Mawr is not a huge institution, the dean comes to know many of the graduate students personally. And Maureen had come to Bryn Mawr on a fellowship from Amideast, an organization with which I was familiar. So we quickly established a bond. I met her mother when she came on a visit, and Maureen and I had several long talks about Birzeit and about her hopes for the future.

Yet it was only in 1986, after Maureen had returned to the West Bank, that I came fully to realize what a remarkable person she was. In October of that year, my husband and I paid our first visit to Israel and the West Bank. I was to be giving a paper at a maritime history conference at the University of Haifa, but we wanted also to spend some time in Jerusalem - and I thought it would be splendid to see Maureen as well, and the West Bank.

Today, nearly ten years later, it seems hardly credible that we could have arrived so ignorant of the realities Maureen faced. This was roughly a year before the Intifada began; tensions were palpable, and when Maureen came to Jerusalem to welcome us, Birzeit University was essentially closed and classes could not be held. Looking back now, I can only wonder at how she proceeded to introduce us, proudly and lovingly, to the very best her world had to offer - while simultaneously letting us discover for ourselves the pain felt in that world. She never preached. (She must have been exceptionally good at her chosen profession, counselling.) Indeed, she went to great trouble to make our visits to Ramallah and its environs pleasurable. But, in the end, not only did we come away with a keen awareness of the West Bank situation, but also of the special concerns and problems faced by West Bank women - and of ways in which women were attempting to address those problems. (When, five years later, I happened to be in Cairo, at a session with women faculty from various

institutions, thanks to my "education" by Maureen I knew what questions I wanted to ask).

I last saw Maureen about a week before her untimely death, and it is still painful to realize that none of us will see or hear from her again. She was a truly good woman, wise and compassionate, a rare combination of gentleness and strength. And, for me, she was a very special friend.

November 13, 1995

**Hala Atalla:**

**A Scholar of the "First" Order**

**Hunter R. Boylan**

Professor and Director

National Center for Developmental Education

Appalachian State University

I am sure that all who knew her remember Dr. Hala Atalla as a kind, gentle, thoughtful and compassionate person. Surely her colleagues in the U.S. remember her that way and those on the West Bank had many more opportunities than we did to experience her qualities. One hopes that her accomplishments as an international scholar are equally as well known as her accomplishments as a human being. But just in case they are not, let me comment on some of her scholarly and academic endeavors.

In 1988, the National Center for Developmental Education (hosted by Appalachian State University in North Carolina) established a "Visiting Scholars" program for U.S. and international researchers and practitioners. Dr. Hala Atalla was the Center's first visiting scholar.

Under a grant from the AMIDEAST foundation, she spent a week with us learning how colleges and universities in the U.S. deal with students who are underprepared or who have fallen behind in their academic work. She was interested in this topic because, at the time, the Israeli government had closed the universities of the West Bank. Consequently, she believed that the academic skills of many young Palestinian college students would eventually begin to atrophy. She felt that something was needed to enable them to practice their academic skills even though the universities were closed. Further, she felt that institutions should be prepared to help students "catch up" with what they had missed once the universities reopened.

During her studies at the Center, Hala decided that the learning assistance center model held the most promise for an initiative on the West Bank. A learning assistance center is a centralized program or department that offers tutoring, individualized instruction, and academic counseling to all students. It is also a program that does not necessarily require a university base. Many institutions in the U.S., for instance, offer "store front" learning centers off campus in inner city or other low income areas. These centers allow disadvantaged students to improve their academic skills before enrolling in college. The institutions also provide an on-campus learning assistance center

so students may continue their skill development at the same time they are taking classes.

Having decided that this model held promise, Hala also decided to become an expert on learning assistance centers. While doing research with us, she read countless books and articles, reviewed program evaluation reports, consulted with experts in the field, and studied everything we had available on the topic. She also identified several of the best learning assistance programs in our country and arranged to visit them. As is expected of visiting scholars, she also assembled a substantial resource notebook of materials to take back and share with her colleagues. In her work with the Center, Hala was a diligent scholar and researcher who approached her task with great seriousness and considerable competence.

After leaving our Center, she travelled to campuses through the U.S. in order to visit learning assistance centers. For a time, she was also the first Palestinian to serve as "Practitioner in Residence" at the California State University Learning Assistance Center in Long Beach. There, she studied under the internationally known learning assistance expert, Frank Christ.

Because of her research and the knowledge and experience she had gained, Hala was invited to join me as an observer on a team of scholars to evaluate the learning assistance program at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. Our role there was to assess the college's learning assistance activities and to make recommendations for improvement. Her comments and observations were integrated into the final evaluation report and she is therefore credited as the first West Bank scholar to participate in the evaluation of a U.S. learning assistance center.

When she returned to Birzeit University, she developed a proposal to set up a learning assistance center there. She sent her proposal to me and several other U.S. scholars for review. All of us give it high ratings. Her proposal was well organized, well written, and incorporated a great deal of current thought and scholarship in the field.

Hala was also working with several other West Bank universities in an attempt to explore the feasibility of using learning assistance models for Palestinian students. I believe she was the first person to introduce the concept of *learning assistance to higher education in the West Bank*.

I do not know what happened to her proposals. I recall that, as is typical in higher education, funding problems interfered with implementation of many of her ideas. Also, the West Bank universities were reopened eventually and it is possible that this reduced the perceived need for learning assistance programs.

Later, Hala returned to the U.S. and became the first Palestinian scholar to be recognized at an international conference on learning assistance. In 1990, the National Association for Developmental Education and the European ACCESS Association held a joint conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Hala, not only attended sessions but she served as a moderator for presentations during the conference's international track. As a former president of the National Association for Developmental Education, I was honored to provide special notice for her work on the West Bank at the Association Presidents' International Reception.

