

## PLANTING SEEDS OF PEACE

*Munir Hussein (Ago)*

BY PATRICIA DEMPSEY

**D**ressed in khaki shorts and sneakers, he could easily have passed as one of the camp counselors. But **MUNIR** Hussein (Ago) a real estate dealmaker, had come to this peaceful spread of tall pines and clear lakes near Lewiston, Maine, to observe. As a guest of Seeds of Peace summer camp, he quietly listened to a tense dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian teenagers.

“The professional facilitator opened with a question: ‘What do you think about the wall between Israel and the West Bank?’ There were 14 teenagers from Israel and about 10 from Palestine,” recalls Hussein, a Palestinian American. “They were probably on their best behavior because there were visitors in the room, but it was a very open, candid dialogue. They bunk together, sail, do the ropes course, and have discussions that remind me in some ways of a St. John’s seminar—starting off with a question.”

As a managing director in real estate acquisition and development for a private equity firm in Manhattan, Hussein skillfully arranges financing and structures lucrative real estate deals. Yet for all the delicate negotiations he has managed, nothing prepared him for this first visit to Seeds of Peace in 2003. The camp brings together teenagers from both sides of a conflict area, such as Palestine and Israel, India and Pakistan, the United States and Iraq, and the Balkans, in order to foster mutual understanding. “I was dazzled,” Hussein says. “Here’s an organization that is really doing something about the problems in the world. They’re seeking to educate

and expose young people to their ‘enemies’ at a time in their life when they’re forming their opinions and perceptions. Hopefully this will help create a new generation of leaders who will be wiser and perhaps less judgmental of someone’s looks or beliefs.”

He discovered the organization while studying for his MBA at Columbia University, through a Jewish colleague who was serving on the Seeds of Peace board. “He came to me and said, ‘I think you will really appreciate what this organization is doing,’” Hussein says. Observing the camp in action inspired Hussein to offer his considerable management skills to Seeds of Peace. He volunteered on the Young Leadership Committee, managing fundraisers in Manhattan and mentors former “Seeds” with career advice. Last year, Hussein joined the organization’s board of directors and is currently its only Palestinian American member.

As a board member, Hussein hopes to provide a leadership model for teenagers who come from Palestine. “I want to set a good example and use my Palestinian heritage as a positive thing,” he says. “There are many occasions—business meetings, parties—when I’ll hear comments

or someone will ask ‘where are you from?’ I say, ‘Rye, New York’ and they say, ‘No, where are you really from?’ It depends how diplomatic people are, but in this climate of fear the tiniest little difference stands out. I want people to see that I’m not just like an American, I am an American.”

Last summer Seeds of Peace touched Hussein personally when his then 13-year old cousin Dana attended the camp in Maine. “She lives in a small village in Palestine, Zeita, near Nablus, of about 2,000 people,” says Hussein who has numerous relatives on his father’s side who live on the West Bank. Hussein has visited Palestine several times, and when he traveled there in 2000 with his parents he spent time with Dana, whom he describes as “exceptionally bright.” Yet the opportunities for a young woman like Dana in her village were, and still are, limited. “The tiny village where Dana was growing up has dirt roads, stone houses, olive trees, and chicken farmers,” Hussein says. “The women are raised in a totally traditional Middle Eastern culture and handle the children and household chores. Although they are given the opportunity to go to college, they typically do not have the same choices that men do.”

Hussein’s father, a Palestinian immigrant who spent his career with large consumer product companies, and his mother, a classics professor at Montclair State University in New Jersey and an advocate for woman’s rights, later returned to Palestine to convince Dana’s parents to let her attend the program. “Her father was cautious,” says



CHRISTOPHER HUSTON

HIS CORPORATE LIFE IS ABOUT DEAL MAKING, BUT WITH SEEDS OF PEACE, HUSSEIN BUILDS BRIDGES.

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## 1993

**RACHEL BLISTEIN (A)** is in Michigan: “I completed my master’s degree in Landscape Architecture at Morgan State University in Baltimore, graduating in 2003. After working in Baltimore for several years, I met my future husband, Paul Alexander, and decided to re-locate to Ann Arbor, Mich., where he was completing his PhD in Mechanical Engineering. We were married in October of 2004 and, one and a half years later, bought our first house in nearby Ypsilanti. My husband works for General Motors as a research engineer and I recently began my own residential design firm, Veris Landscape Design, L.L.C. We love Michigan, despite the cold winters and troubled economy. The surroundings are beautiful, the people are friendly, there’s a funky local music scene and lots of great food (it goes with the cold winters). Anyone who wants to get in touch is welcome to reach me at [rblistein@yahoo.com](mailto:rblistein@yahoo.com).”

