

After a few weeks I was invited to a youth meeting at Mr. Whitaker's home where I first heard the word Bahá'í. The following weekend when I visited the George Street shop I told Mr. Whitaker I wasn't interested in religion and he said that it didn't matter and that we'd talk of 'science', for he was wonderfully informative, so that soon I came to realize that my disbelief was not against religion but against the inadequate church doctrines.[4]

Other small Bahá'í groups existed in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, and Auckland, and together numbered approximately 100. Of Bahá'ís his own age, Jim recalled:

In 1937 there were three Bahá'í youth, Lucy Trueman and Merle Brooks in Adelaide and myself in Sydney (though I didn't meet them until I returned from Palestine in 1942). In Sydney there were three Bolton children, in Adelaide two Dobbins children, and at Booleroo South Australia, two Brooks, all of whom continued in the Faith - three other children of Bahá'ís did not continue as Bahá'ís.

Not long after Jim became a Bahá'í, preparations commenced for the visit of Martha Root, a travelling Bahá'í teacher. He attended her lectures in Sydney, and in Honolulu in August 1939 was the last Australian Bahá'í to see her, shortly before her death.

The Australian and New Zealand Bahá'í communities were not only small in numbers but were relatively unfamiliar with each other, as the costs of travel and the vast distances between the major centres inhibited regular contact. Although the first national convention was held in Sydney in 1934, the national body was elected by correspondence during the war years when travel for non-military purposes was impossible.

Meeting Shoghi Effendi

Jim volunteered for the Australian Army's medical corps, knowing that volunteers had a choice of field of service, and anticipating that a posting somewhere in the middle east would enable him to visit the Holy Land and meet Shoghi Effendi. The decision was a conscious one; a colleague had offered to sign papers that would have exempted him from service (on the grounds that his services were essential to a business), but Jim was intent on meeting the Guardian. According to Jim's memoir:

My first project upon joining the army was to take steps to get sent to the Middle East where after several months of army training (in the medical corps) I arrived late November. We couldn't get leave for a full month so it wasn't until just before Christmas 1941 that I got to Haifa on three days leave. After some difficulty I was able to contact the Bahá'ís, finding the Guardian just before dark inspecting the terracing of the Bahá'í gardens on Mt. Carmel and arranging to meet him the next morning. But that evening I was taken to the Archives by the Guardian's brother. Rúíyyih Khánúm welcomed me the next morning at the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and sat in at the interview with the Guardian. The first of many. I was the first westerner to visit Haifa for over

two years, and as I'd just recently been to Wilmette the Guardian asked of many of the friends, especially of Hyde Dunn, who'd died early in the year. I was able on that occasion to visit 'Akká and Bahjí and the Garden of Riván. I asked if it was possible to get a Bahá'í ring-stone as well as some photos of recent date of Haifa and the offer of any Bahá'í book I desired; as the only one I hadn't read was the recently published Epistle to the Son of the Wolf I chose that book. Also I had an invitation to stay at the Western Pilgrim House on my next visit - which was a month later. This time I made the acquaintance of Sutherland Maxwell who was staying in Haifa at the time, had a number of interviews with the Guardian, one of which was of over an hour, and again visited 'Akká and Bahjí. This time I met the father of Shoghi Effendi who had rooms at Bahjí. The Guardian liked to meet the young Bahá'ís and to talk to them - they certainly felt the impact, and for a life time. I couldn't tell anyone what the feelings were that I went through during those visits to the Guardian but they established a direction and planted a seed that has never ceased to grow. I was the first male believer from Australia that the Guardian had met, before that he's only met three others - Effie Baker in 1925, Clara Dunn about 1933, and Ethel Dawe in 1938 on her return from England.

