Footprints in the Sands of Time

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FOOTPRINTS IN THE
SANDS OF TIME
Memoire of a Maidservant

Shahla Behroozi Gillbanks
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow, or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord,

“You promised me Lord,

that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?”

The Lord replied, “The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.”

~~ Mary Stevenson, 1936

INTRODUCTION:

"FOOTPRINTS IN THE SANDS OF TIME" is my memoir as a Bahá’í in Iran, pioneering in different countries around the world, and a historical account of service
in the United States, New Zealand, and Czechoslovakia.

Part, I, MY FAMILY HISTORY starts with the 1880’s historical perspective of Persian
history when my grandfather left Ishghabad for the ancient city of Hamadan. Then his
family life in Tehran and his involvement in the Persian Constitutional Revolution. It

continues with the story of my parents who lived as Bahá'ís in the 20th Century of Iran, the social and political changes of Iran and its impact on the life of the Bahá'í community.

Part II, MY LIFE JOURNEY: includes my life in Iran, pioneering to the Philippines, New Zealand, Kenya, and the Caribbean. It entails a recollection of special events of my life, as I experienced them; the memories of the Bahá'í personalities that I was privileged to know, and their influence on my spiritual growth.

These precious souls were the spiritual role models for the fresh saplings of the Bahá'í community in Iran. They helped the new generation of Bahá'ís in tasting the sweet savors of love, loyalty, and service in its most sublime state.

Each of my contemporaries experienced these same events differently as if looking through a stained-glass window and seeing different formations of magnificent shades and colors.

I dedicate this token to the memory of my spiritual mentor, Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhajir. A person who has had the most influence on my life and the countless others who have had the bounty and the joy of knowing him. We were the traveling companions of a mentor who helped us to find the path in the fragile and yet timeless journey of life.

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As this Memoir had spanned more than 50 years, I reconnected with old friends via
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Shahla Gillbanks

PART I

MY FAMILY HISTORY

A Glimpse at the Persian history, circa 1844 to the early 1900's
'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Some Answered Questions, describes the social milieu of Persia as

follows:

“The Báb —may my soul be His sacrifice! —it was at a young age, that is, in the twenty-fifth year of His blessed life, that He arose to proclaim His Cause. Among the Shí‘ihs it is universally acknowledged that He never studied in any school, nor acquired learning from any teacher. To this the people of Shíráz, each and all, bear witness. Nevertheless, He suddenly appeared before the people, endowed with consummate knowledge, and though but a merchant, confounded all the divines of Persia. Alone, He undertook a task that can scarcely be conceived, for the Persians are known throughout the world for their religious fanaticism. This illustrious Being arose with such power as to shake the foundations of the religious laws, customs, manners, morals, and habits of Persia, and instituted a new law, faith, and religion. Though the eminent men of the State, the majority of the people, and the leaders of religion arose one and all to destroy and annihilate Him, He single-handedly withstood them and set all of Persia in motion. How numerous the divines, the leaders, and the inhabitants of that land who with perfect joy and gladness offered up their lives in His path and hastened to the field of martyrdom!
The government, the nation, the clergy, and prominent leaders sought to extinguish His light, but to no avail. At last His moon rose, His star shone forth, His foundation was secured, and His horizon was flooded with light. He trained a large multitude through divine education and exerted a mavellous influence upon the thoughts, customs, morals, and manners of the Persians. He proclaimed the glad-tidings of the manifestation of the Sun of Bahá to all His followers and readied them for faith and certitude.
The manifestation of such marvellous signs and mighty undertakings, the influence exerted upon the thoughts and minds of the people, the laying of the foundations of progress, and the establishment of the prerequisites of success and prosperity by a young merchant constitute the greatest proof that He was a universal Educator - a

fact that no
fair-minded person would ever hesitate to acknowledge."

"Bahá'u'lláh appeared at a time when Persia was plunged in the darkest ignorance and
consumed by the blindest fanaticism. You have no doubt read at length the accounts that
European histories provide of the morals, manners, and thoughts of the Persians during
the last few centuries, and these require no repetition. Suffice it to say that Persia had
sunk to such abysmal depths that foreign travellers would all deplore that a country which
had in former times occupied the pinnacle of greatness and civilization had by then fallen
into such abasement, desolation, and ruin, and that its people had been reduced to utter
wretchedness.

It was at such a time that Bahá'u'lláh appeared.

As soon as the Báb revealed His Cause, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed: "This great Man is the
Lord of the righteous, and it is incumbent upon all to bear allegiance unto Him." He arose
to promote the Cause of the Báb, adducing decisive proofs and conclusive arguments of
His truth. Although the divines of the nation had obliged the Persian government to exert
the most vehement opposition; although they had all issued decrees ordering the
massacre, pillage, persecution, and annihilation of the Báb's followers; and although
throughout the land the people had undertaken to kill, burn, and plunder them, and even
harass their women and children—despite all this, Bahá'u'lláh was engaged, with the
utmost constancy and composure, in exalting the word of the Báb. Nor did He seek for a
moment to conceal Himself, but associated openly and visibly with His enemies, occupied
Himself with adducing proofs and arguments, and became renowned for exalting the
Word of God. Time and again He suffered intense adversities, and at every moment His
life was in grave danger.

He was put in chains and thrown into a subterranean dungeon. His extensive hereditary
possessions were entirely plundered, He was four times exiled from land to

land, and in
the end, He came to abide in the Most Great Prison.

Notwithstanding all this, the call of God was ceaselessly raised, and the fame of His
Cause was noised abroad. Such were the knowledge, learning, and perfections He evinced that everyone in Persia was astonished. All the learned people—friend and foe
alike—who attained His presence in Tihrán, Baghdád, Constantinople, Adrianople, and
‘Akká received a complete and convincing answer to their every question. All readily
acknowledged that in every perfection He was peerless and unique throughout the world.”

- Taken from:
https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/’Abdu’l-Bahá/some-answered-
questions/4#774123

The Spiritual and Social Awakening of Persia

The social and spiritual renaissance of Persia started with the historic event of Báb’s
Declaration as the Herald of the Promised One, Bahá’u’lláh. It took force when Báb’s
Letters of the Living and his disciples, carried his message to the masses in far corners of
Persia, Iraq, and India. They met with dignitaries, the clerics, the learned and general
population. The teachings of the new Faith encouraged individual investigation of the truth,
without relying on the cleric's interpretation of the Word of God. Soon the numbers of the
Bábis were tenfold. The courage of the believers to face martyrdom for their belief,
withstanding the Shah’s army and the clerics, awakened the social consciousness of the
nation. It reached its peak with the Martyrdom of the Báb and the imprisonment of
Bahá’u’lláh in the Dungeon of “Siyáh-Chál.”

The modern history textbooks falsely refer to the Bábi Movement as a rebellion against the
Shah, creating an upheaval in the nation. In the early history of the Faith, thousands of
believers were martyred by the verdicts of the Shah and the clerics. The army and the
masses attacked innocent civilians, including women and children for the main

purpose of
the total elimination of the Bábi's and Bahá'ís in Persia.

From 1844 to the 1880's, the Russian and British Empires had dominating power over most
of Persia. The Persian Royals (the Shah's) had practically lost their political power beyond
Tehran. In this period, the Russian Tsars gradually advanced into the northern and eastern
regions of Persia and captured most of the territories. They then created the Russian
province of Transcaspia and built the European type city of Ishqabad in Turkmenistan.
However, the Turkmens never lived in that town. The city was occupied by Russian Officers
and Army, in addition to the immigrants from Armenia, Persia, and other Central Asian
territories.

In 1884 a group of Persian Bahá'ís escaped persecution by emigrating to Ishqabad. They
enjoyed religious freedom and activities and have gradually developed a thriving Bahá'í
community. By the turn of 20th Century, under the direction of Abdul- Baha, Haji Mirza
Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, a cousin of the Báb, supervised the construction of the first Bahá'í
Temple.

'The Bahá'í community reached a high stage of development in the early years of
this century. Just prior to the Russian Revolution in 1918, more than 4,000 believers
lived in Ishqabad, where they had erected a Bahá'í House of Worship, built an
elementary school, two kindergartens, and a medical clinic, and had established a
highly developed community life, featuring multiple libraries, social clubs and various
societies devoted to drama, gymnastics, and other pursuits.'

~~ Taken from One Country: Newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community,
Jan- March 1997
https://onecountry.org

The Background History of My Mother, Nayereh Behroozi

I was told by my mother, that my grandfather was the son of one of the Persian families in
Ishqabad. He left home in his teens and went to Hamadan – an ancient town in

Western
Persia. He was a handsome young man with progressive views, ready to change the world.
He met my grandmother, a pre-teen girl, by the river. He mischievously threw some
pebbles into the water to get her attention. My grandmother scolded him for his naughty
behavior. My grandfather fell in love with her and asked her parents for her hand. They got
married and soon after, moved to Tehran. She bore 18 children, including a pair of twins.
My mother was the last born.

My grandmother was from a family of devout Muslims. She told my mother that when her
husband's "Bábi" sisters came for a visit from Ishqabad, they did not cover their heads. So,
their blond braided hair was showing. After they had returned to Ishqabad, my grandmother
gave away all the bedding and dishes that they had used – as they had been touched by
the "infidel Bábis."

Years later, my oldest aunt married a Bahá'í merchant from Ishqabad. He died young and
although my aunt never became a Bahá'í, their young son, under the care of his uncle,
grew up as a Bahá'í. This cousin and his children were the only Bahá'ís in my extended
family.

The Persian Constitutional Government; 1905 - 1925

The Russian Revolution of 1905 and the economic stagnation and exposure to Western
culture, had influenced the Persian progressives to initiate a social revolution in the country.
The beating of a merchant by government officials triggered the uprising of the Merchants
Guild and the clerics. They demanded a Constitutional Monarchy, limiting the power of the
Shah, and granting popular power to the Majlis (Parliament.) The Mozaffarad-Din Shah
signed this declaration in 1906, shortly before his death.

In 1907, The Russians and British used the change of power and the political instability to
their advantage and entered a pact to divide Persia into North and South, with the Russians

influencing the North and British the South. They sent their ambassadors to inform
Mohammad Ali Shah, the new monarch. In 1908, the Shah, with the support of the British
and Russians decided to abolish the Constitution. He arrested most of the leaders of the
Constitutional movement and bombarded the Majlis (Parliament) during its Opening
Ceremony.

My grandfather was an influential merchant of the Persian Carpet in the Bazaar (Market).
He was a member of the Merchants Guild who supported the Constitutional Revolution.
Each year he participated in the opening ceremony of the Majlis, by decorating the building
with carpets from his shop. However, in 1908, my grandmother who was pregnant with my
mother, went into labor. My grandfather stayed home and missed the meeting of the
Constitutional Leaders with the Shah at the Royal Garden. In this meeting, the Shah
overturned the Constitution, closed the Parliament, and arrested the Constitutional leaders.

When my grandfather heard the news, he knew that not only he had lost his inventory of
carpets, but his life was in danger. He went into hiding in a windowless basement for a
year, became gravely ill and died shortly after. He was in his early forties.

My mother was only a few years old when her father passed away. She was brought up by
her mother and an older brother who were staunch Muslims.

In 1909 the Pro-Constitutional groups forced the Shah to abdicate and replaced him with a
young, inexperienced Ahmad Shah. Although they re-established the Constitution, it left a
weak Persian Government with the Shah having no control outside of Tehran. The British
consolidated their hold on the Persian Oil supply by the treaty of the Anglo – Persian Oil
company, giving a concession of 16% of the profit to the Persian government.

After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the British used Persia as a base for an unsuccessful
attack on Russia, to stop the spreading of the Bolshevik influence in the Middle East and

India. The Russians in turn, annexed a large portion of Northern Iran, creating the Persian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In 1920, as the Russian-backed guerrillas of Rasht were preparing to march into Tehran and take over the government, Reza Khan Pahlavi, with the partial support of the British, launched a coup d'état, that eventually abdicated Ahmad Shah and gave the power to Reza Khan.

Reza Shah 1925 – 1944

In 1925, the Parliament ended the reign of Qajar Dynasty and appointed Reza Shah as the legal Monarch. Reza Shah set to centralize the fractured tribal rules to a constitutional government. He gradually decreased the influence of the British and Russians, by getting rid of the 1908 Treaty. Consequently, in 1933, he forcibly negotiated with the Anglo- Persian Oil Company for a considerably higher share of the oil revenue at 21%.

In his efforts to modernize the country, he enforced a nonsectarian decree by forbidding women to wear the chador – a veil that covered women from head to toe. My mother remembered Reza Shah himself, stopping a woman in the street, ordering her to hand over her chador, putting it under his boot and ripping it apart with his hands. This practice was repeated throughout the country by law enforcement. It went hand in hand with ordering men and women to discard their customary Persian garments and replace them with western ones.

Reza Shah started the implementation of a national curriculum for the compulsory public education for girls and boys. It was followed by the establishment of the University of Teheran.

During his reign, the women emancipation movement took place, helping women to work and take part in various social actions.

During this period the mass persecution of Bahá'ís by the government and the clerics decreased and was limited to occasional incidents.

This massive social change upset the clerics and their followers. However, their
demonstrations and resistance were met by a strong response from government forces,
which sometimes led to the killing of the clerics and their followers.

“Iran,” replacing Persia:

In 1935, Reza Shah asked the “League of Nations” to formally adopt
“Iran” as the correct
name for the country, and to no longer refer to it as Persia.

The reason for this name correction was the historical perspective of Iran. The ancient
historians stated that circa 1000 BC, three Aryan tribes: The Medes, Persians, and
Parthians left the Caucasus region and migrated to the Iranian Plateau by the Caspian Sea.
They called their new land Iran, the land of the Aryans. Around the same time, another
Aryan tribe moved away to the land which they called “Allman,” presently
called Germany.

The Iranian Medes settled in the northwest of the Plateau, and in 728 BC formed the first
Iranian Dynasty and unified the tribes. The seat of Median Empire was in the city of
Hamadan.

The Persians settled in Pars and had a close affinity with the Medes. In 550 BC, young
Cyrus the Great rebelled against his grandfather, the Median King and started the
Achaemenid Empire, which became known as the Persian Empire to the Greeks. Thus, the
western historians following the Greeks, called Iran, Persia. The Achaemenid kings moved
the seat of their empire to Pars but kept Hamadan as one of their three capitals. Shiraz, in
Pars Province, is the birthplace of the Báb and the Bábi Faith.

Most of the significant archeological finds of the Persian Empire, such as Persepolis are in
Pars. However, Hamadan has the most ancient relic, the Stone Lion, from the Median
Empire period. There are also two ancient inscriptions from the Achaemenid Emperors
carved in granite, on the side of the Alvand Mountain.

Persian Public Education:

Until the early 19th Century, primary education in Persia was mainly Islamic religious
“Maktabs” – schools for boys, or private tutors for the nobility. By the 1830’s other
charitable and religious organizations established schools in Persia.

From 1897 - 1912 under the guidance of Abdu’l-Baha, The Persian Bahá’ís established
schools for boys and girls in Tehran, Hamadan, and other major cities in Persia. These
schools were recognized later, by the government. They accepted students from all
religious and social backgrounds. The graduates from the Tarbiyát Schools for girls and
boys in Tehran became prominent members of the Persian community.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged American Bahá’í educators such as Dr. Moody, to support and
fund the Tarbiyát School for girls. Some students received sponsorship from the Persian–
American Educational Society and continued their higher education in the United States.
The first among them was 16-year-old Qudsyyieh Ashraf. Years later, in her talk in
Mashhad, she related that in May 1912, she had the honor of attending the Dedication
Ceremony of the Bahá’í Temple in Wilmette. As the ceremonial golden shovel was dull,
Abdu’l-Baha used an ax to break the ground for the placement of the Cornerstone. Then,
a young man handed him the shovel to turn the earth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked the Bahá’í
women from different nationalities to come forward and turn the earth. He called upon Miss
Ashraf to represent the women in Persia.