**OMAR S. MANEJWALA, M.D., (A)** writes: “Over the last six years (since finishing up as Chief Resident in psychiatry at Duke) I’ve become very interested in the treatment of addicted healthcare

professionals. In July 2006, I moved to Virginia to become the Associate Medical Director of the William J. Farley center, a program for chemically dependent professionals. I also spend a few days a month lecturing across the country on various topics in addiction medicine. This is exciting and rewarding work, as about half of my patients are addicted medical professionals including physicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, dentists, etc. It’s really been an honor and a privilege to participate in their

recovery. When I’m not working I’m still traveling like crazy. Last year I climbed Kilimanjaro and hiked the overland track in Tasmania. Last month I returned from my fourth trip to India, this time to attend my brother’s marriage at the Taj Mahal.”

Wages,” won 11 industry awards last year including *Games* magazine’s ‘Party Game of the Year,’ ” he writes. “It will be carried nationwide at Target starting in August! I am very excited.”

## 1997

**DOMINIC CRAPUCHETTES (A)** has been encountering great success in the board game business: “Our latest party game, “Wits &

## 1998

**JEAN (TULLY) FLAHERTY (A)** and her husband, Seamus, joyfully announce the births of their three children, Aoife Marie, born December 1, 2003; George Anthony, born March 26, 2005; and Saoirse Anne, born October 7, 2006. They live in Plantation, Fla., and will move to South Bend, Ind., this autumn.

**DAWN (SHUMAN) BORCHELT (A)**, Matthew, and Wolfgang welcomed their new son and brother, Robin Wylde Borchelt to the world in their new home on May 2, 2006. He was 7 lbs. 9 ounces and 20 inches long.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

**KEVIN BROCK (SF96)** and **KHIN KHIN GUYOT BROCK (SF88)** hope to add a new member to their family soon: “We married in 2004, after meeting in a summer alumni seminar on Jane Austen in 2000 and in several more over the following years. For our honeymoon we did the Coast-to-Coast walk in England, a 200-mile hike from the North Sea to the Irish Sea through Yorkshire and the Lake Country. We live in Mountain View, Calif.” Kevin is a software engineer with a networking start-up in Santa Cruz and Khin Khin teaches first grade in a local public school.

“We are currently trying to adopt an infant through domestic open adoption,” he adds. “Open adoption is very different from international adoption, because the birth mother and the adoptive parents know more about each other, and there is usually some degree of continuing contact after the baby is born. The birth mother chooses the adoptive parents who she wants to raise her child, so there’s a lot of uncertainty involved while waiting for a match. The biggest challenge is getting the word out, so if you know someone who is pregnant and considering adoption, please feel free to give them our contact information: 408-806-9190; [brock@kevin.com](mailto:brock@kevin.com).” ❀

## 2000

**ALEXIS BROWN (SF, EC03)** recently joined the Board of Directors of Creative Santa Fe. She has added this to her list of other volunteer efforts at the Santa Fe Rape Crisis and Trauma Treatment Center, Santa Fe Cares and AIDS Walk, and High

Hussein. “She’d never been out of the village and it’s a big leap to go from this tiny village in the Palestinian countryside—not only to go to the United States, but to a camp where she would be bunking with roommates from Israel.” By June 2006 Dana joined fellow Palestinian “Seeds” at an orientation session before they took a plane from Tel Aviv to the United States with the teenage Israeli “Seeds.”

Hussein, his parents, and his uncle from Boston visited Dana on her second day of camp in Maine in part to reassure her

parents that she was thriving. “She was wearing her headscarf and she was a little nervous, but she got out and was playing soccer with the kids. She’d never been swimming before; she played all kinds of sports and went boating and did crafts, and of course they do a ropes course, where you’re learning to spot one another and build trust.”

Hussein says Dana’s English, along with her confidence and world outlook, reached new heights. “Now she’s back in her village and she’s started a Seeds of Peace type

program there,” he says. “It’s had a tremendous impact on her life and broadening her horizons.”

“It’s funny,” Hussein adds, “back when I was at St. John’s, I was never aware of being that different in college. People were just people. This is the way I was brought up, a face is a face, a mind is a mind, an idea is an idea, you don’t look at a person’s culture or ethnicity—you look at who they are as a human being.” ❀