Soon after these visits Jim received a letter written by the Guardian's secretary: "He was very happy indeed to meet you, and feels that if you are an example of the Bahá'í youth of Australia, they will render the Cause many valuable services." [5] A day later Shoghi Effendi expressed similar sentiments when writing to the Australian and New Zealand national assembly:

A few days ago Mr Jim Heggie came to see the Guardian. He was able to visit all the shrines and archives as well. Shoghi Effendi was delighted with him; he found him devoted, full of faith and zeal, and very well read in the teachings. He feels that if this is a sample of the Bahá'í youth of Australia, there is, indeed, a wonderful future ahead of that country! [6]

These few lines had a significant impact on Jim, who felt that they implied he should remain in Australia and not consider returning to Canada.

Family and career

Jim returned from Palestine in 1942 and in 1943 was posted to Buna in New Guinea. At the end of the war he returned to New South Wales. Stanley W. and Mariette Bolton, who had also graduated from Palmer College, employed Jim in their chiropractic business. As already noted, Jim married Merle Brooks in 1947. Merle continued her career as a teacher of English and music, and raised their children Jennifer, Adrian, and Christopher. In 1948 the Heggies moved to Brisbane to work toward the formation of the first assembly there. They later returned to Sydney, where they helped establish a local assembly in Hunters Hill. In 1960 Jim established his own chiropractic clinic in Parramatta, remaining until retiring from full-time practice in 1987. [7]

Promoting the Bahá'í Faith

In addition to work, Jim became much involved in Bahá'í teaching activities.

Jim was an effective teacher of the Faith in the 1940s, when there were few new Bahá'ís in any one year. He was able to teach actively during his army years:

Wherever I was in the army I was able to speak of the Faith and thus caused many hundreds to hear of Bahá'u'lláh. The first to respond and accept the Faith was a young farmer near Warwick, Queensland. The only other, one in my hospital unit who became a Bahá'í in Buna, New Guinea in 1943. No doubt the first New Guinea believer. In fact it was my presence in New Guinea for two and a half years and that of Jim Chittleborough in Milne Bay that allowed the Guardian to state in God Passes By the opening up of those areas of the Faith.

In 1946 Jim was appointed to the regional teaching committee for the states of New South Wales and Queensland, and was elected secretary. In 1948 he commenced service on the national teaching committee, and was frequently a speaker at firesides and public meetings.

The national spiritual assembly

In 1947 Jim was elected to the national assembly, and elected secretary. That year also marked the commencement of Australia's first Six-Year plan. The national assembly negotiated a number of transitions in the 1940s. Hilda Books of Adelaide, (Merle Heggie's aunt), had been secretary of the national assembly from its establishment in 1934 until 1944, when it was decided that the secretary should work from the newly acquired national Bahá'í centre at 2 Lang Rd, Paddington, in Sydney. Dulcie Dive was elected to the position, and transferred her residence from Auckland.

Jim was not elected to the national assembly in 1951-52, but was re-elected in 1953, the year the ten-year plan commenced. Six members of the assembly elected that year pioneered to Islands in Asia and the Pacific, and at a by-election in January 1954 Jim was once more elected secretary. He was subsequently re-elected to the national assembly every year until 1972, excepting for the year 1969; in that year, however, national assembly member John Davidson was appointed as an auxiliary board member and Jim was elected as his replacement in a by-election.

Each year from 1954 until 1967 (except 1957-59) Jim was elected secretary of the national assembly. As an administrator of Bahá'í institutions, therefore, Jim played a vital role during the years of the ten-year and the nine-year plans. In these years Bahá'í communities were established in all the neighbouring islands of the Pacific, the house of worship was built in Sydney, and large-scale systematic proclamation activities were implemented.

In 1955 he received a letter from Shoghi Effendi asking the national assembly to commence plans, in the strictest confidence, for the construction of a house of worship in Sydney. Detailed investigations into the design, and the costing of construction had to be undertaken before they were announced to the community in the Guardian's 1957 convention message. For nearly two years Jim and his fellow members of the national assembly laboured on these plans in secret, as Shoghi Effendi did not want the community to be disappointed should

they have to be postponed for whatever reason. Between 1957 and 1961 Jim remained closely involved in the construction work. Likewise, for the three decades following the dedication of the house of worship, from 1961 until his passing, both Jim and Merle devoted themselves its support. For at least a decade Jim printed the programmes for Sunday services. Dressed always in a dark suit, he stood at the entrance to the temple prior to the Sunday services (in earlier years held at 3pm and more recently, at 11am), with a stern yet kindly face, handing programmes to visitors.