Hala later joined our national association as well as the international ACCESS group. She shared many of the professional journals she received through these memberships with her colleagues. Consequently, she was the first person to introduce the U.S. professional publications, *The Journal of Developmental Education*, and *Research in Developmental Education* to West Bank scholars.

Dr Hala Atalla was highly regarded among the international community of scholars in learning assistance. I do not think she ever realized how many times she was the first to do something in that community. All of us considered her to be an unusually intelligent and wise professional. She was not a talkative person in public. But when she did speak, people paid attention. She had an amazing ability

to say something that enabled others to conceive of problems and issues from a different perspective.

More than most visiting scholars who have come through our Center and participated in our professional activities, Hala Atalla had a mission. It was my privilege to know her, to talk with her now and then, and to correspond with her regularly. She shared her mission with me in many ways on many occasions.

Hala lived through troubled times and had enormous empathy for the young people who shared those times with her. She believed and hoped that one day there would be peace on the West Bank. She also believed that it was part of her mission to help young people of the West Bank survive their times now and prepare themselves academically and intellectually for the better times she hoped would come.

She never complained about the way things were. She never flinched from the effort it might take to change them. She never let events distract her from her mission or her sense of vision. Nor did she ever see herself as a prime mover in her vision. She simply wanted to do her part... quietly, competently, and with grace, strength and professionalism.

There was a slogan popular among educators in the U.S. during the 1980s. "I touch the future, I teach." Few of us understood that as well as Dr. Hala Atalla.



# **A Mentor and Friend**

**Abla Nasir,**

Director, Tamer Institute

Former Principal, Friends Girls School

I have known Hala for ... Maybe this sounds like a cliché that we often use to introduce a relationship. I must say, though, that I have asked myself the question of how long I have known Hala and as far as I can look back I feel I have known her all my life.

We lived in the same neighborhood and before I was acquainted with Hala I knew Hala. Good people spread their fragrance like violets ... Not necessarily conspicuous but certainly effective!

I remember back in the early 70s, I was working on a paper for my Psychology class and I needed to interview young women. Hala was working at Al Tireh Vocational Centre at the time as a student counselor. She was so welcoming when I called her and asked her about the possibility of interviewing a group of her students. We sat in her office after I finished the interviews and we talked and shared ideas and thoughts as if we always did so. Hala's warmth and acceptance broke many barriers for me. It really felt like I have known her all my life.

Experience taught me that the value of a relationship is in its quality which cannot be defined in terms of time spent to make up the relationship. I have come to realize that the authenticity of a relationship does not need time to get stronger; rather a relationship is strong and deep by the quality of time that enriches it. Although brief were the times Hala and I had to sit together, our conversations were special. I regarded Hala as mentor and friend and she made me feel that I was her friend too. I turned to Hala at every juncture of my career and study experience. She challenged my fear of venturing into the unfamiliar and gave me support by being non-judgmental and understanding.

One evening after the end of a conference in Bethlehem, Hala did not have her car and asked me if she could have a ride with me to Jerusalem. On the way were talking and were so involved in the conversation that I insisted on driving her all the way to Ramallah. I took a back road to her house. Hala noticed that I did have my Keffiyeh (the Palestinian checkered scarf) on my windshield and

asked if I (who as a Jerusalem resident have an Israeli license plate) felt safe driving with my yellow plate in Ramallah at night during the Intifada. Just as I was bragging about never having any fears ..... we were struck by a loud bang that sounded like a very close shot. Then we both looked at the windshield and there it was, a stone had cracked it. Hala felt so bad and responsible and I noticed she was nervous. Amid my own nervousness, I tried to reassure her that it was really nothing to worry about. We made it safely to her house and I drove back to Jerusalem. Next morning there was Hala knocking at my office door with a beautiful pot of plants. The plants, she said, were to convey wishes for my safety and we both laughed as I said that both of us are really entitled to safety wishes!

*I was shocked when I heard that Hala was very seriously ill. We were comparing notes about our shoulder pain a few weeks before I heard the news of her fatal illness. This illness has struck the life of many people close to my heart. Having just experienced the loss of my husband at a young age, my consolation is in the fact that he lived an active life and has accomplished a great deal and left tons and tons of good memories for the family to cherish. Similarly, Hala's life was full of great accomplishments and deeds that affected the life of so many people. She was admired, loved and respected by all those who knew her and they were numerous. I feel privileged to carry with me a precious memory of someone like Hala.*

# **An Exceptional Person**

Diana Safieh

Jerusalem

It is so ironic to be writing about your best friend after her departure from this earth to her eternal home in heaven. It is true that we believers know after our short life on earth we enter eternal life. Yet death is the most painful physical separation from our loved ones we humans endure, even though we believe that their spirit is still with us and we are sure that they inspire all those who seek their assistance.

Hala, a dear friend, a sister, was taken from us at the height of her career and at a time of great personal fulfillment. Throughout her life - public and private - she was a comfort to her family, schoolmates, students, colleagues and friends. She excelled in her studies and scholastic achievements but really it was through her presence, ideas, life choices and personal contact that she blessed us.

In 1964, she came back from the American University of Beirut to join the UNRWA staff as an instructor of professional studies at the Teachers and Vocational Training Center in Ramallah.

In 1967, still working at the Teachers and Vocational Training Center, she was transferred to the job of Vocational Training Counselor. Other than counseling students and helping them integrate their vocational studies with life careers, Hala introduced psychological counseling and provided a wider outlook on life, not only for her students but for her fellow teachers, administrators and even the laborers working on the campus. She touched everyone she met. Hala played a most important role among her Palestinian brethren who, like her, were uprooted from their homes in the 1948 war and were scattered throughout Arab countries and all over the globe. Hala thought herself to be among the fortunate ones even though her family was displaced from Jerusalem and lost their home and means of livelihood. Thanks to her parents she enjoyed a normal life in Ramallah and was not obliged to live in a refugee camp under horrible conditions as did so many others.