During the Constitutional period, the Persian Government started a public education
system in the country. My mother attended one of these private schools for girls. In 1921,
the Teacher Training school was established in Tehran. My mother was among the first
group of teachers who completed the training and then taught in the same school that she
had graduated from.

Reza Shah established the Education Ministry which standardized the modern compulsory
public education in Iran. It placed constraints on religious school’s

operations and
curriculum. In 1935 the Ministry mandated the Bahá'í Schools not to observe Bahá'í Holy
Days. When the Bahá'í schools did not conform, they were ordered to close permanently.

The Story of My Father, Abbas Behroozi:

My father was born in 1899 in Hamadan. His mother died during childbirth and left him and
his nine brothers and sisters as orphans. By customary tradition, my grandfather married
a widowed sister of my grandmother who also had a child. Together, they produced three
more children which made a complicated family relationship for the stepchildren. My father
and his siblings felt lost in the crowded home.

Hamadan was the home to a diverse ethnic and religious group. The general population
was staunch Muslims, the minorities included Assyrians - who were Orthodox Christians,
and Jews. Each had their own ancient language and culture. The Zoroastrians practiced
their pre-Islamic religious and cultural traditions. These minorities mainly associated with
their own and had only business interactions with Muslims. Each had their set of prejudice
against the others. I remember when my young, US-educated uncle married an Assyrian
woman, the strong adverse reaction of his family was so pervasive that they had to move
to Tehran. The prejudice was much more prominent when it was Muslims against Jews.

In 1877, a Jewish physician embraced the Faith in Hamadan. He was one of the first of a
considerable number of Jewish Bahá'ís in Hamadan.

My father, being born in one of the most ancient cities in Iran, developed a great love for
Pre-Islamic Iran, its culture, and religion. Later in life, he became an amateur archeologist
and received a commendation from the Archeological Society of Iran. He had a collection

of coins, back to the time of Darius the Great, who started the use of currency in the world.
On our family vacations, my father always took us to visit Archeological sites in Iran.

My father left home when he was a teenager. He first went to Turkey then Iraq and learned conversational Turkish and Arabic when communicating with the public. While in Baghdad, he joined the Military Medical Corps, studied medicine, and was certified as a medical doctor. Then he was stationed at the Royal Hospital outside Baghdad.

My father was not aware that the Royal Hospital was situated at the old Najibiyyih Garden. One day while taking a break in the hospital garden, he saw an old man outside the gate, waving and beckoning him. My father asked the guard to let him in. The old man told my father that he had been watching my father for a while and thought it was important to let him know that a significant event had taken place in this Garden. He had urged my father to find out more about this by contacting the Bahá'ís. He left, and my father never saw him again. Some time passed before my father crossed the path of the Bahá'ís and was introduced to Mr. Abbas Alavi, a great Bahá'í teacher, and scholar. Through Mr. Alavi's loving instruction my father learned about the Bahá'í Faith. He believed that he was destined to work in the "Garden of Ridvan," where Bahá'u'lláh declared his mission to his followers; the great event that the old man urged the young doctor to investigate. My father was attracted to the Faith's progressive teachings, such as the equality of women and men, and a Faith which was devoid of the religious prejudices and fanaticism of Muslims. As he loved Zoroaster, the ancient Iranian Messenger of God, he admired the Persian lineage of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

In 1926, when my father visited his aunt in Tehran, he met my mother and married her in the Muslim tradition. It took years for my mother to overcome her strong prejudice and gradually, through the patient mentoring of Mr. Alavi, she first accepted the Báb, and later Baha'ullah. They had their two sons when in 1935, my father gained employment with the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, and the family moved to Abadan. My father by that time could

speak English and a bit of French. He told me that he used to memorize 100 words from the English dictionary each day, to learn the language and get employment with the Oil Company.

Abadan is an island in the southern part of Iran, and because of its proximity to the Persian Gulf, is the most important port in the region. The Anglo - Persian Oil Company, after the discovery of oil in the region, built a pipeline and the largest Oil Refinery in the world in that city. Most of the population of Abadan were British, Iranians from the other areas, and Indians. The townships had British designed bungalows, parks, schools, and clubhouses. However, British Colonial rule was enforced. British housing, facilities, and clubhouses were for British employees only. The Non-British professional staff had their "zones "which were segregated from the oil fields worker's quarters.

My parents enjoyed the modern way of life which was nonexistent in other parts of Iran. They felt they were transported to a world and culture which was new and exciting. However, my father, being a proud Iranian, could not accept the colonial discrimination of the British. Especially knowing that the Company was reaping the profit of his country's

natural resources. The deciding factor for my father leaving his position with the Company was when one of his children was sick and needed hospitalization. Although my father was the Hospital's doctor and was treating British patients, he was not allowed to admit his child to the British Ward. It affected my father tremendously. He left Abadan and eventually, in 1941, became a medical officer at a hospital in Ramsar.

Ramsar, a city by the Caspian Sea, was built amidst the lush Mazandaran forest. Having a mild Mediterranean climate, it became a resort city for the affluent and the Summer Capital of Reza Shah. It was also near the Russian border.

Events Leading to the Allies Invasion of Iran

When Reza Shah came to power, his first and foremost mission was making Iran a

united
and modern nation. After the renegotiation with the British Oil Company, he used the
revenue to build roads, highways, and railways which connected Iranian regions from north
to south and east to west.

Reza Shah's policy was to limit the influence of the British, as well as Communist Russia
in Iran. Therefore, he employed consultants from the United States to develop a national
financial system, and German technicians to build factories and the railway system. He
granted the purchase of steel factory from Germany, and concession to the German
Lufthansa airlines to fly in the Iranian airspace rather than the British. When World- War II
engulfed Europe and Africa, strategically the Iranian railway system became vital to
transport arms and troops for the Allied forces. However, Reza Shah declared Iran as a
neutral country and refused the Iranian Territories to be used by foreign troops.

In 1941, the Allied forces invaded Iran, disregarding Iran's neutral status, and forced Reza
Shah to abdicate for his son. He lived the rest of his life in exile. The Iranian Transport
Corridor played an important role in defeating Germany. Sir Winston Churchill, the British
Prime Minister, called Iran the Bridge of Victory.

My parents and their three young children were in Ramsar when neighboring Russia
invaded Iran. It was without warning and thus caught everyone by surprise. My father was
called to duty at the hospital. My mother and three kids joined other families to go into
hiding in the forest. The Allied Occupation of Iran continued until 1943. It culminated at the
"Allied Tehran Conference," when President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Stalin met
at the Russian Embassy in Tehran. At this important conference, the Tehran Protocol
pledged to recognize Iranian independence.

During the Allied occupation, my parents moved to the Central Province of Iran, close to
Tehran, which offered more security. My father was employed by the Ministry of

Health and
was the Head Medical Officer of the Public Clinics in various regions. I was born at the end
of the WWII, in Tehran.

A Glimpse at the Bahá'í History of Tehran

Tehran has been the capital city of Iran since the Qajar Dynasty. The affluent part of the
city, with large palaces, gardens, water reservoirs, bathhouses, and shops, belonging to
the royal court. Each palace had its own prison dungeon and guards.

The Báb after his Declaration sent his first disciple, Mulla Husayn, to deliver a letter on his
behalf to a nobleman in Tehran. The secret communication between the Báb and
Bahá'u'lláh continued until his martyrdom in 1850. As the was held a prisoner throughout
his ministry, Bahá'u'lláh took the leading role in safeguarding the Faith and protecting the
early believers. In 1847, the Bábis in Qazvin were accused of the assassination of a cleric.
Tahirih, the Pure One, was placed under house arrest and a number of prominent Bábis
jailed. Bahá'u'lláh helped the prisoners and arranged for Tahirih to be taken to his house in
Tehran. The Prime Minister ordered Bahá'u'lláh to leave the country. Bahá'u'lláh left Tehran
for Iraq and stayed there until 1851.

The period after the martyrdom of the Báb, which coincided with Bahá'u'lláh's absence,
brought confusion and chaos to the leadership of the Bábi community in Tehran. In 1852,
three Bábis decided to avenge the Báb's execution by an attempt on the life of the Shah.
Bahá'u'lláh, who had just returned to Tehran was not aware of this plan. The Shah's injury
was superficial, but the effect was catastrophic for the Bábis. Hundreds were imprisoned
and killed within four months. Among them Tahirih, the Pure One. The Prime Minister's
soldiers took Tahirih to the Ilkhani Garden and found a drunk servant to strangle her. They
threw her body into a well and covered it with dirt and stones. Bahá'u'lláh, along with all the
Bábi men in Tehran, was arrested.

Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the dungeon of the Siyáh-Chál (the Black

Pit), an old
reservoir of a public bath in the royal court. The following is an excerpt from The Dawn-
Breakers – Page 63
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

‘I now proceed to relate what befell the remaining companions of the Báb, those
who had been privileged to share the horrors of the confinement with Bahá'u'lláh.
From His own lips, I have often heard the following account: "All those who were
struck down by the storm that raged during that memorable year in Tihran were Our
fellow-prisoners in the (Siyáh-Chál) , where We were confined. We were all huddled
together in one cell, our feet in stocks, and around our necks fastened the most
galling of chains. The air we breathed was laden with the foulest impurities, while
the floor on which we sat was covered with filth and infested with vermin. No ray of
light was allowed to penetrate that pestilential dungeon or to warm its icy-coldness.
We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them to repeat
certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervour. 'God is
sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-sufficing!' one row would intone, while the
other would reply: 'In Him let the trusting trust.' The chorus of these gladsome voices
would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning. Their reverberation
would fill the dungeon, and, piercing its massive walls, would reach the ears of

Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, whose palace was not far distant from the place where we were
imprisoned. 'What means this sound?' he was reported to have exclaimed. 'It is the
anthem the Bábís are intoning in their prison,' they replied. The Shah made no
further remarks, nor did he attempt to restrain the enthusiasm his prisoners, despite
the horrors of their confinement, continued to display.’

In this dungeon, Bahá'u'lláh received a visionary revelation that he was the “Promised One
of God,” referred to as the “Hidden Declaration.”

Within four months of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment, nobles, politicians, and ambassadors intervened on his behalf. The Royal Advisors did not deem it wise to execute Bahá'u'lláh and escalate the unrest. Therefore, the decision was to remove Bahá'u'lláh and eradicate the Bábis in Iran. The Shah made a pact with the Ottoman Emperor, to exile Bahá'u'lláh to the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Bahá'u'lláh was released in December, his properties were confiscated, and in January, he was forced to leave Iran for Baghdad with his family. It was the onset of his forty years of exile to Baghdad, Istanbul, Adrianople, and Akka in Palestine.

The persecution and killing of the Bábis continued in Tehran. Innocent Bábis were taken to the Sabzih Maydan – the "Green Square," where farmers used to bring their produce to Tehran for sale. When I was a child, my mother took me to this square to buy fresh vegetables. I was always in awe, imagining the martyred believers, shedding their precious blood on that holy ground.

Dr. Muhajir, the Hand of the Cause, related the story of Mr. Sarvestani, a Muslim who left his house to visit a friend. He happened to be in Square where they were beheading a Bábi in front of him. A few drops of the martyr's blood fell on his shoes. It had a long-lasting effect on him. He found the Bahá'ís and became a prominent Bahá'í teacher. Dr. Muhajir told us that the blood of the martyrs was like a heavenly river flowing through the veins of the believers, invigorating the spiritual life of each generation!

Persecuted Bábis from small towns and villages found refuge in Tehran, being protected to some degree by the influential Bábis. They lived close to each other, and the men carried daggers to safeguard the family.

In 1863, after the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, in Baghdad, most of the Bábis embraced the new Faith. As Bahá'ís, they lived a peaceful life. They did not bear arms, defy the government, or even fight back when attacked. Bahá'í scholars gathered in

Tehran and
formed the group of Moballeqin - the expounders of the Bahá'í teachings. They held weekly
meetings with seekers in Bahá'í homes. They also held deepening classes for the Bahá'ís.
Some of these scholars were former prominent clerics who had embraced the Faith. They
had an in-depth knowledge of Islamic Prophecies and proofs for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.
Mr. Alavi, the spiritual teacher of my parents, was a distinguished member of Moballeqin.
Through their efforts, the number of Bahá'ís increased, representing different stratum of
society.

However, a small group of Bábis did not accept Bahá'u'lláh. I remember as a child that I
knew about one group who lived in the impoverished area of "Qanat'e - Shah," in the
southern part of Tehran. To protect their lives, they lived in an isolated neighborhood and
always carried stilettos. Their source of livelihood was taking large canisters of drinking
water from the underground "Qanat" and selling them door to door in Tehran. The general
population, with all the misinformation about the Bábis, were apprehensive to have close
contact with them. Like most people, they did not differentiate Bábis from Bahá'ís, they
misdirected these uncomfortable feelings towards the Bahá'ís too.

By the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, Bahá'ís were quite visible in Tehran.
They established the Tarbiyát schools for boys and girls and a health clinic which was
supported by American doctors. They also started publication of Bahá'í literature using
stencil prints.

In 1897, under the directives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, four Hands of the Cause convened the first
Bahá'í Consultative Body. Due to the suppressive condition in Iran, this Central Body
coordinated both national and local administrative affairs. In 1928, under the directives of
the Guardian, the Central Spiritual Assembly in Tehran was among the original National
Assemblies who held a Bahá'í election.

During Reza Shah's rule, as he favored a secular and centralized government control, the widespread killing and persecution of Bahá'ís decreased. However, since the Iranian Constitution did not recognize the Bábis/Bahá'ís as a legitimate religious minority, "systemic persecution, and discrimination" emerged. It intensified in 1933, by closing all the Bahá'í schools in Iran, including the prestigious Tarbiyát schools in Tehran – as they did not comply with the policy of the Ministry of Education to operate on Bahá'í Holy Days. It was followed by banning the production and import of Bahá'í publications. Bahá'í public employees were either demoted or fired without compensation. The government did not recognize Bahá'í marriage, and it went as far as imprisoning bridegrooms for having a Bahá'í marriage.

The following is an excerpt from a letter on behalf of the beloved Guardian:

'The persecutions from which the Persian friends are now suffering represent, indeed, the culmination of the long and nation-wide campaign which the authorities in that country have during the last two years launched against the Faith. In many of its aspects, this campaign is reminiscent of the persecutions suffered by the early Bábís, ... The first incident which led to this outburst of fierce antagonism on the part of the Government was in connection with the Tarbiyát Schools in Tehran. The school authorities having, after due consultation with the N.S.A. and in strict conformity with the principle governing the observance of Bahá'í holidays, decided to close the schools on the occasion of the celebration of the anniversary of Báb's martyrdom, the authorities in the capital immediately issued orders that the schools be permanently closed, and that also no public meetings of any kind be held by the believers. This has been done in spite of the fact that other religious communities,

such as the Muslims and the Zoroastrians, are allowed to celebrate their own feasts, and as such enjoy full religious freedom. Similar orders were issued to the

believers
in all other parts of Persia, with the result that today the friends find their activities in
Persia completely paralyzed. Their schools have all been definitely closed, their
meetings suspended, their correspondence intercepted, and their assemblies and committees for the most part dissolved.
The situation, as it stands at present, is highly disconcerting. The friends, however,
faithful to the injunctions of the Master regarding obedience to government in all
administrative matters as distinguished from those affecting their conscience and
loyalty to the Cause strictly adhere to the laws and orders of the government. Their
sole hope is the assurance that in due time all these restrictions are bound to disappear....'
~~ Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day, Page 51
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

A Glimpse at the History of Iran: 1941 – 1955

The forced abdication of Reza Shah and the foreign occupation of Iran created a vacuum
in the Central Government of Iran. The new Shah who was young and inexperienced, tried
to follow his father's policy of maintaining a secular and independent Iran with limited
foreign interference. However, he did not have the strong military and security forces that
Reza Shah had exerted to police the country. The poor economic conditions and lack of
control of the central government, helped the clerics to emerge and regain their hold on the
general population.