Jim's departure from the Australian national assembly is intriguing. He had attended the international convention in Haifa in 1973, and having been encouraged in his work by Hugh Chance and Ali Nakjavani, he announced at the subsequent Australian national convention shortly afterwards that he would be moving to Haifa to continue his indexing. However, he had perhaps acted too quickly, as he was subsequently informed that he should continue his work from Australia. Perhaps he was happy to have this news spread. In any case, relief from the burden of national assembly service would allow him to pursue his other activities.

Jim's character

Jim was an intensely practical man whose character was frank and down-to-earth. He showed little desire for material wealth, or for any form of status. As his youngest son Christopher explains:

Dad was offered a commission (having reached the level of Staff Sergeant) but declined as he preferred to remain with his men. This was viewed with askance by some, but dad had absolutely no pretensions to that form of leadership, military or civil.[8]

He had dry sense of humour that he spread throughout his time-consuming tasks. At one time, when writing to Shirin Fozdar about her travel in Australia he mentioned that Frank Wyss had obtained a three-month visa that allowed him to go to the remote Cocos Islands:

Mr Frank Wyss left Friday by plane for Cocos and can stay for two months without permission - he'll have to apply for an extension from the island. As there is no accommodation it will be necessary for him to camp on the island. He took a tent and food with him. I fear he will find it very quiet...[9]

At another time he wrote to Alvin Blum in the Solomon Islands with news of efforts to settle the difficult post of Loyalty Islands:

We have a Mr Shapur Suhaili ... in Sydney at the moment on his way to New Caledonia. He is trying to crack Loyalty: anyway, we'll see what things are like when he gets there.[10]

Scholarship

Study of the Bahá'í teachings has been an integral part of the life of the Australian Bahá'í community since its inception. In addition to providing study and deepening activities at community level, summer schools at Yerrinbool

commenced in 1938 and contributed to an emerging ethos of systematic learning. Jim Heggie's contribution to this tradition was to move beyond personal study to the production of texts for use by a wider audience. In an age before computers, and in which the Bahá'í writings were gradually appearing in print in English, his principal contribution was the production of indexes and concordances that facilitated systematic study, and in some cases brought together passages thematically. In the 1940s he also learnt Braille, and commenced producing Bahá'í books for the blind. He stated in a 1985 memoir:

Though Bahá'í literature was very limited, we had the New Era, Gleanings, The Hidden Words and Some Answered Questions, I found myself learning a new language and toying with such words as Manifestation, Omniscient, Omnipotent. I found myself confirmed in Bahá'í belief long before I met any of the members of the Sydney community, at that time of fifteen members...

Through the 1940s into the 1960s Jim provided information on the Bahá'í Faith for a number of publications. In the 1950s, for instance, he assisted the Rev. E. H. Vines (Minister of St. Margaret's Presbyterian Church at Turramurra, and Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales) with information about the Bahá'í Faith for the 1958 edition of his study in comparative religions, *Gems of the East*. He subsequently wrote an entry for *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, published by the Grolier Society in 1962.

The study of Islám

While studying in North America 1939-41, Jim became friends with Gertrude Struven. Each month she came to Devonport to speak at public meetings he organised as part of an effort to establish a local assembly in the city. Mrs Struven had written a manuscript on Islam that had not made it into print. Whatever the reason for this, she impressed on Jim the significance of the study of Islam for Bahá'ís, and he embarked on one of his life-long interests. His Qur'anic Study index, produced in 1946, was authorised by the Australian national spiritual assembly for distribution in 1957. His undated work *Muhammad and Islam: A Bahá'í Qur'anic Study* includes a 38-page essay introducing Islam's key teachings and history, Islamic references found in the Bahá'í writings and in the Bible, and a note on the history of the Imamate.