Hala's abilities and effectiveness were known and felt beyond the campus: parents contacted her for help with their children, students sought her out, even young, married couples came for advice. her

home was a refuge for those in need. For the children there were always plenty of goodies, sweets and even small gifts. No one left Hala's presence without some sweet gift.

I cannot speak of Hala without paying some small tribute to her family.

Lutfi and Melia Atalla were a lovely couple both of whom came from prominent Greek Orthodox Jerusalem families. They built a happy life in West Jerusalem, with God's blessing of three adorable baby girls, Siham, Hiyam and Hala, whom they showered with loving care and the best they had. All was shattered with the 1948 war, which forced them to flee to Egypt until 1951 when they came back to what remained of Palestine under Arab sovereignty and settled in Ramallah. Lufti Atalla went daily to work in Jerusalem, but wanted his "three princesses" to live near their school, the Friends Girls School of Ramallah. Again in 1967 war greatly disturbed their lives and the Atalla family, although an integral part of the Greek Orthodox Palestinian Jerusalem society, were given West Bank identity cards. No longer could this family pass freely to and from Jerusalem -- their home town and that of their ancestors.

Hala returned to her beloved studies between 1976 and 1977, when as a British Council scholar, she went to Exeter University in Britain, where she followed the B. Phil. advanced studies program. In 1977, she joined the staff at Birzeit University and established the first psychological-counseling center in a Palestinian institution.

In 1980, Hall again went from the active interaction with students to the active life of a student herself. Perhaps this is why she understood students and faculty so well. Between 1980 and 1985 Hall worked for her Ph.D. at Bryan Mar College in Pennsylvania in the field of Human Development. There she won the love and admiration of her professors and fellow students. They immediately recognized her inner spirituality, beauty and potential. Hala had something very special in her face, from her wide-open eyes it was as though a light would strike deep inside you. She had the gift of knowing the feelings of the one before her. She comforted you without letting you feel she

was counseling or comforting you. So often you would talk to her and confide your most intimate feelings, your very intimate worries and problems free of any self-consciousness. Hala was really very special.

As you might expect, Hala had the chance to stay and work in Pennsylvania and I think she would have loved to be able to do that -- to continue to be in close proximity to an outstanding academic institution and continue her research. She, however, held her desires in check and came back to her homeland where she felt it her duty to continue to help her people directly as long as they were forced to live under occupation. Throughout her stay in America, Hala continued writing to her mother, sisters and friends and she was kept informed of the situation at home which caused her great pain.

In December 1987 the Intifada began and with it increasing Israeli oppression. Hala continued to work with practically all charitable societies dealing with issues of children and women and started devoting a lot of time to those physically handicapped as a result of the Intifada. Demands on her counseling skills increased even beyond her work at the University. Many, many people came to get help from Hala because the pressure that came to bear during the Intifada disturbed even the very strongest of Palestinians. Hala herself felt these pressures and it really pained her that people with West Bank Ids were barred from entry to the Jerusalem she loved. She felt imprisoned.

Hala was offered a number of very good jobs which she turned down with the hope that she could implement her proposal for a Learning Resource Center at Birzeit University. This she felt was of utmost importance since Israeli restrictions on educational activities had undermined the entire Palestinian school system. Unfortunately, the University never managed to raise the money necessary to make her dream a reality.

In November 1994 Hala looked tired. Her friends entreated her to go to the doctor. Despite her physical fatigue she continued to work and even went to Hungary with some students for a conference in early December. Hala returned to the university and prepared semester

examination, administered them, corrected all the papers and completed all the semester requirements even though she knew the seriousness of her illness.

After completing all of her academic chores, Hala, in February 1995, went to America for medical purposes. She thought she would also relax at Bryn Mawr in Pennsylvania where she had studied and had friends that she loved. The treatment did not prevail and Hala never came back to us. She died and was buried in West Chester.

In December, prior to her departure, I visited her with my brother Afif and his family for Christmas. Although tired, she was attentive to everybody and enjoyed talking to Afif's daughters. A month later in London we were astonished to hear about her brain tumor and kept in touch by phone. When I think of it all now, the amazing thing was that she comforted me and urged me to look after myself. Hala to the very end listened to others and the keen sense of knowing what others needed never left her.

Hope, one of the seeds that Hala planted in our educational system continues to bear fruit. I have spoken of Hala's work during the Intifada. I sometimes sit and wonder what would have been her reactions to Oslo II and all that is happening now in such a very short time.

The Atalla family now is bigger in heaven than on earth. Hala's father died Easter Sunday 1972, her mother's heart stopped in 1988 on the first anniversary of the Intifada while entertaining friends and our dear Hala departed in Easter Sunday April 16th 1995, the same day as her father.

To Siham, the eldest daughter in Ramallah and Hiyam, married in Amman, we feel with you and share your sorrows but never forget what the pastor in America told you: "God also needs counselors to help those who come to Him who die in traumatic situations, especially young children." And isn't it strange that the tragedy of the Oklahoma bombing happened between the time Hala died and before she was buried. One of the hallmarks of an exceptional person, such as



Hala, is that their life encourages others to do as they did. Hala loved the following poem and practiced it in her daily life.

*If I knew that a word of mine  
A word not kind and true  
Might leave its trace in a loved one's face  
I'd not speak harshly, would you?*

*If I knew that a smile of mine  
Might linger the whole day through  
And lighten a heart with a heavier part  
I'd not withhold it, would you?*

*-- Anon*

Dearest Hala, may your spirit remain with us and help us to help others as you did so generously throughout your life.

# **No One Was Without Value**

Agneta an Ivan Magnusson

Diakona

**Dear Hala,**

We did not have the opportunity to talk to you during your difficult time. We had no chance to say goodbye. Therefore we use this opportunity to say a few words directly to you.