While the British and American governments were extending their sphere of influence to
control the oil in Iran and the Middle East, Stalin counteracted by recruiting a group of
progressive Iranians to form the Tudeh (Communist) party of Iran. In this atmosphere of
relative freedom, other progressive groups who were against both the clerics and foreign
control started to form.

The British and Americans who were anxious about the communist influence agreed with
the clerics to incite the public against any group which was not adhering to

Islamic
doctrines. As the clerics were always against the Bahá'ís, they used them as a scapegoat
to achieve their objectives. Thus, the "Jam'iyat Fadai'yan Islam" (The Society of Devotees
of Islam), a Muslim terrorist group, was formed that had a far-reaching effect on the
eradication of the progressive leaders, elimination of the Tudeh party and the persecution
of the Bahá'ís .

In 1951, Dr. Musaddiq was elected by the Parliament to become the Prime Minister of Iran.
In addition, with the leadership of Dr. Musaddiq, they passed a resolution to nationalize the
Iranian Petroleum Company. Later that year, Dr. Musaddiq led a delegation to the United
Nation Security Council to defend the rights of the Iranian government to nationalize its Oil

industry. Representatives of the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of United States met
with the Prime Minister and based on his suggestion, later submitted a letter of appeal.
The following are excerpts from a translated version of this letter:

'….this Assembly can justly state that followers of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran
have been deprived of their civil rights in governmental agencies, that their
possessions and property have been plundered by unregulated elements, and that
their lives are the targets of attacks, even death, while police officers and security
agents have offered no assistance. The National Spiritual Assembly [of the Bahá'ís
of the United States] has copies of various letters and documents prepared by
administrative agencies of the Bahá'ís of Iran, which have been submitted with great
urgency to the government of that country, but which have remained unanswered
and have resulted in no remedy. This Assembly is confident that Your Excellency,
aware of the impoverishment of public opinion [in Iran] and the ill-behavior of
officials, will take effective steps towards ensuring the safety and security of Bahá'ís
under the protection of the law. What will be briefly outlined in this presentation
relates to current events that commenced in 1944; reference to other events or
enumerating the most critical details in these historical documents have been
avoided. The instigators of persecution against Bahá'ís are members of an

activist
group known as Anjuman Tablighat Islami [The Society for Islamic Propaganda], whose activities have greatly increased since 1941. Members of the aforesaid group
are active in various parts of the country and provoke the public against Bahá'ís;
moreover, they urge the police to neglect the protection of these wronged citizens
in the face of public abuse. Moreover, this Society has been engaged in publishing
lies against the Bahá'ís and in fueling the fire of public enmity and prejudice, to the
point that the populace now considers Bahá'ís to be enemies of religion and the
nation, destroyers of Islam, and opposers of civil law. Wherever the Bahá'ís are
under attack, the Muslim 'ulama—in other words, mullahs—have an active hand in
events. They assure people in the mosques that if they were to massacre and
completely annihilate the Bahá'ís, they would receive a worthy prize in paradise.
They instruct people to kill Bahá'ís and plunder their possessions.

…… Despite all existing evidence and witnesses, the murderers were freed, and
the looters were sentenced to just one month of imprisonment. This resulted in the
encouragement of lawlessness and the erosion of people's confidence in the
judiciary. This, in turn, resulted in a new wave of persecution against Bahá'ís. "Go,
kill Bahá'ís and confiscate their possessions! Did the government punish the people
of Shahrud? You too can act like them!" Such was the call to arms of the mischief-
makers and rabble-rousers! The following is the text of a Ministerial Decree, no.
744, dated July 4, 1944:

Among the Bahá'í teachers and leaders are commonly found those who work in
governmental offices. The activities of these individuals and their involvement in the
affairs of the nation are destructive and a cause of harm and loss. With the utmost
care and seriousness, they must be kept under surveillance; should they fail to follow
instructions, they must be dealt with in accordance with the law.

This document provided the mischief-makers with the necessary pretext to

further
harass, persecute, and attack Bahá'ís, and to expel them from various government
offices.

…… In Tehran, people were ceaselessly urged to persecute the Bahá'ís. Azadegan
newspaper published the following statement: Our laws regarding denying
employment in governmental offices for [members of] this apostate sect [Bahá'ís] is
completely clear. Therefore, by our official tradition, that is, by Islamic jurisprudence,
the killing of Bahá'ís is permitted—nay is considered a religious obligation.

…. We are confident that this brief outline will suffice to establish our assertion,
since, in various parts of Iran, Bahá'ís have been ruthlessly made the target of
assault and injury, some have been mercilessly killed, the possessions of many
have been plundered and pillaged, and they have been deprived of their civil rights.
Bahá'ís are not allowed to print books or journals. When the enemies publish lies, it
brings disrepute upon the Bahá'ís. In the official government census, even though
the Bahá'ís forthrightly declared their religion, nonetheless the census-takers
registered them as Muslim. Fifty-eight Bahá'ís were discharged or suspended from
work in the Education Ministry or other governmental offices in October 1950, and
we have their names on file. At a time when the fanatical Muslims accused the
Bahá'ís of atheism, Satanworshiping, and apostasy, and proclaimed them as the
true enemies of Islam, our Spiritual Assembly wrote to the leaders of Islam
throughout Iran on March 21, 1928.46 That letter included the truth about the Bahá'í
teachings and the close connection between the Bahá'í Faith and Islam, and the
high regard by Bahá'ís for the Prophet Muhammad, which may aid Your Excellency
in becoming more aware of the reality of the Bahá'í Cause.

…. Dr. Musaddiq, we consider it essential to submit to your presence the truth of the
Bahá'í teaching, which emphatically enjoins upon Bahá'ís to be faithful to their

government, obedient to the laws and not to participate in any antagonistic political parties. With utmost effectiveness, these teachings compel Bahá'í citizens to praiseworthy conduct. We are deeply astonished and puzzled as to why a country like Iran, with its brilliant ancient civilization, which enjoys the benefits of constitutional law, can nevertheless deal with a minority group like the Bahá'ís in ways that are against decency and opposed to the provisions of the law, when its Constitution has clearly and with foresight provided for the equality of all people before the law. We submit this petition to your honor not only for the sake of religious fraternity and unity with, and affection for, the Bahá'ís of Iran but also because of our Faith's teachings, which enjoin upon us to have a special regard for Iran. We ask that with confidence you accept our well-wishing prayers.'

With loving regards, Horace Holley,
Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.

~ Taken from Dr Musaddiq and the Bahais - bahai-library.com, By Bahram Choubine.

Dr. Musaddiq, during his reign from 1951 to 1953, championed a Secular Democratic Iran, free from foreign economic domination. He considered Bahá'ís as Iranians with the same rights and privileges as other citizens. He introduced social programs such as social security and a Land Reform Act, which changed the feudalistic system of massive land ownership by a few, including the royal family. His policy ended the British control of the Anglo- American Oil Company.

The liberal policies of Dr. Musaddiq' s government were against the interest of the British and American Cold War policy in Iran. Churchill and Eisenhower were concerned that Stalin would find a foothold in Iran through the Iranian communist "Tudeh" Party. Therefore, in 1953, the British Secret Service and American CIA, planned and executed a successful Iranian coup d'état to overthrow the Musaddiq government and reinstated the Pahlavi

Monarchy.

The Shah made a pact with the superpowers to safeguard their interests in Iran. He also made another pact with the Muslim fundamentalists to give them a free hand to promote Islamic doctrines in Iran, and to undo the damage that his father inflicted on the Muslim clergy. His advisor's logic was that through religious indoctrination, the unsatisfied nation would divert their interest from political issues and shun the creeping and powerful influence of Communism in Iran. This pact chose the Bahá'ís as a sacrificial lamb. Their persecution was a diversionary method which was required, to raise the emotional level of the zealots. The drama of Falsafi plot was staged in this period of history. Once again, the Mullah's paraded the streets in their attire, and the wearing of the veil for women, which was illegal, became an option, enforced by the Mullah's and zealots.

PART II

MY LIFE JOURNEY

CHAPTER 1

My Early Childhood and Youth in Tehran

1950 – 1968

'If it be Thy pleasure, make me to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee.'

~ Bahá'u'lláh

https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/PM/pm-150.html

I was born at the end of WWII, and the culmination of the Allied occupation of Iran. My father, while still working for the Ministry of Health, moved his family to Tehran and commuted to the out of town clinics. Later, he partnered with a pharmacist and started a Pharmaceutical Production Company. He manufactured and distributed one of the first lines of over the counter drugs in the country. He also introduced the first Jell-O products

to the Iranian market.

During my youth, many Bahá'í entrepreneurs became successful and wealthy industrialists,
introducing modern technology to Iran. Among them, Mr. Sabet, who created the first
Television Broadcasting station and Pepsi-Cola, the first Cola production company in Iran.
The Arjomand family, who started production of one of the first lines of home appliances,
and televisions in Iran. Also, through the generous endowment of Misaghieh family, we had
a modern Bahá'í hospital in Tehran. These establishments were the primary source of
employment for thousands of Iranians and Bahá'ís who were not able to find a job due to
discriminatory employment practices against Bahá'ís.

I grew up as a Bahá'í child in Tehran, where continuous discrimination and persecution of
the Bahá'ís was a way of life. My first awareness of being "different from others" happened
during a hot summer day. I was sitting outside our house, enjoying the coolness of a small
canal which once a week, brought water to the neighborhood. A woman clad in a black
chador (hijab) was passing by. She looked at me with contempt and said "you bad Bahá'í!
Move away from the water; you are defiling the water that faithful Moslems are going to
use." I was bewildered by this remark, so I went to my mother and asked what they meant?
My mothers' explanation made me aware of the precious gift of the Faith, which was given
to me, to hold and to love.

This nagging sense of contempt by non-Bahá'ís was always intermingled with a sense of
security, tranquility, and love that surrounded me when I entered any Bahá'í gathering. The

spiritual kinship with the members of the Bahá'í community compensated for the unkind
treatment of some Muslim relatives. I recall one Naw–Ruz, which is the traditional Iranian
New Year, our Muslim relatives boycotted the customary visit of my parents because we
were Bahá'ís. The only visitors who graced our home and filled our hearts with joy were

our Bahá’í friends.

I remember the occasional visits of an aunt who made sure to always sit on a prayer rug that she had in her possession. When we offered refreshments, she used to dip them in our backyard pond, repeating a verse of Quran, to cleanse them. My mother had great patience for this old lady, but as a child, I had enough of the humiliation. So, I had decided not to offer her any food. My mother, of course, gave me a stern lecture about forgiveness. However, my defiant action hit home, and the old lady decided to restrain her outrageous behavior while she was in our house. When she and her daughter wanted to kiss me, they covered my face with their chador, so that their lips would not touch my skin. I remember years later when I came back to Iran with my family, this cousin repeated the same behavior. It shocked me beyond limits.

Being brought up in a Bahá’í family had nurtured my spiritual self. When I was a few years old, early in the mornings while still in bed, when I heard my mother’s chanting of prayer, I used to sit up, folded my arms in reverence and listened to her melodious voice uttering verses in His praise. I felt a sense of awe and indescribable peace. As soon as the prayer was finished, I used to lay down and go back to sleep.

My First Pilgrimage to the House of the Báb

One beautiful Ridvan, close to my sixth birthday, my family joined a group of friends who were going to Shiraz to make a pilgrimage to the House of the Báb. I vividly remember that beautiful house, feeling the spiritual energy when entering its sacred threshold.

Mr. Afnan, as the representative of Báb's family, greeted us at the Guest House, adjacent to the House of the Báb. He lovingly briefed us about the proper protocol of the pilgrimage, per Bahá’u’lláh’s instructions in the "Tablet of Pilgrimage."

Mr. Afnan admonished us to be detached from earthly desires and wants and pray that we would attain God's good pleasure. He urged us to fashion our pilgrimage after

the
exemplary life of his Holiness the Báb, who never claimed to have any wish or desire of
His own, but that which granted to Him by the Almighty.

Mr. Afnan instructed us to enter the House of the Báb with pure hearts, to drink from the
fountain of spiritual love and to reflect on the historic event of Báb's Declaration. I was the
only small child in the group. So, my mother was asked to watch over me and take me out
of the room if my behavior disrupted the pilgrimage. However, my young mind was
fascinated by hearing the mystic events leading to the Báb's Declaration. I felt transformed
into the past, witnessing the historic moments of His Declaration. So, I followed Mr. Afnan,
kissing every step which led to the Declaration Chamber.

There, a lamp on an exquisite silk carpet, marking the position of the Primal Point, when
he declared His Cause to the first Letter of the Living. The stained-glass windows were
mysteriously pouring out a sea of subdued light and colors on the intricate plasterwork of
the walls and ceiling. We sat down in absolute silence; prayers were chanted. Each one of
us had a chance to meditate and feel the majestic moment.

We were shown the relics of the Báb. Not long after; they were sent to the Archives for
safekeeping. The Tablet of Visitation was chanted, and we were led to the courtyard. We
drank from the well that was used by the Holy Family and given a few leaves from the
orange tree that His Holiness the Báb had planted with his own hands.

This pilgrimage was the foundation of my spiritual bonding with the Faith. I developed an
undying love for Mulla Husayn and chose him as my hero. I admired his humility, self-
sacrifice, and devotion to the Báb and His Beloved Faith.

House of the Báb in Shiraz, the room
where he Declared his mission to Mulla Husayn
http://media.bahai.org/

Courtyard of the House of the Báb
Baha'i Points of Interest: House of the Báb - views of the ...
thebabhistory.blogspot.com

The “Falasfi” Upheaval

My earliest recollection of the celebration of festivals of Naw Ruz and Ridvan in Tehran was the wonderful garden parties at our majestic Bahá’í Center. Hundreds of Bahá’ís gathered from different parts of the city, socializing and enjoying the sweets and fruits served on numerous tables in the Garden. Then, going to the Great Hall for the spiritual celebration of the Holy Days.

During these events, most of the neighborhood knew about our Holy Day celebrations, due to the sheer number of Bahá’ís who were visiting the Center, and their joyful countenance. This silent acknowledgment was a source of pride for all the Bahá’ís. It was a way to proclaim our Faith in the repressive environment that we were living.

The onset of the tumultuous events against the Bahá’ís was the radio broadcasts of a Muslim clergy called Falsafi. The sarcastic and belligerent sermons of Falsafi were primarily targeted to ridicule the doctrines of the Faith. It created a sense of shock and incredulity in Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís alike. The impact was a series of ugly incidents leading to the widespread persecution of the Bahá’í community in Iran and the martyrdom of innocent Bahá’ís.

