

The Almanac

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR MENLO PARK, ATHERTON, PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

OCTOBER 18, 2017 | VOL. 53 NO. 7



WWW.ALMANACNEWS.COM

FINDING REFUGE THROUGH ART



A mission trip to treat hearing loss brings art by Syrian refugee children to Menlo Park | Page 18



Artscene | Page 21

Viewpoint | Page 23

Home + Garden Design | INSIDE

FINDING REFUGEE THROUGH ART

A mission trip to treat hearing loss brings art by Syrian refugee children to Menlo Park

By Kate Daly
Special to the Almanac

A team of American audiologists and volunteers were on a humanitarian mission treating patients at a refugee shelter in Amman, Jordan, last spring when they stumbled across a treasure trove of art: a collection of heart-wrenching paintings Syrian children had done on patches of old United Nations tents at a refugee camp.

That find set in motion a quest to pay young artists there to make more pictures. Now 15 of those paintings of doves, flowers, people and bombs, and their Arabic captions sharing feelings about escaping war, are hanging in a special display in Menlo Park through November.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Menlo Park resident and audiologist Dr. Jane Baxter, these paintings and others are mounted at her Pacific Hearing Service office as “phase one” of what she hopes is more art and more awareness stemming from her mission trips to that part of the world.

Since 2015 she and her husband Steve Beck have volunteered in Jordan four times, and plan to return next March, and possibly again in September.

One canvas by a 13-year-old shows

two girls, one staring straight ahead, the other with her eyes shut. The caption reads:

*Sister tell me when
Hope arrives
So, I open my eyes.*



Dr. Jane Baxter

A blossom, three colorful birds and a lone black bird perch on a stark branch in a canvas by another 13-year-old artist. The caption reads: “I came to the camp with all my memories. I will not forget you my three friends, one day I shall meet you in the heavens.”

These powerful paintings were done by children living in the Zaatari refugee camp. The camp was created in 2012 on three square miles in the desert to house Syrians fleeing violence at home, and has evolved into a permanent complex for 80,000.

Dr. Baxter’s friend Maggie Conroy was the one who discovered the art and arranged to commission more pieces from the young artists with the twin goals of providing “them with some kind of income and to try to help build awareness of the refugee situation,” Ms. Conroy said.

Getting the art out of the country was somewhat of a challenge, Ms. Conroy acknowledged, but she plans to continue buying the art and bringing more out.

Ms. Conroy works as an art therapist and was with the audiologists on their mission trip to Jordan last April. She entertained families while they waited for treatment, promoting healing while having fun.

She framed 13 additional pieces from her art therapy sessions for exhibit. She shares the story of one boy being fitted for hearing aids at the Irbid Camp, a camp established in Jordan in 1951 for



Girls with Dove
Hajar Alkifri
Age 13



Dove in the City
Leila Jokdar
Age 10

Vases with Flowers
Suheima Alamari
Age 11



■ THE EXHIBIT

The art exhibit coincides with Pacific Hearing Service celebrating its 40th anniversary. Through November, the public is welcome to stop by 3555 Alameda de las Pulgas, Suite 100, in Menlo Park, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and take a short self-guided tour of the collection.



Tree Person
Abdullah Almisri
Age 13



Girl holding town
Artist unknown



Let us play
Live and love
Taj Jukdar
Age 13

Palestinian refugees. He drew many pictures of little boys with huge ears, saying he wanted more brothers to play with. He left the clinic hearing for the first time in years.

One of the framed art pieces is a sample of crochet done by another patient, a Syrian mother whose husband was a dentist but is not allowed to work in Jordan. She goes to a refugee center that houses and feeds war-wounded children, and also offers rooms and supplies to women so they can crochet, knit and sew items to sell and help provide for their families.

Dr. Baxter said she and her colleagues see hundreds of patients during a week's stay. Typically, a team of 25 to 35 audiologists and volunteers, organized through Entheos Audiology Cooperative, hand-carry in 500 to 600 hearing aids, older generation models manufacturers give them, recycled ones from American patients, and others bought with donations.

She said they always run out of inventory so they see kids first and then the adults.

Many of the refugees "have very severe hearing loss, a lot of it (because of) bombs and war," and some due to intermarriage, she said.

She treated a family with four sons, all with severe hearing loss. She also worked with two sisters whose father said they couldn't hear since they were babies, that there must have

been something wrong with the breast milk.

Dr. Baxter said, ideally, they would like to get out to schools to test students because "if they don't have hearing, they send them home from school," and the children are then further isolated.

She was astounded to find "some families where the kids don't sign and don't speak," and smiles when talking about the rewards of being able to give the gift of hearing.

Dr. Baxter remembers having reservations initially about

working in pediatrics at these makeshift clinics, where they have to bring in all the equipment, test long lines of children, and outfit them with hearing aids, but she has found "the kids are so well-behaved; they sit all day and are cooperative because they know it's the best day of their life."

She recalled one 10-year-old boy who was so determined to get to the clinic he came by himself, but most show up with a parent.

Post-care can be an issue. She said the United Nations

often provides free batteries at the camps, but hearing aids can break and need periodic cleaning.

The team usually brings along a hearing aid maintenance kit, and tries to teach locals what to do, but there are no formal learning opportunities in Jordan for the study of audiology. Dr. Baxter said the World Health Organization is looking to make some strides in hearing care and she'd like to "partner with them." ▣

Art on the cover:

Left: "Boy with Balloon," by Bash'r Suleiman. Top: "Tree Person," by Abdullah Almisri, Age 13. Bottom: Artist unknown.



Dr. Jane Baxter works with a patient.

Photo by Alan Wagmeister



Children at the Zarqa refugee camp in Jordan greet American audiologists and volunteers.

Photo by Alan Wagmeister