Indexes and concordances

Jim accomplished his projects by rising early, and spending some time in his study before departing for work. On evenings and weekends he combined these projects with other administrative and community activities, and regular attendance on Sundays at the house of worship.

George Ronald has published *An Index of Quotations from the Sacred Writings*[11] and *Bahá'í References to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. [12] But most of Jim's projects remain unpublished in book form: *Bahá'í Scriptural Index*; [13] *Index to the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*; [14] *Index, God Passes By*; [15] *An Index of Quotations from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*; [16] *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings, Vol II*; indices to "Selections from the

Writings of the Báb", "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", and "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá"; an "Index to Promulgation of Universal Peace and Star of the West"; Some Studies, Vol I, II, III; and an Index to the Compilation of Compilations.[17] In November 1991, Jim compiled 57 quotations under the title "Spiritual Aspects of Health." Some of these projects were reproduced by Gestetner and sold by the Bahá'í Book Committee. MacEoin also lists Messages from the Guardian Taken from Bahá'í News.[18]

These works are far more creative and useful than the terms "Index" and "Compilation" imply. Those that are compilations draw together Bahá'í writings on a theme in insightful ways, and those that are indexes find subjects in their content that may not be apparent on a first reading. Thus Heggie's indexes and compilations in fact offer original insights into the meanings that the texts convey. Although many feel that compilations have been superseded by the power of the computer, an alternative view is that compilations continue to be useful "because they are the product of long hours of intellectual activity in matching texts to subjects. The keyword searching that one does on computer databases does not necessarily retrieve everything relevant or exclude everything irrelevant." [19]

Jim could not have imagined having a large audience for his work when he first commenced these studies, and so he adopted the habit of binding a small number of volumes for presentation as gifts, mostly to family, but also to a few fortunate friends. That Jim Heggie has left a legacy of indexes and concordances, rather than essays and commentaries, indicates another of his defining characteristics: a casual conversation with him would include precise references concerning the topic in the Bahá'í writings. As a scholar, Jim was singularly interested in mastering the content of the "Creative Word" rather than commenting on it. He never lost the zeal that Shoghi Effendi had identified during those three fateful interviews in Haifa.

At his passing the Universal House of Justice cabled:

DEEPLY DISTRESSED LEARN PASSING JAMES HEGGIE WHO RENDERED OUTSTANDING SERVICE
CAUSE BAHAUULLAH IN ANTIPODES OVER FIVE DECADES HIS DEVOTED ENDEAVOURS MANY
YEARS MEMBER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AUSTRALIA INCLUDING LENGTHY PERIOD
SECRETARY CONTRIBUTED ESTABLISHMENT SOUND ADMINISTRATIVE FOUNDATION NATIONAL
COMMUNITY. LOVINGLY RECALL HIS CONSTANT DEDICATION TEACHING CAUSE HIS
ENTHUSIASM STUDY WRITINGS FAITH HIS SCHOLARLY WORKS VARIOUS ASPECTS TEACHINGS
...

Graham Hassall[20]

End Notes

{Notes start with #4 as this item was originally web-posted with another paper.)

Undated memoir in the possession of the author.

25 December 1941, Messages to the Antipodes (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications

Australia, 1997) 178.

26 December 1941, Messages to the Antipodes 178-180.

At which time Jim passed the practice to Christopher Heggie.

Chris Heggie, November 1999.

6 June 1955. 0025/0007. Australian National Bahá'í Archives.

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n.p. [Australia], n.d. [1971?].

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Comp. James Heggie. [Australia], 1972, 97 pages.

Ralph Wagner, Westfield State College Library, posted to Bahai-Studies on 21 February 2000.

Thanks to Christopher Heggie and Merle Heggie for additional information.

METADATA

Views15553 views since posted 2010-07-16; last edit 2024-08-05 14:04 UTC;

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Language

English

Permission

author and publisher

History

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