



Fred's first encounter with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not what he expected.

Arriving at the Inn at Green Acre where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was staying—now known as the Sarah Farmer Inn—Fred stood, “head to foot ... covered with soot. His blue eyes stared out from a dark gray face.” He was embarrassed by his own appearance, and by his means of transport. He approached 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his secretaries. Someone said, “Here he comes, now.” One of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretaries introduced Fred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Fred continues,

“To my astonishment He looked at me and only said, ‘Ugh! Ugh!’ not offering to shake hands with me. “Coming as I had, and feeling as I did, I was very much embarrassed.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá then called Fred to His room on the third floor of the Inn where they spoke privately through an interpreter. “He welcomed me with a smile and a warm hand-clasp ... His first words were ‘Welcome! Welcome! You are very welcome,’ –then, ‘Are you happy?’ – which was repeated three times. I thought, why do you ask me that so many times? Of course I am happy... Then, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked,

‘Where did you come from?’

Answer: ‘From Minneapolis.’ ...

Question: ‘Did you have a pleasant journey?’”

Fred continues,

“Of all the questions I wished to avoid this was the one! I dropped my gaze to the floor—and again He put the question. I lifted my eyes to His, and His were as two black, sparkling jewels, which seemed to look into my very depths. I knew He knew and I must tell... ‘Riding under and on top of railway cars.’ ... ‘Explain how.’ Now as I looked into the eyes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá I saw they had changed and a wondrous light seemed to pour out. It was the light of love and I felt relieved and very much happier. I explained to Him how I rode on the trains, after which He kissed both my cheeks, gave me much fruit, and kissed the dirty hat I wore...”

'Abdu'l-Bahá arranged for Fred to have new clothing. He remained in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's company for several days at Green Acre, and afterwards was invited to accompany Him to the Boston area for a week. Later, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled to Minneapolis, Fred again saw him.

Fred recognized Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this Age, completely reformed, married, and dedicated his life to promoting the Bahá'í Faith. Fred and his wife Kathryn raised four children, all of whom followed the path of their parents and became Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had promised God would give Fred “four blessings,” and in time Fred found out what this statement meant.

Later in life, Fred particularly focused on promoting the principle of the oneness of humanity, and worked to improve race relations in such cities as Atlanta, Georgia, and Helena, Montana.

The degree of the change of character wrought in Fred Mortensen by the Word of God, is shown by the fact that when funds needed to be transferred to the Holy Land during the First World War, 'Abdu'l-Bahá selected Fred Mortensen to be the courier.

Fred wrote:

“These events are engraved upon the tablet of my heart and I love every moment of them. The words of Bahá'u'lláh are my food, my drink, and my life. I have no other aim than to be of service in His pathway and to be obedient to His Covenant.”

Sources:

“‘Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst,” by Earl Redman;

Master's Thesis by Justin Charles Martin Penoyer, Fred Mortensen's great-grandson

2. From fredmortensen.org

Who Is Fred Mortensen?

Born into extreme poverty in the urban slums of America, Fred rose to spiritual levels few of us will ever hope to reach. His father, an immigrant from Denmark, tried to soften the urban-poverty immigrant experience by turning to alcohol when the trials of life got the best of him. His mother tried to steer Fred away from a life of bad choices. With a natural creativity and a loving nature, Fred did what he could to help his struggling family. After the third grade, he dropped out of school in order to work. But where Fred's street education took him, he followed. Like his father, he also spent time in the taverns. During his life on the street he stole and bullied his way around the slums of Minneapolis and he began to spend time with gangs of hooligans. When he was about 20 years old he and his brother broke into a mail car on a train. Railroad detectives spotted them and gave chase. In order to protect his younger brother, he took the mail bag from him and ran in the opposite direction. The detectives gave chase, forcing him to eventually jump over a very high wall. In the process of landing, he broke his leg and was arrested.

Albert Hall, who was a follower of the Bahá'í Faith, was appointed as his attorney. Sensing the beautiful soul beneath the façade, Albert Hall began to tell Fred about the Bahá'í Faith. He gave him a Bahá'í book and a dictionary.

Some time later, Fred Mortensen managed to overpower a guard and escaped. For the next four years he lived as a fugitive while traveling in other states.

Once he accepted the Bahá'í Faith, his life began to change. Although still officially a fugitive, he returned to Minneapolis in his mid-twenties and lived without further encounters with the police. Fred heard the news about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to America, but also heard a rumor that He might not travel west. Fred traveled to Cleveland and while there, he dreamt of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. With an uncontrollable fire burning in his breast he decided to go to Green Acre in Elliot, Maine to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Having no money, he used the skills he learned earlier in life and traveled under freight cars and on top of passenger trains.

Arriving dirty and tired one evening at Green Acre he asked some of the assembled men how he could see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Looking only at his outer condition, they tried to send him away. Undeterred by their disapproval, he knocked on another door and found two kind-hearted women who offered him a place to sleep and a way to clean up.

The next morning he attended a meeting where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was speaking. Shortly after the talk, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in spite of the fact that many others had arrived prior to Fred Mortensen, asked to see him. One of the first questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked was - how he traveled. Feeling embarrassed by his mode of travel, Fred tried to dodge the question. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pressed him for the details. When Fred finally described to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá how he traveled, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took his soot-covered hat and kissed it. That moment totally transformed Fred Mortensen’s life and he began a life full of sacrifice and service.

3. Excerpt from Justin Penoyer's MA Thesis, from scribd.com

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