Long before we met you we had heard about you. Nice words about you had flown as far as Sweden. We had heard about the lovely woman who the students always trusted. We were looking forward to meeting you.

We arrived in the Occupied Territories in 1989 as representatives of the Swedish organization, Diakona. Our task was to administer and organize the building of a rehabilitation center in Ramallah, the Abu Rayya Rehabilitation Center, and to support and serve the Palestinian people during the very difficult time of the Intifada. It was not only the two of us. It was also a number of Swedish experts, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses and doctor specialized in rehabilitation. The people in Ramallah took care of us in an excellent way. They introduced us to different people and one of these people was you... the one we really wanted to meet.

It is important for foreigners to know about the culture in the country where they live and work. Life is so different in your country from the lifestyle in Sweden. You, Hala, were the one that carefully introduced Palestinian society to all of us. Most probably that is why we all fell in love with the people, society and country!

Why were you asked by so many institutions and organizations to evaluate so many different programs and projects? Most probably it was because of your skills and your professionalism. But not only because of that. We believe that one important reason was that you always looked very seriously into the project and really evaluated it. You wanted to find out by yourself and then you gave your own opinion. You never said anything just to please anyone! You were always very sure before you said anything negative and if your

opinion was negative, you always - in a positive way - gave advice to correct what was wrong.

I remember once that you evaluated a program of special education. That was not a glamour job but for you it was important. You understood the situation of the mentally disturbed children and you wanted them to have a good program. You saw that there was a possibility for them to get education out of their situation. In the introduction to the evaluation, you quoted this poem by W.H. Davies:

### *The Happy Child*

*I saw this day sweet flowers grow thick.*

*But no one like the child did pick.*

*I heard this day bird after bird,*

*But not one like the child has heard.*

*A hundred butterflies saw I,*

*But not one like the child saw fly.*

*I saw the horses roll in grass,*

*But no horse like the child saw pass.*

*My world this day has lovely been,*

*But not like what the child has seen.*

In you eyes no one was too small to serve! No one was too simple to deal with. No one was without any value. Together with you everyone felt that he was someone special. You listened to what he

was saying and even to what he was not able to give words to. You opened his mind for all the positive things around. You gave hope where there was no hope. You saw doors open where others just saw that all the doors were closed. That is why we loved you so much!

The last thing you did for Diakona was to participate in an evaluation of our rehabilitation program. You did that in a very professional way and with an approach that encouraged us to continue and stimulated us to work even harder towards the aim we had.

Dear Hala! You understood the proverb that says: "The flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today." You planted the seeds but you were taken away too early to see them grow. What that happened we never will understand. We, your friends around the world that are still working, have to water the plants and help them grow. We have to serve and listen to the people that need us. We will do that because we met with you and your way of living will always be a model for us.

# **She Brought Out the Best**

**Ethel Wil ey Maw**

Professor Emeritus

Bryn Mawr College

As Chairman of the Department of Education and Child Development at Bryn Mawr College, I first met Maureen Hala Atalla when she applied to become a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Bryn Mawr College in 1980. Her application for admission showed that she was a distinguished educator and counselor at Birzeit University and a significant force in community organizations working to improve conditions for women and other minorities in Palestine. Her self assurance and firm goals convinced us that she was the kind of student who does well at Bryn Mawr College. She did not disappoint us.

As a student, Hala distinguished herself by her clear thinking and by her ability to master a body of knowledge, analyze it, critically organize it, and use it constructively and creatively to solve problems. She was thorough and scholarly, never satisfied with anything short of excellence. In presentations in seminars and in informal discussions, her manner of speaking was quiet yet decisive, serene yet arresting. She commanded the attention and the respect of her listeners with her thoughtful and well-reasoned opinions based on carefully researched facts.

As a person, Hala displayed the same qualities of integrity, serenity, competence and intelligence that distinguished her scholarly work. Even the most volatile of her classmates became more thoughtful when in conversation with her. She had the gift of bringing out the best in those who were privileged to know her.

Hala was distressed by the suffering of the Palestinian people and the trials of her beloved Birzeit University. Yet when she spoke of the situation in Palestine, it was with sadness, not rancor. It seemed that she had within her a core of peace that freed her from despair and thoughts of vengeance. Her calm personality was brightened by a keen sense of humor and by a joyful appreciation of the beauty she saw in both art and nature. She was a congenial companion, a charming hostess, a delightful guest.

After receiving the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, she returned to Birzeit University where she continued her selfless service to others. Among those whose plight claimed her attention and concern were the students whose education had been interrupted when schools and the University were closed. During that too-short period of service, she returned at times to the United States to attend professional and academic conferences. When possible, she stopped to see me and my husband. These were happy times for us. We consider ourselves fortunate indeed to have known her. With her passing, the world has lost someone of great promise.

September 1, 1996



# **Understanding Two Cultures**

**Majorie Smit**

Former staff member, UNRWA

**"OUR WORK IS TO SHOW  
WE HAVE BEEN  
BREATHED UPON- TO  
SHOW IT, GIVE IT OUT,  
SING IT OUT, TO LIVE  
OUT IN THE TOPSIDE  
WORLD WHAT WE HAVE  
RECEIVED TROUGH OUR  
SUDDEN KNOWINGS  
FROM STORY, FROM  
BODY, FROM DREAMS  
AND JOURNEYS OF ALL  
SORTS."<sup>1</sup>**

In her book "Women Who Run With the Wolves" Clarissa Pinkola Estes emphatically communicates her passionate belief that every woman is naturally a powerful force filled with a deep sense for instinctive knowing and caring. I believe that this does in many ways describe Hala's personality and her interaction with the world and people around her. She believed in the inner strength of the human beings, was intuitive to the needs and desires of others, and showed great personal strength in dealing with difficult personal situations. She lived her life caring for the happiness and mental health of others -her family, relatives, friends, students and colleagues. Her philanthropic nature was genuine and based on an intuitive sense for people's inner strengths, their desire to be appreciated, to be respected and to succeed in life.