I was too young to understand the gravity of the situation. What I remember was a sense of danger, intermingled with the protective shield of love and care from my parents and their friends. It created a fragile sense of security amidst the upheaval.

I remember nightly visits to the house of Mr. Abbas Alavi, the beloved Bahá’í teacher and spiritual mentor of my parents. His warm and loving counsel helped the small gathering of friends to gain confidence to weather the storm. His sense of humor helped to make us ready for events which would test our faith and perseverance.

Social scientists believe that when there is an external danger which threatens the lives of the members of a group or puts its existence at risk, it creates a tremendous unity and

cohesiveness amongst its members, which in turn, works as a magnetic shield for the survival of the group. This theory was proven time and time again, amongst the Bahá'í community of Iran. It intensified during the Falsafi period. The believers challenged this upheaval by showing their sense of loyalty to their Faith and welcomed the kinds of suffering that their spiritual forerunners endured and gave their lives for.

Fascinating phenomena at this period was proclamation of the Faith, due to the adversarial actions against Bahá'ís, initiated and carried out diligently by its ardent enemies. Up until then, the existence of the Faith was not officially acknowledged by Iranians. In the history books, the Bábi Faith was demonstrated as a political uprising which was stifled by the Royal Army. The Bahá'í Faith was considered an obscure remnant of the Bábis in Iran, continuing this political movement.

Falsafi's sermons, entertaining and comical as it was for the Muslims, created an awareness of a phenomenon which was much greater than what they were led to believe.

The sermons which were regularly broadcasted by Iranian Radio Stations created a new interest throughout the nation. People wanted to know more about this "movement," which was threatening Islamic spiritual and political entity.

The systemic discrimination of the Bahá'ís, administered in all governmental agencies, was a springboard for the Bahá'ís to clarify the ludicrous misinformation given to the nation through the pulpit of a Mullah. Articles and books were published by the Bahá'ís to disprove these allegations. Heated discussions became prevalent in different family gatherings, in the workplace, in the classrooms, and amongst neighbors. These events clearly led to the proclamation of the Faith as an independent religion, rather than a political movement.

The crown of this proclamation was the destruction of the dome of the Bahá'í Center of Tehran. The government assigned a General as its representative to undertake

this
abhorrent act. It was presumably a claim of victory by the Royal Army over a group of
defenseless and innocent civilians.

The day that the majestic dome of the Bahá'í Center was desecrated was one of the
saddest days of our lives. We were ordered by the National Spiritual Assembly not to be
spectators of the demolition. As the regime intended to make a spectacle of the moaning
and grieving Bahá'ís, who would gather to witness the destruction of their "Shrine." There
were a few Bahá'í ladies, who on that gloomy and rainy day, disguised in Chadors, made
the last farewell journey to our beloved Center, to pay their respect from a distant alley.

This driven desire to be present was not necessarily for the love of a building structure, but
it was rather a farewell to the symbol which represented the community of the Bahá'ís and
the limited freedom that we had enjoyed for a short period.

In recent years, certain documents written by the former leaders of the present regime of
Iran revealed that the Falsafi era was a well-planned political move, to divert the attention
of the dissatisfied Iranian populace from organizing a political front, inciting social unrest
and an eventual revolution.

The Shah was wrongly advised by political experts to use the Bahá'ís as a target and
scapegoat. Therefore, granting power to the Muslim Fundamentalists to commit genocide
against this obscure and insignificant political group. They incited the misinformed masses
to carry out their plan.

When the danger of systematic elimination of the Bahá'ís became prevalent, our beloved
Guardian directed all the Bahá'ís around the world to send petitions to the Shah of Iran,
stating their objection to the persecution of their fellow Bahá'ís. The outpourings of the
thousands of letters addressed to the Shah, some from the most obscure corners of our
planet, was the final blow to the miscalculation of his Imperial Majesty's

Advisors. It
provided proof of the universality of the Bahá'í Faith.

My most favorite story which I heard in Mr. Alavi's home, was from a letter written by an
African believer. He wrote to the Shah; "Your Majesty, a few years ago, when I was not yet

a Bahá'í, I used to practice cannibalism as a ritual practice. If then, you happened to cross
my path, I would not hesitate to kill and taste your flesh. But since I have been blessed to
accept Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and embraced his Faith, my spiritual transformation
changed my heart. I learned to love and respect the lives of human beings. Now, I am
writing to you to vouch for the lives of my fellow Bahá'ís who are your subjects. They are a
peace loving and gentle people, and as your subjects, you are to protect them and spare
them from undue suffering. I beseech you to stop this senseless persecution."

The worldwide pressure and intervention of international agencies and foreign
governments on behalf of the Bahá'ís was instrumental for a change of approach in the
Iranian regime. There was a gradual easing in the blatant disregard of lives and rights of
the Bahá'ís. A more subtle but unceasing approach was chosen to continue with the
constant persecution of the Bahá'ís.

The Qamish-Dareh Bahá'í Summer School

One of the first Bahá'í Summer Schools in Iran was held in the Qamish-Dareh, the property
of a Bahá'í friend of my father. The owner, Mr. Rahnama, was distinguished for being
among the descendants of one of the first Zoroastrian families who embraced the Faith of
Bahá'u'lláh in Iran.

"Qamish Darreh" or "Bamboo Canyon" was nestled deep in the foothills of the Alborz
mountains. A cool stream was flowing through a small bamboo grove, giving the illusion of
an oasis amid the ancient mountain range. A pomegranate garden surrounded the summer
house of Mr. Rahnama. The sleeping quarters for the participants was the rooftop of this
modest house. The families who attended the school were given a spot on the

rooftop to
set up their sleeping gear. My most vivid memories was when under the silvery light of the
star-studded sky on the rooftop, we gathered around Mr. Alavi, listening to his stories about
the bygone heroes of God.

Every dawn, we started the day by climbing the mountain, to hold our devotional -
Mashriqul'adkar in the delightful surroundings of the Bamboo Canyon. We performed
ablution in the sparkling cool water of the spring, and welcomed the new day by each
offering prayers and chanting the Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh. Then it was time to head
down towards the clearing in the pomegranate grove, to partake in a healthy and simple
breakfast provided for us. This clearing served as our dining area and open-air auditorium
for our classes.

The principal teachers of the school were Hand of the Cause of God Mr. A.Q. Faizi, and
Mr. Alavi.

A group of Persian pioneers from the Arab Emirates participated in the summer school.
They were elated to have the opportunity for once again being in a "Bahá'í" gathering,
where they could talk freely about the Faith and feel that they were members of the larger
"Bahá'í" community.

Our new found friends told us that these small Emirates of the Persian Gulf were ruled by
conservative Islamic regimes. Their government forbade freedom of speech and practice
of any religion besides Islam. Teaching the Bahá'í Faith was strictly forbidden, and any
violation of these rules led to the immediate expulsion of the offenders and confiscation of
their properties. The Beloved Guardian admonished the pioneers of these regions to
practice utmost caution in teaching the Faith. The Pioneers were to fill pioneering posts
and teach through living the "Bahá'í" life. Their primary objective was to establish a Bahá'í
entity in these arid lands, form Spiritual Assemblies, and fulfill the Goals of the Ten-Year

Plan.

There was no proper schooling for the children of these pioneer families, especially for girls. The parents had to send their young children to the Panchgani Bahá'í School in India, to receive a proper Bahá'í education. This was one of the reasons that there were very few children participating in the summer school.

All school participants volunteered to share the housekeeping and cooking responsibilities for the duration of the School. The school coordinator, Mr. Dhabih, decided that children too should have the bounty of service, by sharing some simple housekeeping responsibilities.

My job, which I proudly shared with my friend Jaleh, was the daily cleaning of all the lanterns that would be used for the outdoor lighting. One afternoon, when grown-ups were resting, we went to our usual spot by the small stream to do our chore. We were discussing the best possible way to get rid of the soot which had blackened the lamps. Suddenly we realized that we were not alone. The Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Faizi was standing close by, listening to our conversation with amusement. We showed our reverence, which was customary to extend to a Hands of the Cause of God. Mr. Faizi was genuinely interested to know us and showed an undeserving appreciation for our spirit of service. He bestowed upon us such fatherly love that we were completely at ease with him. We felt privileged to have the opportunity of spending such precious moments with one of the true sages of the Bahá'í Era. Although I was not aware of Mr. Faizi's true station then, that encounter was the onset of a long-lasting association, which weaved through the fabric of my Bahá'í life.

In this formative age, my innermost quest was to single out heroes to pattern my life after them. I was privileged to choose Mr. Faizi as my first living hero. In later years, I was counted as one of his numerous, but equally special, spiritual children.

Mr. Faizi was a handsome, well-built man. He had penetrating dark eyes and a

melodious
voice. Because of his long stay in the Arabian regions of Persian Gulf, and his natural
linguistic ability, his spoken Persian had a trace of an Arabic accent. His unique taste in
clothing; wearing dark colored shirts and jackets, accompanied by a French beret, created
an impression of a French artist.

His manner was aristocratic and gentle. He shied away from the customary praise and
excessive reverence which was usually lavished on personalities of his caliber. He

believed that those types of deferential treatment lead to a grave spiritual test. He firmly
believed that Bahá'ís should strive to reach their spiritual destiny by achieving the state of
"absolute nothingness," to find an "everlasting life," which was promised by Bahá'u'lláh.
When Mr. Faizi was amidst Pioneers, he was exuberant. They moved him. He could not
wait to let others know about the splendid qualities of each one of them. A small sacrifice
became a testament to their love for their beloved Faith. He would have willingly sacrificed
his life for the happiness of these friends. I remember years later when he came back from
a teaching trip, he was suffering from the side effects of a chronic heart ailment. A friend
concerned about his health wondered why he did not rest when the symptoms became
severe. Mr. Faizi with utter sincerity said; "Because those beloved Pioneers, living in such
remote islands, were expecting me. I could not fail them on account of my poor health."

Mr. Faizi was a multi-talented personage. He was a writer and a poet, as well as an athlete,
an artist, and calligrapher. He loved educating others, but at the same time, he spent his
time learning the language and culture of different nations. He was a sage in the eyes of
the public, and a loving teacher for all. He painstaking created beautiful pieces of
calligraphy to give to his fellow Bahá'ís as a token of his love and appreciation for serving
the Faith.

Mr. Faizi, as a young man, decided to go pioneering to the remote villages of Isfahan - it was the same region that Báb spent a short period of respite before his arduous journey to his eventual martyrdom in Tabriz. He chose the teaching profession to enable him to train the minds, bodies, and souls of youth, in an area where the opportunity for education was scarce. Most of these youths became Bahá'í teachers and pioneered to the far corners of the world. Among them were our dear pioneers from the Persian Gulf.

When the Beloved Guardian asked the Bahá'ís to go to the Arabian regions of the Middle East, Mr. Faizi was among the first group who responded immediately to this directive. He never mentioned his own sufferings and hardship. However, his admiration and love for these dear Pioneers was an indication of his personal experience of living under strenuous conditions in those inhospitable lands.

My Bahá'í Neighborhood

Tehran had a large Bahá'í community, and thus children's and youth classes were held within a few blocks of each Bahá'í Section. The Bahá'í curriculum was for 12 years, as was the Iranian school system.

I remember the excitement of going to my first children's class when I was six. The lesson was memorizing the full name of the Báb. When my father picked me up, I repeated that blessed name " His Holiness the Primal Point, Mirza Sayeed Ali-Mohammad, the Bab" all the way home.

When I was a junior youth, we moved to a new neighborhood. There were four Bahá'í families in our street. The Ighani family lived a few houses away. I was not usually an early riser, but when I had my final exams in June, I used to get up early, go to my backyard, sit

on the steps, and memorize my lessons. I always felt blessed hearing the melodious voice of Mr. Lagha'i chanting Bahá'í prayers, oblivious of our Muslims neighbors hearing him.

On Becoming a Bahá’í

In the barren and inhospitable spiritual environment of Iran, Bahá’í activities were the refuge for the young saplings of the community. It helped them grow roots and strengthen their Faith in Bahá’u’lláh.

There was a concerted effort by the youth committee to create a positive and nurturing environment for the youth, to help them develop an interest in acquiring knowledge, and becoming firm in the covenant.

One such activity was the deepening classes, which were held at lunchtime during the month of the Fast. It was a symbolic substitution of spiritual food for the material one. It also rendered peer support which youths needed to carry out the ordinances of the Fast.
During these sessions, some prominent Bahá’í teachers shared their ideas and knowledge with the young generation. When I turned 15, I started participating in these sessions.

One day in March, because of a change in my class schedule, I was late for the Fast’s deepening session. I walked into a roomful of Bahá’í youth, and noticed the speaker expounding on the "Reality of Man." He was a tall, pleasant looking man in his mid-thirties.
I heard him reciting a verse, with a melodious voice, from the Persian "Hidden Words" of Bahá’u’lláh:

‘O friend!
In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love, and
from the nightingale of affection and desire loosen not thy hold.’

(Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

I was then, a student of Persian literature, delving deep into the literary work of the great masters, and wanting to be one of the standard bearers of my rich national heritage.
Listening to the mystic poetry of this verse and the next that followed, stroke a chord deep in my heart;

‘ With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God,

scan for a while the horizon of the divine knowledge, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal hath revealed, that haply the mysteries of divine wisdom, hidden ere now beneath the veil of glory and treasured within the tabernacle of His grace, may manifest unto you.’

(Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 16)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

In my mind, these Divine words of Bahá’u’lláh, outshined the literary works of any Persian Masters. I was led to the gate of a mysterious garden and invited to enter. Then, I have bestowed the ecstasy of inhaling the fragrances of the Rose Garden of His Divine Love.
The speaker was elaborating on the concept of the love of God for His creation; he was quoting a French philosopher in Persian, similar to the following poem:

‘I was roaming among the ruins of the bygone past,

There, within the cracks of a broken wall, I beheld a tiny wildflower,

Overwhelmed by its exquisite beauty, I cradled its fragile petals in my hands and said;

O tiny creature, you are a token of God's love, your mere existence is a miracle, bearing witness to His splendor!’

~ Poet, unknown

Years later, I heard Ruhiyyih Khanum likening the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to a magnificent spiritual banquet that enables each seeker, to choose what best nourishes his spiritual needs. On that memorable day, I was destined to partake in a heavenly banquet that quenched my burning thirst. I found spiritual nourishment in the mystic metaphors that so enriches the Bahá’í Writings.

The speaker moved onto the subject of the spiritual virtue of being humble. He gave us the metaphor of a majestic tree with its branches shadowing the blades of grass which grew under it. One day, a stupendous storm surged, destroying and uprooting whatever stood in its path. When the winds died down, the majestic tree which had never learned to withstand the gale of tests had broken in half. However, the blades of grass were still standing. For

they just swayed and bent until the storm blew away. Their flexibility and humility helped them survive.

I wanted to know more about this speaker, whose love for the Faith was so overpowering. I learned that his name was Mr. Kamal Bakhtavar. He was the author of a book entitled "The History of Beliefs." It entailed a depiction of ideological views of the World's Great Religions. This book which was published for the public had an extensive and accurate section on the Bahá'í Faith. The publication of this book put its author at great risk, making him a thorn in the eyes of notorious "Tablighate-Islami"– the followers of Falsafi. He became the target of a few assassination attempts. Mr. Bakhtavar radiantly acquiesced to these instances of risk. He tirelessly continued with his busy teaching schedule.

When I learned that Mr. Bakhtavar was conducting a weekly class on " Some Answered Questions," I decided to become one of his pupils.

