

Distinguished Alumni

Distinguished Alumna Award – 2009

Mona Khalil '84

In your Baccalaureate speech to the class of 2005, you told graduates about your unwavering belief that “what binds us as humans is stronger than what divides us –whether it be religion, race or politics,” a statement reflective of your philosophy of life and faith in humanity.

In 1981, you arrived on the Mesa as the School’s first Saudi Arabian national and one of the first girls to join Cate’s student body. While you were eager to take on the challenges of Cate’s demanding curriculum, you also took pride in being part of this groundbreaking era at Cate, excelling academically and graduating Cum Laude in 1984 while receiving not only the School's highest honor -- the Biddle Cup -- but also the Allan J. Gunther Mathematics Award, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute medal, and the Scholarship Cup in both your junior and senior year.

Your classmates describe you as “inspiring” and “larger than life,” and fondly remember your magnetic personality and inquisitive mind. Indeed, your warmth was infectious and your gift for relating to all kinds of people never failed you. On the Mesa, you engaged dorm mates in vigorous philosophical discussions late into the evening and came to the aid of classmates who were struggling in their classes. Your intelligence and your genuine interest in learning and in helping others made you a leader and inspiration to everyone around you.

You went on to Harvard, where, in addition to your many academic accomplishments, you founded the Arab Students’ Association and the Arab-Israeli Dialogue. You graduated Harvard in four years with both a B.A. in Government (Cum Laude) and an M.A. in Middle East Regional Studies. Continuing your search for a path to peaceful resolutions of world conflicts, you enrolled at Georgetown, where you earned a master's degree in Foreign Service and your juris doctorate.

In 1992, you became the first Saudi woman employed as a lawyer by the Saudi Arabian government. Taking steps towards your ultimate dream of facilitating the Arab-Israeli peace process, you accepted a position with the United Nations, where you provided advice to the General Assembly and worked on complex issues such as the events surrounding the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 and the war in Iraq. After 12 years, you became the Senior Legal Official for the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria. Your wisdom and sound moral compass now guide you in advising the IAEA on Security Council sanctions, counter terrorism and the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Mona Khalil, we celebrate you for your service to the School as well as for your selfless pursuit of the goal of peaceful resolution to world conflict. Out of a sincere determination to serve, you made the decision long ago to become part of the solution. Your embodiment of Servons provides a model for those who hope and believe they can make a difference in the world. For your exemplary service to Cate School and to humanity, we are honored to add to your list of many “firsts” by naming you, Mona Khalil, the first woman to receive Cate’s Distinguished Alumna Award.