I met "The Atalla's" when I arrived in Ramallah to work with UNRWA in 1972, Hala's mother Melia, her sister Siham and Hala. It was through the friendship with them that I learned the full extent of

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Women Who Run With the Wolves; Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D.

Arab hospitality. In fact, being from a northern European country the depth of their hospitality and friendship was overwhelming. The Atalla's became my family away from home. I fondly remember the wonderful evenings at their house, the outings to Jericho, the delicious home-cooked meals and the lively discussions about *Palestine history and culture, politics and human nature*. It was through their friendship that I learned to understand and appreciate the wealth of the Arab culture, its heritage, the richness of its language, and its customs rooting deeply in ancient Arab history. The tone of these discussions implied the passion for the Palestinian people and the sincere understanding for human suffering. Yet the tone was respectful and dignified in relation to other cultures, demonstrating a great willingness to capitalize on people's inner strength and basic values to solve differences between people.

Against this family background, Hala's passionate belief in strength of people's "Inner Self" is not surprising and her decision to enter the field of psychology must have come natural. I got to know Hala well during the time she taught psychology and was the student counselor in "Tireh", Ramallah. I was always impressed by her dedication to the psychological and professional development of the young women attending this collage. She stood up for their rights as students as well as for their human rights. She always found time to listen to them, provide advise and supporting them in their decisions. She was highly respected by the students.

She was always very clear on the educational priorities and insisted that these priorities be the guiding principles of the operation of educational institutions. This made her a well respected and much relied on, colleague among the "Tireh" and UNWRA staff.

Her decision to take the opportunity to work for her Ph.D. in the United States was made after much deliberation; she would have to leave her mother and sister behind in Ramallah, which at that time suffered from the extreme difficulties faced by people living under occupation. She would have to leave her job as student counselor, while she knew how much the students were in need of the having the

opportunity to talk confidentially about their problems, anxieties and personal feelings. It was only after much convincing that this was an unique opportunity to professionally develop and to be even better prepared to work with the growing number of students in the West Bank that she decided to accept the opportunity. This decision-making process was indicative of her altruistic nature.

I visited Hala twice at Bryn Mawr College while she was writing her thesis. We had long and intensive discussions about Jungian theories of the human psyche and the transformative function of the psyche in our emotional developments living in different cultures. Hala's insightfulness brought to me the realization of how rich personal development can become when opening oneself up for other cultures. It also made me realize how fortunate Hala was, and many people like her, to be born and raised in one culture and educated in the principles of another. It gives this people the wealth of understanding two cultures: - broadening their thinking and comprehension beyond the boundaries of their own culture and hence developing an awareness of the most inner human characteristics and values. Hala had internalized these abilities brilliantly and generously shared the benefits of it, both in personal and professional relationships.

Today Hala is no longer with us, however her spirit of inner strength, her believe in the power of the universal nature of human values and beliefs and her life devoted to live out these beliefs in a controversial and topside world, will be her legacy.

I am proud to be her friend and I feel blessed to have been a part of her life.

# **Hala: In Memory of Her**

Jean Zaru

Sabeel, Palestinian Liberation Theology Center

*“Wherever the good news is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her”. Mark 14:9*

I am writing in English because I feel it is important for Hala’s friends, whose mother tongue is not Arabic, to read this. I am also certain that most Palestinians can understand English. Hala always sought a broader, deeper and more durable community which embraces our common destiny as dwellers on planet Earth, which affirms our common humanity, and which recognizes our possibilities as persons with the freedom to create options where none appeared, to make deserts bloom and to stand still in quiet places to hear the voice of God.

*“If it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is true that all remembrance remains secure until it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself...what saves the affairs of mortal human beings from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in its turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance and even for sheer reference arise out of it.” -Hannah Arendt, On Revolution*

With the above in mind, I would like to express my thanks to the Women’s Studies Center at Birzeit University for inviting contributions to the book they are planning to publish in appreciation of Hala as a role model for Palestinian women.

A lifetime experience has brought me close to the Atalla family and to Hala. In recent months as I looked back, I tried to reflect on this experience, to remember what it had taught me, especially after Hala passed away. Hala’s Easter was at Easter and her passing on is so much more about life than about death, but for all of us who have lost her physical presence, there is a gap. Hala was such a grand human being in a world where there’s too often a shortage of such people, so dependable, and always her own dear self. There is no institution in Palestine which did not seek Hala’s expertise and dedication at one time or the other. She was empowered and energized to seek the well-

being of all. I saw how she related lovingly, kindly and effectively to children and young people. How patient and loving she was with the elderly. Hala was a good listener always and a wonderful representative of the Palestinian people and of women.

I cannot forget the remarks of my international friends from all walks of life who always thanked me for introducing Hala to them. Even the birds and plants had a share of Hala's tenderness and care. What a privilege and what a great gift it has been to have had Hala as a friend, as a sister, and it was a challenge to work with her against what ever denies us a women and as Palestinians. She was unique with her style, her hospitality, her sharing of herself and of her time and energy with everyone. Hala worked quietly and steadily, often behind the scenes to accomplish her purposes which were focused on the good of the whole rather than the agenda of a faction or a group in a very selfless way.

Hala and I served together as members of the Board of Trustees of the Friends School. She never accepted positions, but always accepted responsibilities and worked hard on committees for the well being of students and teachers. I always marveled at the energy and wondered what were her inner resources! Where did she get all that patience when it was so easy to rage against so much ?!

Hala served the Friends (Quakers) in another capacity. She was a member of the advisory committee of the Quaker Legal Aid Center in Jerusalem. Again and again visiting international Friends spoke of Hala's special contributions, her wisdom, humility, serenity and love.