A year passed before I attended Mr. Bakhtavar's class. I came to respect my teacher's global knowledge of the literary texts of the great religions. My mother teasingly called me,

Mr. Bakhtavar' s little disciple. I took the study of difficult passages of this magnificent book very seriously. I had a great admiration for what Mr. Bakhtavar stood for and considered him a role model. I wanted to achieve his level of commitment and courage.

Mr. Bakhtavar was not offended by having a young girl attending his " grown-up" class. He respected my interest and kept his sense of humor handy when I was around. He used to tell me that, as a Turkish proverb goes; "If you don't eat sour pickles and avoid the midday Sun, someday you will be somebody!"

I started my high school freshman year at Tabari School, one of the largest public school for girls in Tehran. Study of the "Sharia" or tenets of Islam was one of the mandatory courses at the high school. Our teacher, Mr. Shahandeh, happened to be one of the members of the notorious group of Tablighate-Islami. He was a fanatic to the

bone and got
a kick out of demeaning the female gender and the Bahá'ís. At the beginning of school
year, he asked all the non-Muslim students to stand up and identify themselves. Then, after
a mortifying sermon, he excused all the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians from his class
but not the Bahá'ís. He told us that the Bahá'í Faith was a heresy of
Islam and not a religion.
Therefore, we should attend his classes to be enlightened.

From then on, he repeatedly called upon the Bahá'í students to read and interpret different
verses of the Quran. He intended to use any mistake that we made as a springboard to
degrade us. I made a genuine effort to study my lessons. I repeatedly asked Mr. Bakhtavar
to interpret difficult passages. Little by little I could answer most of the questions that Mr.
Shahandeh asked me. Our teacher who did not regard us worthy of the subject was
impressed. He kept calling on me to do the day's lesson for him. He criticized my
classmates about their ignorance and laziness for letting an infidel beat them in their
spiritual learning. He had the habit of going through a lesson quickly and spending the rest
of the period chattering with a small group of students who clustered around him. The rest
were free to do whatever we wanted to do.

One day, during the "chatting period," one of my classmates came to me and said: you
must go and hear Mr. Shahandeh insulting your Messenger. She went on to say that a
Bahá'í student joined the chatting group, and Mr. Shahandeh used the opportunity to insult
her by calling the Báb "an illiterate youth." To prove his point, he stated a verse from the
Bayan, indicating that the grammar in this verse was wrong. The Bahá'í student was
distraught, but the rest of the group was enjoying the charade immensely. I approached
the crowd surrounding Mr. Shahandeh and heard the latter part of this conversation. As
students of this bizarre character, we Bahá'ís learned to brush away his tongue lashings
and put-downs. However, his blatant affront to our Beloved was a different matter. I was so

furious that I abruptly cut him short and said; “Mr. Shahandeh you have no right to insult our messenger. If you think you have any valid argument, you should discuss it with a Bahá’í teacher who is familiar with these verses, rather than students like us!" Shahandeh responded that he was free to say what he pleased, and no one, not even the female principal of our school could stop him. Then, he continued to patronize me.

I was so angry that I stormed out of the class and into the Principal's office. In those times,

Bahá’ís never sought justice from the authorities when religious issues and freedom of religious practices were concerned. So, my action was not the wisest under any given circumstances. However, as a young and emotional person, I did not contemplate the consequences of my action. What I said to the principal and her deputy was not conventional either. I addressed the principal and said; "Mrs. Shams, Mr. Shahandeh is insulting my Messenger, His Holiness the Báb, who is also the Messenger to the millions of the Bahá’ís in the world. I saw the shock on their faces, followed by a sarcastic remark from the Deputy Principal about “millions of Bahá’ís?” I looked at her and said yes, it is true; there are millions of the Bahá’ís in the world. I looked back at the principal and continued, "you should not let this man use our class as a Tablighate-Islami gathering and challenge your authority and gender." My last statement triggered a quick response, and she followed me to my class. I saw a baffled shock and tension on my teacher's face. He started defending himself and enlisting the class to back him up. Mrs. Shams firmly asked him to put a stop to this discussion and prevent a further and more serious incident. I still do not know what she was inferring to; maybe she was afraid of “bad international publicity.” Because of this discussion, they decided that Bahá’ís should be excused from attending his class for the remainder of the year. That was the first official recognition of our religion (this decision was overturned the next year). When Mrs. Shams left our classroom, Mr.

Shahandeh, who was totally agitated, delivered a fiery sermon. He elevated his own rank as a seeker of truth who enlightens the infidels. To rebut his argument, I challenged him and my classmates to meet with a Bahá'í teacher who could provide an answer to his unjust accusations. In an emotional state, close to mass hysteria, he and my 30 classmates accepted my challenge.

That evening I had a visitor who knocked on my door. He introduced himself as the teacher of the "Islamic Religion" for the lower division. He said that he is a Bahá'í, but no one in school knew about it, as it would certainly jeopardize his livelihood. He wanted to offer his support and appreciation. He also wanted to warn the fireside speaker and me, of the risk involved. Apparently, Shahandeh had been making threatening remarks in the staff room, and the staff was agitated.

Wednesday came, and I attended my Bahá'í class. When Mr. Bakhtawar heard my first remark, he affectionately humored me to break the ice. I elaborated on the classroom event and asked whether he was interested in participating in the promised debate. He gladly accepted the challenge and set a date for the meeting.

On the promised day, none of my classmates turned up. Mr. Shahandeh appeared, accompanied by his older brother. Both were carrying large umbrellas, to use as a weapon. It seemed that they were more afraid than we were. The Bahá'í teacher had decided to attend this meeting as a testimony to his courage. He wanted to confront Shahandeh in the future when he would distort the truth about this meeting.

When we arrived at the meeting place, Mr. Bakhtawar welcomed us with a humorous remark that instantly broke the tension. The meeting took a few hours, and all Mr. Shahandeh' s accusations were answered and clarified by Mr. Bakhtavar. When no other issues were raised for discussion, Mr. Bakhtavar concluded the discussion by asking Mr.

Shahandeh for an oath to no longer harassing the Bahá'í youngsters in his classes.

That evening was one of the proudest moments of my Bahá'í life. I had learned how to face adversaries without hesitation, as did Mr. Bakhtavar, trusting the Hosts on High for confirmation and assistance.

The next few years in high school Shahandeh controlled his remarks. He never gave an accurate account of that debate, not in the presence of the Bahá'í teacher, but he refrained from boasting. The irony of all was that he referred his new Bahá'í students to me to find the answer to rebut his arguments against the Faith.

A year later, Mr. Bakhtavar responded to the call for Pioneering to Pakistan. Ten years later, when I was asked to speak at a youth meeting in the Hadiqueh Bahá'í Summer School, my session was followed by Mr. Bakhtavar's session. It was a joy to see my first true Bahá'í teacher. I asked him whether he remembered me. He laughed and said, of course, I do. Remember when I told you that " if you don't eat sour pickles and avoid the midday sun.... you will become somebody?" It seems that you took my advice!

That was the last time that I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Bakhtavar. Serving in different pioneering fields took us to travel in different paths for our life mission. From what I learned, he came back to Iran before the Islamic Revolution and was eventually martyred by his old enemies in the western part of Iran. An ending which was not entirely unexpected for such a courageous lover of Bahá'u'lláh, my first Bahá'í teacher.

"Blessed is the Spot."

'Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe-cloth me, and in its ocean, immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.'

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 318)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhajir used to advise the youth in Iran to make a concerted

effort to visit the Bahá'í Holy Places in our motherland. He believed that the spiritual energy emanating from these spots would have a lasting effect on our souls. Years before I heard Dr. Muhajir, I had the opportunity to make such a pilgrimage. My father became a member of the National Teaching Committee of Iran and visited a wide range of the Bahá'í Communities in Iran. My father's mission was to help each locality to develop their own teaching and consolidation plan. He made these visits a family affair, and we accompanied him on most of these trips.

In our travels, I learned how vast was my country, and how it cradles within its boundaries people from different ethnic origins. During the early inception of Iranian civilization, the Persians, Parthians, and Medians each settled in various territories. The onset of the

Persian Empire brought about a political unity within the land. However, the difficult terrain of the formidable mountains, and vast deserts that occupied most of the empire, always created natural geographical barriers. It caused separation among the people. This isolation continued until the late 19th Century. My mother used to tell us that when she was a child, there was a terrible drought in Tehran. Streets filled with beggars who were after a piece of bread to feed their hungry children. Most of the poor either starved to death or bloated by eating grass or animal feed and died. Families perished by the thousands. It took ten years for the drought to subside. My grandmother was in perpetual anguish because one of her sons left the house before the drought and no one had heard from him since. So, my grandmother used to go to the streets, feeding the hungry, and praying that a kind soul would return her kindness by feeding her starving son. The same year that the drought was over, my uncle returned. The family learned that he had ventured north to the Caspian Sea region and lived off the generosity of these people. (Núr, the hometown of Bahá'u'lláh is in this region.) When this brother heard about the drought

and starvation in
Tehran, he was utterly amazed. As rice crops in the Caspian region were so immense that
storage houses were overflowing. The farmers had to throw the surplus away for lack of
space. The northerners never knew about the plight of the people in Tehran. The Alborz
mountains were a formidable blockade, making it impossible for the news to travel even a
few hundred miles away.

When we study the history of the Faith, it is astounding to realize how a handful of believers,
in less than a decade spread the Faith of the Báb like wildfire throughout Iran. His Holiness,
the Báb, bid his disciples scatter around, unconstrained as the wind, and find the chosen
ones of God. These devoted servants, empowered and armed with their love for their
Beloved, journeyed on foot to the far corners of Persia. Most of them were persecuted and
eventually drank the Cup of Martyrdom. Shedding their blood was the testament to the
validity of their Faith. People from all walks of life ranging from nobility and scholars to
humble peasants and traders embraced the Faith. It broke all barriers and set aside human
differences. It was the miracle which was achieved not by the advancing technology, but
by the tremendous acts and perseverance of the early Bábis. Dr. Muhajir used to say that
if we touched our pulse, we would feel the blood of the martyrs flowing in our veins.

The early Bahá'í families who experienced persecution in their homeland, moved to
different locations to start their life anew. The teaching plans of our Beloved Guardian also
caused immigration of Bahá'í families from their homeland to new locations in Iran. Sooner
or later tension followed the settlers. Just as the diamond is the product of the synergistic
forces of nature, constant persecution created a new breed of Bahá'ís. There were such
cohesiveness and support among the Bahá'ís that outsiders somehow were daunted by
them.

The first community in my father’s schedule was in the Mazandaran Province. A lush and beautiful region in the north. Due to the distance and mountainous terrain, Mazandaran was the least influenced by Turkish and Arab aggressors. Throughout the history, Mazanderanis kept their ethnic custom, language, and culture intact, with a flavor of their Islamic beliefs.

Mulla Husayn was asked by the Báb to find his "Hidden Treasure," Quddus. Quddus was a prisoner of the Mullas in Mazandaran. Mulla Husayn started his journey with an ever increasing number of believers, from Khorasan (Persia's eastern region). His mission was to rescue Quddus. Their courageous stand during the sustained siege of Fort Tabarsi and their heroic martyrdom and or captivity made a great impression on the surrounding villages. It eventually led to a number of them to embrace the Faith of the Báb.

Some of the survivors of Fort Tabarsi decided to settle down in these villages and asked their families to join them. The result of this movement was a number of “all Bahá’í” villages in this region. We visited one of these in Mazandaran. It was in a lush forest. A single log bridge over a river was the only access to the village.

The residents were proud that Abdu'l- Baha, in one of his tablets called their village the "Lush Paradise." The emerald green forest was a haven for foxes, deer, and birds. The abundance of wildflowers and murmuring rivers and streams truly created the picture of an earthly paradise.

This village was a glimpse of what Abdu’l-Baha described as the future Bahá’í villages in the years to come. The village was divided into a Bahá’í and a Muslim section. By entering the Bahá’í section, one immediately noticed the care shown for the cleanliness and beautification by its dwellers.

Some of the families were the descendants of immigrant families from Sangesar - a city in

the eastern region of Iran. Sangesaries were among some of the bravest Bahá'ís. They manifested the warrior spirit, protecting the Bahá'í community when danger was inevitable. They were fierce when aroused, a force for their Muslim adversaries to reckon with.

We attended a Bahá'í wedding, a beautiful Bahá'í ceremony, followed by folk dances to the music of the Mazandarani version of a steel band.

In this village, the Local Spiritual Assembly was the administrative body for the village affairs. The structured children classes and observance of Bahá'í Holy Days and social laws were manifested openly and with pride, not common in other parts of Iran. I felt that I was transformed into another place and time, far from the social melee of that time.

Despite all the social and cultural differences, we were bonded by our belief and had the affinity of an extended family.

Our next destination gave us a chance to visit the Shrine of Quddus. The noble soul who as we read the writings, if the Bábi Revelation would have been suspended for a moment, it would have been revealed to Quddus.

The deceptive capture of the surviving heroes of Tabarsi by the Prince, who betrayed his promise of safe passage if they surrendered, led to the martyrdom of Quddus. After his arrest, he was taken to the city, tortured, and eventually, his precious body was put on fire. It took a great undertaking to salvage the remains of Quddus and secretly bury him in a

simple and ordinary residential home. No tombstone or marking was permitted, in order to protect his remains and to prevent further desecration of his burial place.

These precautionary measures limited the believers from visiting most of the Holy Spots in Iran without special permission of the National Spiritual Assembly. As too much traffic would attract the enemies of the Faith and make their safekeeping at risk.

Unfortunately, most of these Holy Places have been destroyed following the Iranian

Revolution. It saddens my heart that future generation of Bahá'ís will not be able to have the soul cleansing experience of visiting these sacred spots which were the testaments of the sacrifice and the greatness of the heroes of our Faith.

As a youth, I felt special affinity with Quddus who embraced the Faith as the youngest Letter of the Living and gained respect from the highest Mujtahids of Islam. Who took over the leadership of Fort Tabarsi and sacrificed his life for his Beloved when he was still in his early twenties.

In our journey to Zanjan, we paid homage to the ruins of its Fortress, where Hujjat Zanjani, the great scholar of the Heroic Age and his entire entourage gave their lives as a testament of their love for their Beloved.

It was a moving moment to stand on the ground where men, women, and children, who had realized that they had been surrounded by soldiers and a mob, fortified their homes and converted their humble dwellings into an impenetrable Fortress. I learned about their ingenuity in creating an efficient alarm system by spreading seeds on the ground, which a slight quiver warned them of the enemy's approach through underground tunnels. I tried to visualize Zaynab, a young girl who asked permission from Hujjat, to cast her veil and join the fighting forces in defending the fortress. Zaynab, through her faith, bravery and eventual martyrdom, left her mark in the history as the Joan of Arc of the Bábi Era.

It was incredible to imagine how this group of ordinary people were able to defend their fortress to the end, withstanding the ever-increasing onslaught of the Imperial Army. This group, realizing how the government troops deceived their fellow believers in Fort Tabarsi, into surrender by swearing on the Quran, and then mercilessly killing them after their surrender; never gave up. The Zanjan Fortress was seized when no able bodies were left to defend it, and no roofs were left to keep the innocent children safe. The vengeful force

of the soldiers was so complete that they did not leave a stone intact to remind the world
of the plight and heroism of its inhabitants. I was blessed and in awe to stand at that
threshold and feel an affinity with these true heroes of the Faith.

The next leg of my fathers' trip was to the Azerbaijan province. The land of imprisonment
and martyrdom of His Holiness the Báb.