Hala also gave her time to *Sabeel*, Palestinian Liberation Theology Centre, and the YWCA. I, too, have been involved with these two organizations and observed her capabilities as an effective speaker who managed to engage the attention of the groups by rapidly and intuitively gearing and presenting what she had to say in a manner comprehensible to them.

Did her full time job at the university keep her from serving the whole community? Did this ever delay her even from visiting the sick, the

needy, the elderly or from counseling those in need? Did it ever stop her from being there with the bereaved? Did all these responsibilities ever stop her from holding committee meetings in her home where she shared her family's style of hospitality? Where did she learn all this?

Here I should stop and pay tribute to her family, her parents and her sisters. They maintained a high ideal of family life in practice as well as in theory. They extended themselves to all which many of us might find natural in relation only to some. They shared and shared without ceasing. They were always aware of issues of justice; not seeking as much of it for themselves as for others. The Atalla household was an oasis of peace open for all. Truly it was a household of life. It included both hospitality and mutuality. Its foundation was an *undergirding of love and its language was the two-way language of dialogue.*

During my visits we shared our experiences and reflections. We always reflected critically on our situation as women and asked ourselves where we could find the energy, the power of courage and hope, the inspiration and zest for life to carry on our difficult and important tasks of transforming ourselves and our societies? But Hala was further and deeply concerned with how we can pass on and share our life's experiences with younger women, who are still in search of affirmation, still perhaps uncertain of the choices and possibilities many of us have already experienced and perceived, perhaps not quite aware of the exciting new roads open to women, but also the hard work and new responsibilities women have to shoulder. Hala had a lot to shoulder.

Even during her last week in her Ramallah home prior to leaving to the USA, Hala and in spite of the seriousness of her disease, continued grading her students' papers, finalized grades and put all her files in order to pass them on to others. She remained till the end the perfect hostess taking care of her guests, trying to put them at ease as she saw the pain on their faces at her plight. Her sister Siham and myself tried to protect her from the too many well wishers, but even at the last afternoon prior her departure, she had time for a student in distress.



I was with her when she got a phone call from a cousin, a radiologist in the United States, who told her that he disagreed with the diagnosis given and feared she had cancer. Moments later she returned to her guests in the sitting room as composed as usual and offered those of us there some cookies. That anyone can behave with such grandeur under these conditions is a testimony of Hala's inner-strength and her spiritual resources! Words fail me to describe Hala.

All I can say in memory of her is that she reminds me of the white light of the sun in which all the colors of the rainbow are present while each retains its distinctive character, or I can say her life was like a symphony which all the roles are heard in a single harmony but in which each has its own particular time and place. Hala was a multitude of thoughts integrated in a single mind embracing all, seeking unity in spite of the diversity. Hala is still alive, is still with us and my heart now goes to the wonderful words of Tagore, "Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because dawn has come".

I would like to end this poem written by one of my friends Julia Esquivel.

*I am no longer afraid of death  
I am no longer afraid of death;  
I know well its dark and cold corridors  
Leading to life.  
I am afraid rather that of life  
which does not come out of death  
which cramps our hands  
and retards our march.  
I am afraid of my fear  
and even more of the fear of others*

*who do not know where they are going,  
who continue clinging  
To what they consider to be life  
which we know to be death!  
I live each day to kill death  
I die each day to beget life  
and in this dying unto death  
I die a thousand times and  
am reborn another thousand  
through that love  
from my People  
which nourishes hope.*

May Hala and what she stood for be told and lived in memory of her.

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# **When I Hear a Blackbird Sing**

**Eileen Chan ler**

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There's a blackbird that sings in the woods that surrounds my house. I can hear it as I write, and always when I hear it I think of Hala. It is eighteen years since we listened to a blackbird together and eighteen years since I last saw her, but she remains as vivid to me now as when I first met her.

Hala was a star. She arrived at Exeter University in 1976 to take a post-graduate degree course in counseling which I ran, and she bowled us over. To this day her fellow students and former tutors remember her with deepest affection and admiration. After completing the course she continued to keep in touch with me as she developed her career, taking first her master's and then her doctorate at distinguished universities in the United States, finally returning once more to university teaching. Always she wrote with enthusiasm about her studies but always she added that nothing could equal her time at Exeter. Her fellow students would understand that, because Hala was one of those who made it so memorable a time by the power of her personality.

At our first meeting I recognized that she had all the qualities that anyone could wish for in a student of counseling. She was a joy to teach, and to learn from. Running a course for mature students who have total commitment and endless enthusiasm is a privilege accorded to few academics. When it also includes the possibility of meeting a few rare people like Hala who combine high intelligence with true depths of feeling and intuition, there is an added bonus. You learn from such students and they may learn from one another. Hala's fellow students felt that she brought them especial treasures, as two of them have conveyed to me in the following tributes.

Kate McMahon Moughtin:

*"Depth and yet more depth is what I associate with Hala. It is as if she had an ocean of inner stillness.*

*Hala identified with her people, understood their collective plight, felt their pain. Once, on receiving a letter from her sister which had been*

*intercepted and opened by the occupying authorities in her country, Hala smarted with indignation, conveying a sense of deep silent hurt.*

*I enjoyed the delicacy of her traditions. Hala once cooked me a meal of chicken with nutmeg flavoring, explaining that whereas this delicious dish was the normal family fare back home, the family would have considered it too ordinary to offer a guest. Yet she felt I would appreciate being introduced to what is the family norm. I felt greatly honored. I often wear the mother-of-pearl brooch and the blue-patterned one that Hala gave me.*

*Hala's self-definition was: "I am a Palestinian-Jordanian living on the West Bank." I would have liked every single Irish person to meet Hala: she was the perfect ambassador for her people. Hala had the capacity to understand without having to fill in many details. She was and is a friend with and in whom I feel safe. Somehow Hala had a majesty, together with a playful sense of humour. I grieve for her dying."*

Sue Morgan:

*"I remember Hala's stillness. She had a dignity and a sense of peace about her. I feel we were privileged to have her with us on the course. Despite the suffering that she had experienced, she had humour and great warmth; there was wisdom and pleasure in her slow smile. I had never met any other Palestinians and she was someone very special for whom we all felt immediate respect."*

So Hala thought from a totally different culture from ours, belonged immediately to the course. She found no difficulty in adapting because the aims of the course, whatever their presentation may have been, were her aims too.