We entered “Arq Citadel,” an imposing and gloomy structure, where his Holiness the Báb
spent the last days of his life. Arq Citadel had been preserved as a National Monument by
the Government of Iran for its historical value, entirely unrelated to its significance to the

Bahá’ís. There was only a part of the original structure remained. We then visited the
Sacred Spot where his Holiness the Báb faced the firing squad. We had to be extremely
careful to keep the appearance of being a sightseer when our heart was crying out to chant
the Tablet of Visitation and tears were welling up in our eyes. We then visited the site which
replaced the old moat; where after the execution, the soldiers disposed of the sacred
remains of the Báb and his young companion Anis.

We imagined Solayman Kahn's stellar bravery in secretly carrying his Beloved’s remains
out of Tabriz into a private residence in a remote village of Azerbaijan. We were privileged
to visit this well-hidden and historically significant house. The villagers were quite hostile
toward the Faith. The caretakers of this home, who were the only Bahá’í family there, were
quite isolated from the village community life. No one sold any goods to them or bought
their products. They were not able to find a job or work on the land. Their primary objective
was to safeguard the house and reveal its real significance to no one. Their financial
means, a disbursement from the National Spiritual Assembly, which my father brought for
them, was so slim that the men of the family visited us one by one, after changing into the
only appropriate jacket which was available to them. We shared with them their simple food

and homemade bread, and for the first time in my life, I tasted the true meaning of sacrifice.

The house was spotlessly clean. I entered the basement, a private Persian bath where the sacred remains were cleansed, according to the Bábi burial laws and kept for a length of time. Every atom of this place was charged with such spiritual power, penetrating every cell of my body. It was a spiritual baptism of my soul.

We left this sacred house and its residents with heavy hearts and a renewed sense of faith. We hoped that as their only Bahá'í visitors for quite some time, we had given them some emotional support to continue with their sacrificial service.

A Poignant Remembrance

My father started a Medical Clinic in the southern part of Tehran to help its underprivileged residents. Meanwhile, he joined a core group of medical professionals, organized by Dr. Farhangi, who regularly visited villages which had a Bahá'í population. They offered free medical services to the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í villagers. My father and other volunteers took their families with them to extend friendship and emotional support. The Bahá'ís in the village made all the necessary arrangements for the day of the visit. They welcomed us with radiant smiles and excellent hospitality.

I recently watched "To Light a Candle." This film showed the systematic imprisonment, torture, and killing of the Bahá'ís by the Islamic Regime of Iran. I cried in my heart when it showed that dear Dr. Farhangi was among those who were arrested and executed. His desecrated body was found in the street, with a sign on his chest, calling him an "enemy of Islam." A philanthropic doctor who spent his life helping to heal underprivileged Iranians irrespective of their religious affiliation!

In Search of Excellence

'Praise be to God that the spirit of the Holy Writings and Tablets which have been revealed in this wondrous Dispensation concerning matters of major or minor importance, whether essential or otherwise, related to

the sciences and the arts, to natural philosophy, literature, politics or economics, have been so permeated the world that since the inception of the world in the course of past Dispensations and bygone ages nothing like it has ever been seen or heard. Indeed if an avowed follower of Bahau'llah were to immerse in, and fathom the depths of the ocean of these heavenly teaching, and with utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person's life, materially, intellectually, will be safe from toil and trouble, and unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.'

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS WRITTEN BY SHOGHI EFFENDI
(13 January 1923 to the Bahá'ís of Adhirbayjan)
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 204)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

When I was sixteen, I was savoring the things of youth, becoming aware of my identity, and dreaming about my future. I followed fashion, enjoyed listening to music and going to movies.

I also had serious thoughts about the purpose of my life on earth and the true meaning of death. I was hoping that in this mortal world, I would make my mark and my legacy. My vision for the future was to travel around the world, visiting remote jungles and foreign lands.

I had just completed Mr. Bakhtavar' s class and felt a void in my heart for not being able to continue my course of Bahá'í studies. One summer evening as I was sharing my feelings with my friend Jinous, she told me about the " Public Speaking Class of Dr. Ghadimi." She had heard from her brother that the students had to go through intensive training by studying the Bahá'í Writings in Persian and Arabic.

A large group of participants usually attended the orientation, but only a fraction continued to graduate the Three-Year Course. Dr. Ghadimi demanded the trainees to follow strict rules of conduct and dress code. He had no hesitation in dismissing those who would not meet the high standards of the class. I welcomed the challenge, and we set off to attend the upcoming orientation session.

We joined fifty-three other participants who were eagerly waiting to meet Dr. Ghadimi. The two of us were among the youngest in the group and somehow felt our age. The sudden silence informed us that our future instructor was among us. The figure standing in front of

us was a handsome, well-groomed man, who was immaculately dressed. He looked at each participant with a calculating gaze and sometimes with amusing smile, as was the case when he looked at the two of us.

I instantly remembered that face from the past when as a youngster I attended a few sessions of a Youth Meeting which were held in our neighborhood. The coordinator of these meetings was Dr. Ghadimi, who attended those sessions in a dashing uniform as an Army medical officer.

I vaguely recalled his comments about one's spiritual path to excellence. He stated that he believed in a learning boot camp. As a teacher, he likened himself to a drill sergeant who helped the trainees to set goals and achieve them through hard work. The primary purpose was to develop an understanding of the true station of the Central Figures of the Faith and with passion, reverence, and humility to walk in their footsteps.

Dr. Ghadimi told us that this class was for those who had a high level of commitment, a select group who could withstand the pressure and enjoy the challenge. As the Beloved Guardian instructed; to thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the history and teaching of the Faith, to study the text by ourselves and not rely on the interpretation of others, to painstakingly and conscientiously learn the Bahá’í literature, to "delve into its teachings, assimilate its laws and principles, ponder its admonitions, tenets, and purposes, commit to memory certain of its exhortations and prayers, master the essentials of its administration, and keep abreast of its current affairs and latest developments."

There were 23 of us who were left by the end of the first year – the largest number who survived in the history of the class. Most were in their twenties, a few like

me in our teens,
and one with graying hair that we affectionately called the grandfather of the class.

We were a conglomerate of different social, educational, and ethnic backgrounds, with
diverse individual characteristics. The uniqueness of this assemblage was that throughout
the years of constantly working together, we kept this individuality intact, but developed a
spiritual bond which we treasured throughout our lives.

The duration of this class was three years. Every two weeks the students completed the
study of an assigned book and successfully pass the test with a minimum score of "B" or
above. Each test was stand alone. More than two below-standard scores would be a cause
for dismissal.

The students were to memorize the entire Persian and Arabic Hidden Words of Baha'ullah,
a compilation of at least 300 quotations from the Central Figures of the Faith, a number of
Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, and the Kitabi Aqdas in its entirety.

This preparation was to enable the trainees to become effective public speakers. We were
given a topic every two weeks to research, compose, memorize, and deliver. The speakers
delivered their talks in class and received upfront and matter of fact feedback from the

instructor, who graded them based on their performance. Any substandard performance
was not treated lightly by the Instructor and would be the cause for dismissal.

Classes were held once a week for four hours. Punctuality and perfect attendance were a
must in this class. Tardiness was treated as absenteeism, and three absences sufficed to
be the reason for dismissal.

We spent the first segment of our class with a young teacher who was one of the graduates
of Dr. Ghadimi's class. During this part, we took our tests and reviewed our assignments.
We also studied Arabic language and grammar.

In the second segment, Dr. Ghadimi trained us in public speaking principles and discussed

in depth issues from the assigned book that we were currently studying. During this period,
Dr. Ghadimi covered a wide variety of subjects, which included discussion of our spiritual
mission as a Bahá'í. He believed firmly in the power of the Pure Word. With mastery, he
quoted and elaborated on the meanings of the Bahá'í Writings, teaching us to strive to
practice what we had learned and to stand steadfastly for what we believed. He never
imposed on us his opinions but helped us to choose independently what was best for us if
it was within the framework of the Bahá'í teachings.

Each session was an inspiration to ponder on the writings with a new dimension, assessing
the options to serve our Beloved Faith. These sessions gave us the feeling that after a
strenuous climb, we had reached the peak of a mountain. A new horizon was revealed to
us as a reward for our hard-earned achievements. These unusual and indescribable feel-
ings which we shared, kept us attending the sessions week after week. All of us were
determined to climb higher mountains and reach higher peaks. Sometimes if our
performance was not up to par, we got a serious reprimand from our trainer and sustained
a bruised ego, but most of us knew that it was a price to pay to keep us going, rather than
being left behind and losing the company of the peers. There were some who decided they
were not ready to continue this path and quit. It was a sad moment to contemplate upon
these departures and then, gathering our strengths to continue our journey. There were
nineteen of us who eventually graduated the extended fourth year of the course; the largest
and lengthiest training program of the Public Speaking Class of Dr. Ghadimi.

This new and exciting period of my life demanded a tremendous amount of self-discipline.
I had to count every waking hour of my life and budget my time wisely. As I was facing the
last few years of High School and the University Entrance Exam, I was determined to do
my best not to fall behind on my schoolwork. As the students of this class, we learned
study skills in note taking and speed reading, which were unheard of in the

public education
system of Iran.

The Bahá'í Writings published in Persian and Arabic were hard to find. There were some
early editions that we could only borrow, quite reluctantly, from Bahá'ís with an extensive
library. Sometimes it took us more than one week of going door to door of the Bahá'í
houses, to borrow the book which was assigned to us. It gave us only a few days to study
and complete the assignment. There were only a handful of copies of the Persian Bayan

in Tehran. I was able to find a copy in my college library. It was donated to the library a
long time ago and had been forgotten in a dusty vault. Holding this precious book in my
hands, touching its leather cover, and reading the old manuscript was like traveling into the
past and being in the company of the Dawn Breakers of the Bábi Era.

The greatest effect of studying the Bahá'í Writings was reliving the historical events of the
Faith. I could feel the mystic power that transformed seemingly ordinary men and women
into spiritual giants, performing majestic acts of courage and self-sacrifice.

Reading the memoirs of those who were blessed to meet the principal figures of the Faith
or spending time with them, made my heart leap with joy and ecstasy. There was a moment
while reading the memoir of Dr. Afrookhteh about the life of the Master in Akka; that I could
feel Abdu'l-Baha's presence in my room. I was ready to give my life to be Blessed by His
presence for a short moment. The history of the Faith unraveled the essence and the
purpose of existence for me.

I experienced the bliss of growth by memorizing and reading the pure words. As Dr.
Ghadimi encouraged us to do so. He gave an example of the Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh:
The verses so delicate that like a nightingale, we could only touch their beauty with our
heart. Any attempt to analyze or interpret them would be like holding a nightingale so tight
that it would stifle its splendor.

My conceptual abilities increased through studying the theology and philosophy of the
Faith. It became an integral part of my life and influenced my decision to become a
Philosophy Major in my undergraduate studies. For me, Abdu'l-Baha was the greatest
philosopher in existence. He could elaborate the most complex concepts with clarity and
depth so that it was understandable by any layperson.

This period of my emotional and spiritual transformation was the happiest time in my life.
Some in the Bahá'í community voiced in an unflattering way that the Public Speaking class
was raising Bahá'í elites. It was not the message that we were receiving in class. We felt
fortunate to drink from the elixir of the Bahá'í Revelation and reach an ecstasy that no
material means could achieve. Experiencing this powerful energy made an apparent
transformation in our way of life, that in my case, my immediate family and relatives could
not fathom. It created a prolonged and challenging test that dominated my life for the years
to come.

Due to the tremendous task of completing all my class and school assignments, I decided
to reduce my social time. I carefully planned hours needed to finish a book, memorize a
passage, and work towards my weekly goals. My newly found world of learning changed
my attitude towards the material world. I spent most of my time in my room studying and
enjoying every minute of it. My parents considered this style of life for a sixteen-year-old
girl, unacceptable and somehow abnormal. It created a serious conflict in my family.

Dr. Ghadimi taught us to be perfectionists. We learned how to dress and act as a
professional public speaker. This transformation discouraged behaviors, like dancing or

partying that, may have compromised our social standing. I became a matron at the age of
sixteen. This change of demeanor totally confused my parents and took a long time for
them to figure out how to handle my new image.

The first year of my study in Dr. Ghadimi’s class was overshadowed by the constant pressure from my parents to quit the class and become the girl that I used to be. I had to plead with my parents to at least finish the first year. The sad point was that I had no one at home to give me emotional support or acknowledge my achievements. However, the pressure made me more determined to pursue my new path.

The teacher who was conducting the first portion of the class was a young medical student. We called him Dr. Sadeghzadeh. This energetic teacher was quite enthusiastic to follow Dr. Ghadimi's footsteps. He had great respect for his former teacher and present mentor. His job was to shape us up and lead us through the process of socialization. My first personal encounter with him was within the few weeks of the start of the class. While we were discussing assignments, I made a remark regarding my disappointment of not having Nabil's Narratives as one of the assigned books for that year. This comment amused him, and with a sweet smile, he gave me a special assignment to study this book in two weeks and then deliver a summary report of Nabil’s Narratives. He made it clear that this was in addition to my given assignment in class. It was a symbolic death sentence that turned out to be a turning point for my progress in class. Noting all speeches had to be memorized by heart, we were not allowed to have any written notes to refresh our memory.

On the day that the assignment was due, Dr. Sadeghzadeh asked me to deliver the speech, guessing that I might not be ready. Nabil's inspirational narratives greatly influenced me. I started my speech by reciting a passage on the journey of the Báb through the desert of Karbala:

‘From Mecca, the Báb proceeded to Medina. It was the first day of the month of Muharram, in the year 1261 A.H., when He found Himself on the way to that holy city. As He approached it, He called to mind the stirring events that had immortalized the name of Him who had lived and died within its walls. Those scenes which

bore
eloquent testimony to the creative power of that immortal Genius seemed to be re-
enacted, with undiminished splendour, before His eyes. He prayed as He drew nigh
unto that holy sepulchre which enshrined the mortal remains of the Prophet of God.
He also remembered as He trod that holy ground, that shining Herald of His own
Dispensation. He knew that in the cemetery of Baqí', in a place not far distant from
the shrine of Muhammad, there had been laid to rest Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í, the
harbinger of His own Revelation, who, after a life of onerous service, had decided
to spend the evening of his days within the precincts of that hallowed shrine. There
came to Him also the vision of those holy men, those pioneers, and martyrs of the
Faith, who had fallen gloriously on the field of battle, and who, with their life-blood,
had sealed the triumph of the Cause of God. Their sacred dust seemed as if
reanimated by the gentle tread of His feet. Their shades seemed to have been stirred
by the reviving breath of His presence. They looked to Him as if they had arisen at
His approach, were hastening towards Him, and were voicing their welcome. They

seemed to be addressing to Him this fervent plea: 'Repair not unto Thy native land,
we beseech Thee, O Thou Beloved of our hearts! Abide Thou in our midst, for here,
far from the tumult of Thine enemies who are lying in wait for Thee, Thou shalt be
safe and secure. We are fearful for Thee. We dread the plottings and machinations
of Thy foes. We tremble at the thought that their deeds might bring eternal
damnation to their souls." "Fear not," the Báb's indomitable Spirit replied: "I am come
into this world to bear witness to the glory of sacrifice. You are aware of the intensity
of My longing; you realise the degree of My renunciation. Nay, beseech the Lord
your God to hasten the hour of My martyrdom and to accept My sacrifice. Rejoice,
for both I and Quddús will be slain on the altar of our devotion to the King of Glory.
The blood which we are destined to shed in His path will water and revive the garden

of our immortal felicity. The drops of this consecrated blood will be the seed out of
which will arise the mighty Tree of God, the Tree that will gather beneath its all-
embracing shadow the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Grieve not, therefore, if I
depart from this land, for I am hastening to fulfill My destiny.'

(Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers, p. 140)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

I had composed this speech with tearful eyes, and when I had finished delivering it, I noticed
the same effect on my classmates. Dr. Sadeghzadeh was apparently pleased, and a bit
surprised that a rookie could give a speech without any point to critique. When Dr. Ghadimi
arrived, I was happy to hear a few words of praise uttered on my behalf. I received more
positive reinforcement from Dr. Sadeghzadeh because of my high test scores which were
among the top in the class. The year was coming to an end and my appeals to continue
next year came to no avail with my parents. The end of the year ceremony was an important
event for all of us. In addition to our parents, most of the appointed or elected members of
the Bahá'í Institutions were invited. Each of us was given a topic for a speech to prepare
and practice in class, but none of us knew who would have the honor to deliver the
graduation speech. Dr. Ghadimi, during his opening remarks, emphasized that any of his
students could be called upon and was ready to rise to the occasion.

That year, the Lunar Calendar made the Muslim Fast period coincide with the Bahá'í Fast.
Every evening during the Muslim break of the Fast, Tehran Radio broadcasted a verse of
Quran, chanted in a heavenly Arabian melody; supplicating the Almighty to accept the
sacrifices of the faithful, as an offering for their belief and for enabling them to transcend
this mortal world and achieve the everlasting pleasure of their Lord. In Nabil's Narrative,
the same verse was chanted by Quddus, Mulla Hussein and their small army while defending Fort Tabarsi:

'He (Quddus) would sometimes ask his Iraqi companions to chant various

passages
of the Qur'an, to which he would listen with close attention, and would often be
moved to unfold their meaning. In the course of one of their chantings, they came
across the following verse: "With somewhat of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth
and lives and fruits, will We surely prove you: but bear good tidings to the patient."
"These words," Quddus would remark, "were originally revealed with reference to

Job and the afflictions that befell him. In this day, however, they are applicable to
us, who are destined to suffer those same afflictions. Such will be the measure of
our calamity that none but he who has been endowed with constancy and patience
will be able to survive them.'

www.bahai-library.com/books/dawnbreakers/chapters/19

Hearing this verse every day from Muslims who were the descendants of the Army who
martyred these heroes, filled my heart with tenderness and awe for my beloved Mullah
Hussein and Quddus. As it was a testament, to their ultimate sacrifice that transformed
them into the spiritual giants that they became.

I was assigned to give my graduation speech on "Radiant Acquiescence, while facing trials
and tribulations" In class rehearsal, I taped this chant and played it at the end of my speech,
asking the audience to remember the verses which were uttered by the Martyrs of Fort
Tabarsi, while facing their own tests and difficulties.

Deep in my heart, I was hoping to be called upon to deliver my speech so that my parents
would understand my goal and the path that I was taking to achieve my higher self. When
the time came for the graduation speech, I heard my name called upon to deliver my
speech. I stood in front of nearly two hundred Bahá'ís and delivered a ten minute
presentation. In closing, my friend played the chanted verses of the Heroic Age. It filled the
room and penetrated the souls of the audience. Shortly after, I was surrounded by the
tearful eyes and embraces of the audience. There were dear Bahá'í friends

who knew me
since my childhood and those who I had met only for the first time. Among them, Ghodsyyieh Ashraf who embraced me gently, with great affection. At that moment, I was
aware that my parents understood!

‘Glad Tidings! For everlasting life is here! O ye that sleep, awake O ye heedless
ones, learn wisdom! O blind, receive your sights! O deaf, hear! O dumb, speak! O
dead, arise! Be happy! Be full of joy!’

- November 26th, 1911. Message to the London Bahá’ís for the Day of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
Specially given to Mrs. Enthoven. Page 127
reference.bahai.org/en

This occasion was the turning point of my life when through His bounty and guidance, I
found my destiny in this mortal life and rose above worldly attachments, connected to the
greater power in the universe. Support and sustenance were bestowed upon me by the
great scholars and dedicated servant of God, who continually showered their love upon
me, without any demand or condition. The inner child within me was continuously beckoned
by my spiritual father, Abdu'l-Baha, to follow his chosen path despite my lowliness and lack
of greatness.

What we achieved in the Speech Class was going through the process of growth and
maturity which was beyond the capability of our normal social environment. We learned a

strong sense of belonging to the Supreme Being. We felt responsible for making changes
in the world, no matter how small or insignificant. As Dr. Ghadimi said, we felt that in "a
gentle way we could shake the world."

Through studying the Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, we realized that God has created us
noble, a gem that requires polishing and refinement to be worthy of reflecting the Sun of
Reality. We worked hard to manifest our hidden potentials and be worthy of the station that
God had ordained for His loved ones. Our goal is to achieve His pleasure through serving

and loving Him and His creation, to achieve excellence in whatever we endeavor to do.

As we discovered our purpose in life, we found the pleasure and the joy of hard work to achieve it. We knew that tests and difficulties were challenges that God had presented to us on this journey, and He would have never given us any test that we were not capable of handling.

Dr. Afrookhteh, in his “Memoir of Nine Years in Akka,” wrote about the times when the Master was in imminent danger of being exiled and ultimately crucified. This young medical student was anxious about the upheaval when he visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. However, the Master was the embodiment of calmness and solace for his companions. He advised the young student to focus on his studies with a singleness of purpose. The Master likened the power of concentration of the mind, as the magnifying glass to the sun; it burned away the impediments placed in its way to achieving its objective. He advised his young disciple to set goals and to act upon them with perseverance and singleness in purpose. The Master advised the young student to concentrate then act. As “the bounties of God and His confirmations, revolve around Action.” Moreover, when the Master found his pupil ready to start his life's journey, he asked him to leave Akka and set out for his lifelong service. The young disciple sadly abided by his beloved's bidding.

“Come to the edge," he said.
"We can't, we're afraid!" they responded.
"Come to the edge," he said.
"We can't, We will fall!" they responded.
"Come to the edge," he said.
And so they came.
And he pushed them.
And they flew.”

- Guillaume Apollinaire
www.goodreads.com/quotes

My second year in Dr. Ghadimi’s class was a period of gradual and continuous progress in

my studies. The teacher for the second year was a serene scholar who was completing his degree in the field of engineering. His name was Mr. Sedigh. His mastery was in the Arabic language. The members of my class got to know each other better and established a network of the students of the first and second year of the Public Speaking class.

This networking created deep friendships, and in some instances, romance and marriage. Sometimes later, Dr. Sadeghzadeh married one of my classmates, and both left Iran for the United States for further study. On their return to Iran, Dr. Sadeghzadeh was elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. During Khomeini revolution, he was abducted by the Revolutionary Guards, and eventually tortured and martyred in prison. Shortly after his martyrdom, his wife Jaleh gave birth to their son whom I heard had a striking resemblance to his father.

My other classmate was Mr. Assadollah-Zadeh. He married Shiva Mahmoodi. During the Islamic Revolution, Shiva was arrested, and eventually martyred.

I would also like to mention my dear friend Farnoosh, who replaced Dr. Sadeghzadeh as the teacher for the first-year Public Speaking class, after the Dr.'s departure. During the revolution, Farnoosh was arrested and martyred, leaving a young family behind.

During those happy years of comradeship, it was inconceivable for us to imagine what God had ordained for some of us. Looking back to this period of bliss I can only utter my salutation to these blessed heroes of God and thank Him for the chance to know and love these martyrs for a short but intensive period of my life.

Most of the members of this network chose the path of pioneering and scattered to the far corners of the planet, serving our Beloved Faith with sacrifice and undying zeal. Many of them have achieved the ranks of appointed and elected bodies of the Institutions at their pioneering posts.

Khomeini's Failed Coup

While I settled into the routine of my Public Speaking class, I was facing the monumental task of graduating from High School and preparing for the university entrance exam. Education was the key to a better life and better social standing in Iran. Although public education was free in Iran, there was always hurdles to pass to achieve higher education. There was no mainstreaming in the education system of Iran. Final scores determined who would move to the higher level of education and who would leave school to start an occupation.

The High School Diploma was presented to the students who had passed an independent battery of tests, which was administered at a location out of their school district and scored by a designated group of testers who did not have access to the sealed names of the students, to prevent bias and favoritism.

The evening before the last day of the external examination two of my high school classmates and my best Bahá'í friends joined me in my house for an all-night test reviewing. In the morning, my father drove us to the examination site, and after completing the tests, we headed back to my house by bus. Our house was in an old and established part of Tehran. It was in proximity to the Royal palaces, the Prime Minister palace, the Senate,

and the Royal Court Office. The Royal Military Academy was in our immediate neighborhood also.

When the bus entered, the main avenue leading to my house, we sensed an eerie feeling of a catastrophic happening. The usual bustling thoroughfare was empty. The street tarmac was deeply marred by the imprint of armored tanks which surrounded the Palaces. When we walked down the streets, we picked up one of the leaflets that littered the road. It was an open letter from a Mullah called Khomeini, inciting the true believers to rise and cleanse the motherland from the ideology of the infidel. Among the mandates of the uprising was the annihilation of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

There was very little news by the public broadcasting about this unsuccessful coup. What we heard was a short official statement followed by rumors regarding the uprising in Qum; where a group of Muslim clergies with an obscure Mullah as their leaders were in the process of a coup to overthrow the Shah, and enforce its mandates, including the elimination of the Bahá'ís .

The Savak – secret police were tipped off, and the Royal Army was sent to siege the theological school in Qum. An unknown number of students and their leaders were killed and arrested, and Khomeini was exiled immediately to Iraq. Thus, elimination of the source of the instigation made it impossible for the Tehran coup to succeed. The uprising was stifled in less than twenty-four hours.

Most Iranians never realized what went on in Tehran, and in our neighborhood. We believed that the Khomeini and his Revolution was history. How little did we know what the future had in store for us and fatal events that followed in the later years.

The uprising of Khomeini was the result of a series of reforms initiated by the Shah to modernize the social structure of Iran. It reached its peak in 1963, with the events leading to the referendum to pass his Charter of the White Revolution. Progressive Iranian women now found a rare opportunity to unite and assert their rights to vote and to have a voice in determining the future of their country.

The station of women in Iran was the most frustrating issue for me as a young girl. Being raised under the banner of Bahá'í Principles and Doctrines, I was proud of my God given rights and privileges. What I observed in the non-Bahá'í world around me was a different picture. The Islamic-oriented Iranian laws were repressive and sometimes inhumane. Women had only a partial inheritance if a male sibling existed. The father, brother, husband, or her son, were the keepers and guardians of females. If a wife was not able to bear a child, sometimes she herself, arranged for her husband to take a second wife.

The man had the right to marry numerous wives permanently or temporarily. The man could divorce his wife on a whim without consulting her. The only possession that she could take after the divorce was what she had brought in as her dowry or a fiduciary gift stated in her marriage contract. This financial arrangement after 20 or 30 years did not have the monetary value that it used to have when it was initially arranged, because of inflation.

The custody of the child was granted to the mother for three to six years based on the sex of the child; the former for boys and the latter for girls. Then the father was the sole guardian of the child, with no legal rights of visitation for the mother. In the court of law, a woman was not equal to a man regarding testifying or presenting evidentiary issues.

The most preposterous legal right of men was their privilege to be able to kill a female blood relative, or his wife if he suspected that the said female was sexually involved with a man who was not her husband. So many innocent girls lost their lives in the heat of passion, or under this law, and their murderer was set free without trial. I vividly remember the case of a twelve-year-old boy who killed his mother under this pretense, based on hearsay, and was proud of it.

The predominant thought in the mind of Muslim fundamentalists was the sinfulness of sexual thoughts and desires. The sin of the female gender was solely for being a “woman.” Her presence was the reason for unclean thoughts and acts. By hiding women behind a closed door and under the layer of the veil, the true believer was protected. In another word, the woman was the primary source of evil.

The duty of a woman was to be submissive, meek, and obedient. If a girl was a victim of rape, sexual molestation, or sexual act, the unwritten law mandated her to have an honorable suicide. The worse scenario was murder by a member of her family, or her running away from home and becoming a prostitute. Most of the Persian dramas

were
revolving around these themes. Contemporary Iranian women with careers and university
degrees, wearing the latest European fashions, had to cope with these repressive and
archaic civil and religious laws.

It was inconceivable for the general populace who observed this rigid culture to believe that
in the Bahá'í gatherings, members of the opposite sex could work and worship together,
that there was no segregation, and all observed the law of chastity. I always heard
innuendoes from Muslims about sexual orgies in our Feasts and Bahá'í meetings. The
emotional issue for the masses, who murdered the Bahá'ís during the Islamic revolution,
was the allegation of prostitution and whoremongering by the members of the Bahá'í
Administration.

After the Shah regained his power of sovereignty, he gradually changed this course of
action. I would like to touch upon his so-called "White Revolution" and the unprecedented
role of women in this time of Persian history.

The Shah's logic was that the nation was ready to start a revolution for change in the
political and social structure of the country. As the ruler of Iran, he was willing to initiate
these changes and enforce a bloodless Revolution.

The focal point of the White Revolution was the mandate of land reform and the
appropriation of land to the farmers who had toiled on those parcels of land for generations;
nationalization of the Iranian forest; the formation of Education and Health Corps for
draftees, which was loosely patterned after the American Peace Corp. He offered to

purchase land from the feudal lords, with oil money, and sell it to the farmers for a symbolic
token.

The Shah asked for a national referendum to pass the resolution for the White Revolution
charter. This concept of democracy was too new and foreign to Iranians. The Shah
personally distributed all the royal landholdings that his father had acquired

during his time.

The royal mouthpiece for persuading the nation to vote favorably for his Charter was his Agriculture Minister, a charismatic and highly educated man called Dr. Rafsanjani. He was a great communicator who used the mass media to have an ongoing dialogue with the public.

The land reform Charter instigated a bloody civil war in the large feudal and tribal states. The prediction for a favorable result of the national referendum was gloomy. The night before the poll, Dr. Rafsanjani appeared on TV, appealing to the delegation of Women organizations to persuade their men to vote for the betterment of the country. The representatives presented the hypothesis that if women had the right to vote, they would be voting for this Charter. Then asked bluntly whether their votes would be counted. Minister knew that there was no Constitutional provision for women to vote, and he had no authority to sanction it. So, he tried with all his charm to wiggle out of this sticky situation, but the women shrewdly stuck to their question and did not let go. Finally, the Minister said that if women decided to set up their voting centers and tally them, they would be free to do so. Whether their votes would be counted as a part of the national referendum was not for him to decide.

The next day thousands upon thousands of women went to their voting centers and cast their votes for the White Revolution. The wave of the suffrage movement was unstoppable. Although their vote was not legally counted, it made a statement for the freedom of rights of women in Iran. In the future, the Constitutional Law of Iran was changed for women. They received their right to vote, to be represented in the Family courts for divorce proceedings, and for custodial and financial settlements. There was a sudden leap into the 20th Century within a short period of time. The Muslim clergy and fundamentalists were not

ready for this.

The University of Tehran

Pursuing a college education in Iran, was a privilege which was given to a select few of
Iranian youth. The University of Tehran, then the only national university, was highly sought
after in Iran. The University entrance exam was designed to select less than 10 percent of
the thousands of candidates who took the exam.