I left clinical work in London to take up this newly established and, in 1969, positively revolutionary course in a country town university because I saw it as a possible way of fulfilling a lifetime's ambition. I wanted to make life better for children in schools, for students in universities and for any of that vast number of people who set out to gain an education only to find disappointment and often failure.

Either they fall by the wayside and give up, or perhaps they succeed despite, rather than because of, their experiences. The waste of young hopes was brought home to me in my very first year of teaching and I have been dogged by it ever since.

No school can be perfect but most of us survive the inadequacies and make use of the positive aspects of our time there. It's the sizeable minority who fail to do this which troubles me. I am equally troubled by those who achieve well enough academically to reach higher education then fail to make use of their opportunities.

It is likely that all ambitions to improve the world originate in some experience that has made us feel the world has failed us. Probably without such experience we would not be able to be aware of the suffering of other people, or to feel that their pain is any concern of ours.

I designed the course on the principle that counseling is about pain. Counseling trainees, I guessed, would know that, and would come ready to look at their own pain so that they could make use of it in responding to the needs of others.

You can find unbearable pain in people from all walks of life, from the most privileged to the most deprived. I recognized this when I worked with both the children of the wealthy in the West of London and children of the poor in the East End. The response of society to children who suffer psychological pain is so often to reject them. Their behavior can be frightening and difficult to fit in with ordinary lifestyles. They rock the boat too hard. Most students who come to counseling courses have already come across such children, and they already know about compassion. Sometimes they have to learn that compassion needs to be harnessed so that the counselor's own feelings don't become confused with those of the people they are trying to help. Sometimes teachers need to learn to shed their didactic role and cultivate the opposite process of listening instead of instructing. Sometimes too they have to re-discover the respect for other people that goes with listening to what they have to say. The notion of

respect for those younger than ourselves is very easily lost when we are in a continuous position of power over them.

Somehow Hala was able to avoid all these pitfalls. She had a quality of maturity that helped her to treat everyone with respect and to draw their respect to her. Her own continuous suffering made her respond readily to the suffering of others and people responded immediately to her compassion. She was also able to accept for herself the compassion of others as the following story attests.

One day I showed a group a new film which had been produced by a well-meaning police force who had advertised in the educational press. It was designed to show how the police had set about solving the problem of "young criminals" - seven to nine year olds. The intention was admirable but the method disastrously misguided. "Catch them young and punish them hard and they'll stop."

We watched with mounting horror as one after another dazed and uncomprehending children were screamed at and psychologically brutalised -- pulled out of bed in front of cameras and bombarded with questions and accusations. The film ended with a shot of a tiny bony little boy - seven years old, but looking five -- standing alone in the middle of a huge prison cell, complete with bars and a high window, his face blank with despair.

The group sat in silence, digesting their own despair as they thought of children alone in their anguish. I was reminded once more of Dickens' little Dombey, deposited alone in a room on a table too high for him to climb down from. "Looking as though he had taken life unfurnished and the upholsterer was never coming."

We began to look at our own experience of childhood despair and at how we had coped. My memory was my first night at boarding school, also aged seven. I lay in a small, white cubicle, white walls, white curtains and white bedcovers, desperately afraid of doing something wrong, hopelessly homesick and, above all, dreading the morning when I was certain to fail the first test of the day. I knew I must expect to be woken up by a nun with the words "Benedicamus

Domino" to which I had to reply "Deo Gratias" but how could I be sure to remember such words? I thought of the Snow Queen and felt that ice had entered into my soul too - never to leave it.

Being in civilized surroundings of course I recovered my equilibrium in days to come but I never lost my conviction that there should always be someone somewhere who would understand. For far too many children there never will be.

After this ordeal I felt that the group needed some comfort so I invited them all back to my house. Kate, who is very intuitive, brought along a priest friend who had spent the day with us and watched the film, taking a lively part in the discussion. She asked him to say Mass for us in the garden. This turned out to be an excellent suggestion.

My house being well supplied with the necessary bread and wine, our congregation proved more than willing to participate in a healing experience, whatever - if any - their religious beliefs. These indeed ranged from the priest's convinced, if maverick, Roman Catholicism, which to some extent was shared by Kate and myself, through Hala's Greek Orthodoxy, one or two Church of England and Methodists, to no religion at all and perhaps some atheism. But everyone decided to take Communion.

As we came to the moment when we all would be invited to ask for prayer for some specific cause or person, my thoughts turned to Hala. We had been occupied all day with pain and I knew that Hala's life was dominated by pain that she must feel for the invasion of her country and I felt a great need to comfort her. Like Kate, I am of Irish descent and was brought up on the history of the anguish of my ancestors who fought and died to free their country from the invaders. Every time I visit West Cork - a part of Ireland peopled with my relatives and deeply scarred by past terrors - I go to stand on a "Mass Stone." This is placed high on a hillside so that watchers can warn the priest and people who are gathered there when they see in the distance English soldiers coming to arrest them for the crime of praying their own prayers. Fighting oppression is in my blood; no doubt that is ultimately what brought me to Exeter to encourage teachers to fight



# **Passage with Hala: Reflections**

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Cousin

the oppression of children and students everywhere and to set an example of authority which does not need to descend to oppressive acts to fulfill its role. My heart bled for Hala every time I heard of new atrocities on the West Bank, new examples of oppression.

So I was not quite prepared for the depths of her gratitude for my prayers for her. To me it was axiomatic that sufferers from oppression need comfort and support, especially when they are far away from home.

Meantime, during our unorthodox and very "seventies" Mass we were accompanied throughout by a blackbird. It provided its own version of Plain Song which was quite wonderful. The whole episode, taking place in beautiful woodland surroundings in a sunlit garden was quite magical and gave us all a great feeling of hope.

Since then when I have heard a blackbird sing, I have prayed for Hala and for Palestine. It seems as though, perhaps the prayers are beginning to be answered. Maybe for Ireland too, who knows? I'm sill praying. And Hala, I believe, is still somewhere praying with us all.

When she returned to the United States in February, Hala, I am sure, had no sense of how many lives she would touch. yet as those of us who were concerned with her gathered and dispersed and gathered again, she touched us each in ways compounded of our mutual history and the moments of our presence with her. I want to share with you my sense of her touch at points during the passage.

In New York we gathered, her sisters and her cousins, come to be with her as she awaited surgery. The surgery had arisen on the horizon a few days earlier. It had startled us with its possibilities and shaken us with its risks. We each came in our bewilderment to be with her in hers. But she did not seem so bewildered when first I saw her in the hospital. She was being with us who came to be her companions. How does one speak of an undaunted spirit facing the risk that had come her way?

It was Thursday. We were waiting with her. The surgery had been called off. A new tumor had been discovered, more accessible for biopsy. She was waiting to go down for the procedure, and listening and talking with sister, then cousin, then sister again, at times haltingly, at others clearly. A professor of neurosurgery came in, with a retinue of residents, to examine the patient. He spoke with detachment and so little consideration that sisters and cousins were ready to escort him out. Yet Hala was at peace with it, she seemed pre-occupied, patiently observing the professor's not entirely satisfactory teaching style.

Hala returned to the hotel on Friday. Other cousins were coming for the weekend. We had for long not seen each other in our diaspora. Now we were together to be with Hala. Or was it that she was being with us, as we sensed both courage and peace in her encounter with her passage. Calmly, having put behind her questions of surgery and risk, she moved on the next cycle of decisions: radiotherapy, its promises and prerequisites.

Saturday evening was a gathering for dinner, floating in three different hotel rooms, close to each other on the same floor. Hala was with us

between her periods of rest. She wondered at this gathering of cousins long lost to each other whom she had summoned unwittingly. Was this how we gather in this vast land?

We sat and reflected at the decades that had passed, all aware of our helplessness. Events, externalities had flung us apart, and now an internality had drawn us together again. Calls came in from Rome and Montreal and Amman, from London and Ramallah, from Jerusalem and all over the U.S. So, the gathering in spirit was far wider still.

The memorable time in Sunday was morning. Hala, with Hiyam, went down to the street and together they navigated two blocks to church. They returned in an hour, there was a sense of renewal. She had connected with soul roots that nourished her spirit for the encounters before her journey.

Upon departure on Monday, I took away a sense that Hala was unshaken as she looked ahead. It was no longer an event at a point in time that she saw. It was now a journey into unfamiliar terrain. What remains from New York? The sense of calm, and decisiveness and thoughtfulness. We parted knowing we would be together again in Cleveland.

If New York represented specific actions with well categorized risks and promises, Cleveland suggested a different landscape. The path was radiotherapy and the uncertain promise of significant relief for an unknown period of time.

Our visit with her in Cleveland was shorter. The radiotherapy had been underway for over two weeks. Some side effects were there, and the promise was now in question. Yet the peace was there, and the calm. There was a gathering of friends who had come together for prayer, a shared spirit of caring in search of healing, a sense of uplifting and hope.

All together we ventured out from the hotel. There was an Italian restaurant not far away. We took a big round table under a skylight. It was in the main room where decorations from an old church set the

mood. The colors and the midday light provided much warmth. Hala struggled a little with the food. She was having difficulty with words but she was present to us.

Events were now unfolding along paths unfamiliar, and the healers were uncertain about what lay ahead. This was the beginning of encounter with the end, though unspoken, there was a sense that a passage and a parting were awaiting. Sadness entered the company.

Cleveland had arisen along the path but it was not the place for a sacred passage. The heart called for return to the land of our birth, but the energy remaining was not adequate to the journey. The passage would be in this adopted land.

In Pennsylvania, at the home of a friend, a companion in years gone by, in the quiet countryside by the West Chester. During her years at Bryn Mawr, as student, scholar, teacher and friend, many bonds were formed, and to these Hala was drawn. She had been at home here a decade ago, it was a place from which she could journey on, a place to wait upon the Divinity, to listen for the call home.

It was the beginning of Holy Week, and Hala had started to take her leave. She was no longer able to speak or take nourishment, but she was present to Siham's touch and to some of our conversations. We wondered if Hala would delay her departure until Easter morning as her father had done. By midweek it seemed this might well be her choice.

On Saturday evening, we sensed she would leave us soon. Siham spoke her farewell, remembering that Hala would soon be reunited in a more peaceful place, with mother and father and all those who had gone before. Hala acknowledged the farewell with tears.

On Sunday morning, at the threshold of passage, she breathed more deeply again and again, and then took her leave. It was Easter morning.

As we waited for friends and family to join us for the final farewell, I had the sense that she had moved on in spirit but her presence was with us yet. And as friends and family gathered, the feelings unfolded

in waves, alternating between the deep loss and grief at our separation, yet with a fullness of gratitude for her time with us.

We appreciated very deeply the quality of her passage. She had done her utmost, but in the end she had embraced the foreordained with grace and peace. She was responding to the call, the Divinity receiving her as she embarked on her journey. What endures most is the sense that we were witness to a sacred event.