A fascinating phenomenon was the freedom of expression that existed in the university
culture. Iranians considered students as a select elite, who were the hope and the heralds
of political change in Iran. Most of the revolutionary ideas were disseminated from the
University campus.
During the early reign of the Shah, there had been an unsuccessful, but nearly fatal

assassination attempts on his life when he was attending the graduation ceremony at the
University. This incident created much chaos, with an indiscriminate shooting of the
graduating students leading to the injury and killing of some. The subsequent arrest and
disappearance of several students and professors sent a shock wave through Tehran and
justified the ever-present existence of the SAVAK – secret security agents within the
university campus life.

It seemed that the concentration of political activities was in the College of Humanities and
Literature, and among some members of the Faculty. Despite numerous arrest and
imprisonments, a handful of dissident professors, who were the remnant of Mossadegh
movement, intermingled their lectures with their political views. In the meantime, the
majority of the political figures in Iran were also ex-professors, who had taken a sabbatical
leave to serve in the Shah's Cabinet.

The social status of the professors was high, and within their academic domain, they were
considered as gods. They were the elite of society and therefore not responsible to the
higher authorities in the land. If a student fell from the grace of a given

professor, no higher
power could persuade that professor to change his judgment and give a passing grade to
the disfavored student; his fate was doomed.

My highest professional aspiration was to become a therapist. However, I learned that the
University of Tehran only offered a degree in Philosophy and Educational Sciences, with
minor in Psychology. I was aware of Abdu'l-Baha's view on Disputative Philosophy, as a
wasteful endeavor of the human mind - as it starts with words and ends with words, with
no empirical application. I also read Abdu'l-Baha's praise of the spiritual philosophers such
as Socrates and Plato, who were educated by Jewish sages, and used their knowledge to
prove the existence of God and the spiritual realm of the universe.

After reading "Some Answered Questions," and "Selected Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha," I truly
believed that Abdu'l- Baha was the most significant philosopher of all ages, who unfolded
the most profound philosophical phenomenon which had puzzled the great thinkers of the
history of mankind.

My preparation for the College Entrance Exam was self-taught, as we did not have a
knowledgeable teacher to help us learn what was required. I passed the University
Entrance test and checked only for one Department for my college entrance - I had the
choice of three in case I was not accepted by my first or second Departments. This College
Entrance Test comprised of two essay questions which carried a 100% weight. While
taking the test, I misunderstood the second question and wrote an entirely unrelated
answer. I realized this devastating mistake later and was convinced that I had blown my
chance for a university placement that year. I prayed fervently for a miracle that I was sure
would not come through. A week later to my surprise, I was informed by my sister that I
was ranked 19th, out of the 20 successful candidates.

One year later, when I was taking a class, the professor was discussing the methodical

application of the Philosophical essay. He related to us that during the review of one of the

exam papers, he noticed that the writer totally misunderstood the question. While reading
the wrong answer, he found the structure and the logic were sound and convincing. The
professor decided to accept the paper based on its merit. The Faculty then accepted his
judgment and gave the student another chance. I never revealed the identity of that student
to my professor, but truly believed in the power of prayer, as stated by Abdu'l-Baha:

'Rely upon God. Trust in Him. Praise Him and call Him continually to mind. He verily turneth
trouble into ease, and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter peace. He verily hath dominion
over all things. If thou wouldst hearken to my words, release thyself from the fetters of
whatsoever cometh to pass. Nay rather, under all conditions thank thou thy loving Lord,
and yield up thine affairs unto His Will that worketh as He pleaseth. This verily is better for
thee than all else, in either world.'

~ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Page 177/78
http://reference.bahai.org

Although I had not reached the primal condition of detachment, God, in His absolute mercy,
had answered my prayers.

The Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Dr. Mahdavi, was a Sorbonne University alumnus,
with a refinement attributed to his aristocratic lineage. His great-grandfather was mentioned
in the contemporary history of Iran, as the equivalent of Finance minister and the trustee
of the mint for the Kings of Iran. Dr. Mahdavi had ample opportunity to rise to the highest
level in the civil service. However, he decided that he could build his "kingdom" in the
university, without any political hassle. As he was blessed with wealth, he served the
Faculty as an Honorary Professor. He ruled the department with a subtle iron fist, and a
quiet intellectual approach, which was impeccable and impenetrable.

His lectures were well prepared, and his class well-disciplined and subdued. He did not have to exert his authority, as his reputation preceded him. His nickname was the "Serpent." We were told that any student who failed to meet his approval would face dire consequences. The unfortunate student would fail year after year to make the grade and therefore to graduate. The rumor was that one of the students who had failed Dr. Mahdavi's course pulled a gun, during his last oral examination and threatened to kill the professor. Dr. Mahdavi calmly asked his test questions and dismissed the student, giving him a final failing grade.

Dr. Mahdavi's Chair had three Associate Professors, whom together as a team, decided on the destiny of their students. One of them was Dr. Davoudi. I met Dr. Davoudi in some of the Bahá'í meetings and introduced myself to him. We developed an interesting and unusual relationship. I never had a chance of being in Dr. Davoudi' s class, but we always exchanged a few words in the hallways. If he was alone, I greeted him with the Greatest Name. He always enjoyed expressing our comradeship under the Banner of Bahá'u'lláh in different ways which were unique.

I had a great admiration and respect for Dr. Mahdavi. I always prepared well for his class. My Bahá'í studies made it easy for me to present logical and philosophically sound papers for this course. One day, Dr. Davoudi saw me in passing and called me to talk to him alone. I had just received the highest score on Dr. Mahdavi's test. Dr. Davoudi congratulated me for my achievement and said, when the Faculty members were discussing my paper, Dr. Mahadevi stated that my writing style was unusual for a student of my age. Dr. Davoudi proudly, and with an underlining humor said; Miss Behroozi is a Bahá'í and a student of the Bahá'í Writings. This statement brought a disappointing sigh from Dr. Mahdavi, uttering; it was sad that any bright minded student in this Department was a Bahá'í. I noted a sense

of satisfaction in Dr. Davoudi' demeanor. Typically, most of the Professors did not know the names of a few hundred students in their classes. However, because of this conversation, I was well known by the Faculty.

Dr. Davoudi, with his loving and open approach to the students, was always a favorite. He often was surrounded by a cluster of students carrying on, an academic conversation. I used to join the crowd and enjoy observing my favorite Bahá'í Professor. One day when I was passing by, I noticed him talking to the students, I did not know what they were discussing, but stood on the edge of the crowd and listened. He saw me standing there and said to the group: `It's good that Miss Behroozi, the "Greatest Philosopher," has joined us!' Everybody looked at me with amazement. It was only Dr. Davoudi and me who were chuckling at this Bahá'í humor. I thanked him for his kind word; knowing that the "Greatest Philosopher" was a metaphor for "Cows," referring to the materialistic philosophers, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá reported to have said:

'It is no proof of intelligence to reject everything which does not strike the senses. Nay, rather, such a one is a brother to the animal. The cow has no idea of God; she does not know the soul. So, the only difference between her highness the cow and a materialistic philosopher is that the latter takes a great deal of trouble! It is not a special or exclusive privilege to be the prisoner of one's senses; the cow is the example of this theory.'
~~ Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, page 94
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

My college performance was somehow inconsistent and erratic. The strenuous Bahá'í studies left me little time for too much concentration on my University subjects. There were courses that I appreciated their relevance to the Bahá'í principles and did extremely well in those classes. There were others that I could not relate to, or we had Professors who were not able to attract my attention. Those classes, I barely scored above standard.

In the last year of my college, I enrolled in a class conducted by an old Professor, who was a companion of the late Shah of Iran. He was suffering from the early stages of senility and was kept on the job due to his history and political connections. He had a habit of going down his memory's lane instead of teaching the relevant subject. He was also notorious for failing the majority of the student or passing them with the minimum required score, irrespective of their performance. Because it was mandatory to attend these impersonal and bizarre lectures, students found ways to amuse themselves. It happened that I sat beside a graduate student who had an amusing sense of humor, which kept us entertained.

He had delicate features and a resonant and melodious voice. When we got to know each other, I learned that he was a member of the Afnan, who was related to the family of the Báb. His physical resemblance to the Báb was astounding, and from what I knew, his voice also was like the Báb. As he was not familiar with the Bahá'í community of Tehran, I introduced him to the University gatherings and meetings. He graduated the same year and left for the States to continue his studies. Years later, I heard from his friend that sadly, he was killed in a car accident.

Dr. Ghadimi's Class Graduation Ceremony

'Faith comes to a man through submission to God. The surrendering of self with all its accomplishments renders the soul free of attachment to this mortal world. It drives the stranger away from the heart and enables him to receive the "friend" within its sanctuary.'

(Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 2, p. 220)

When the second year of Public Speaking class was ending, all of us were eagerly getting ready for the graduation ceremony. The excitement was heightened when Dr. Ghadimi informed us that the Hand of the Cause Mr. Faizi would be our honored guest.

I had not seen Mr. Faizi for years. I had read several of his books and was more aware of his station than when I first met him as a little girl. This visit had a special meaning for

me. I was proud to let him know about my efforts in the path of scholarly enrichment in the field of Bahá'í Studies. Dr. Ghadimi selected topics for our speech and told us that he would submit the themes to Mr. Faizi, at the ceremony, to choose whatever topic that he deemed appropriate. My topic was on Islamic Philosophy, and I tried my best to develop a scholarly speech.

I sought the help of Dr. Khonsari, one of my Professors, who was also an associate of Dr. Mahdavi, and a counterpart of Dr. Davoudi. Dr. Khonsari was a Professor of Logic, Islamic Philosophy and Arabic Literature. Dr. Khonsari was a staunch Muslim, proud of his Islamic heritage. Because of my Bahá'í studies I showed a keen interest in the topics that he covered and therefore was one of his favorite students. When I approached him with my questions regarding references to Islamic Philosophy, he shed his usual reticence and expressed his amazement for meeting a young lady who was showing interest in such a topic. As he was well known for his religious affiliation, I did not reveal my being a Bahá'í and thanked him for his compliment. I relayed this conversation to my best friend who was a Muslim. She had been having a rough time in this professor's class and was a bit envious of the attention that I was getting. She jokingly said that she would love to see Dr. Khonsari's face when he learned that I was a Bahá'í. I laughed and said that I would surely get a failing grade due to his disappointment. Not long after this conversation, in our class, Dr. Khonsari was expounding on the Mystic Valleys of Creation; Journey from the Creator to the Created. According to Dr. Khonsari, there was no inference in the Islamic Philosophy, regarding the distinction between the "Knowledge of God" and the

"Will of God," emanating the world of "Being." When I asked for a definition, he responded that no philosopher had defined these stations and they were interchangeable. At that time, I was reading a compilation of the Bahá'í Writings, where

Abdu'l-Baha, in the Tablet
of "Hidden Treasure," defined these stations as a movement (journey) within the "Divine
Essence", of the attributes of God. I was so excited to learn the concept that I shared it
the next day with my Muslim friend. When the final oral exam approached, I went through
the grueling process with confidence. But my friend was uncertain of her fate. I saw her
coming out of Dr. Khonsari's class beaming with joy. I was happy for her and asked what
had happened? She told me that her test question was to elaborate on the Seven Stations
of Creation. She gave the exact account of Abdu'l-Baha's interpretation, as I relayed to
her before. The Professor was astonished and asked where she found this explanation.
My friend responded that it was from the Bahá'í Writings, and she learned from Miss
Behroozi, who is a Bahá'í. A shock wave went through my spine in the reaction to the
betrayal of a close friend. I was sure that my final scores would be doomed. I had learned
a lesson not to expect much from anyone, as everyone has human frailties. I licked my
wound for a while. The final scores showed that although my friend passed the subject, I
had received the highest mark in the class.

When Dr. Ghadimi's Graduation day came, Mr. Faizi honored us with his presence. He
chose the topic of "Teaching the Faith," for the graduation speech. When his time came
to deliver his talk, it was an admonishment that changed the course of our lives and moved
our souls to an unseen realm. Mr. Faizi directly addressed us and opened a new door
and showed us the way to "ACT" on what we had learned. He told us that the fruit of
learning is teaching and pioneering. That we should prepare ourselves for the field of
service and that the Master and the beloved Guardian expected us to serve. That all the
praise and applause that we had received were placing our souls in mortal danger. He
lovingly addressed us: 'My dear ones, when you hear the crowd cheering for you beware

of the consequences. It is like tempting you to climb the highest steps of a ladder, then having it pulled out from under you.' It was a tremendous spiritual awakening to contemplate for our future endeavors.

When it was time for the class picture, with a tenderness that brought tears to our eyes, Mr. Faizi addressed us: My dear ones; "I am sorry for my harsh words! I love you all so much, and your lives are so precious to me. I wish your talents will brighten the remote corners of this world, and that you will achieve the greatest happiness you deserve." This graduation was a turning point in the lives of many who heeded his advice. Some chose the field of pioneering, and some, the path of martyrdom!

Graduation picture of Dr. Ghadimi' s class

Back row from left: 1st - Dr. Ghadimi, 3rd - Behin Paravarpisheh,
5th - Dr. Sadeghzadeh, Second row from left: 1st - Farnoosh,
2nd - Mehran Ighani, last - Shahla Behroozi - Gillbanks.

The First Teaching Trip to Mashhad

The Public Speaking course was generally of two years duration. However, when our class was getting close to the last graduation date, we requested to extend the class for one more year. Dr. Ghadimi accepted the request and developed a curriculum that required each student to complete two teaching and consolidation trips to a Bahá'í community in Iran; one before the third year graduation and one after. I chose Mashhad, the capital of Khorasan, where Mulla Husayn established the House of Bábíyyih, the first Teaching Institute in the history of the Faith. He engulfed this most sacred Islamic center of Iran, with a flame of Divine Love, as described by the Beloved Guardian:

'The audacity of Mulla Husayn who, at the command of the Báb, had attired his head with the green turban worn and sent to him by his Master, who had hoisted the Black Standard, the unfurling of which would, according to the Prophet Muhammad, herald the advent of the vicegerent of God on earth, and who, mounted on his steed, was marching at the head of two hundred and two of his fellow-disciples to meet and lend his assistance to Quddus in the Jaziriy-i-Khadra (Verdant Isle) -- his audacity was the signal for a clash the reverberations of

which
were to resound throughout the entire country.

The contest lasted no less than eleven months. Its theatre was, for the most part,
the forest of Mazindaran. Its heroes were the flower of the Báb's disciples. Its
martyrs comprised no less than half of the Letters of the Living, not excluding
Quddus and Mulla Husayn, respectively the last and the first of these Letters. The
directive force which however unobtrusively sustained it was none other than that
which flowed from the mind of Bahá'u'lláh.

It was caused by the unconcealed determination of the dawn-breakers of a new
Age to proclaim, fearlessly and befittingly, its advent, and by a no less unyielding
resolve, should persuasion prove a failure, to resist and defend themselves against
the onslaughts of malicious and unreasoning assailants. It demonstrated beyond
the shadow of a doubt what the indomitable spirit of a band of three hundred and
thirteen untrained, unequipped yet God-intoxicated students, mostly sedentary
recluses of the college and cloister, could achieve when pitted in self-defense
against a trained army, well equipped, supported by the masses of the people,
blessed by the clergy, headed by a prince of the royal blood, backed by the
resources of the state, acting with the enthusiastic approval of its sovereign, and
animated by the unfailing counsels of a resolute and all-powerful minister.

Its outcome was a heinous betrayal ending in an orgy of slaughter, staining with
everlasting infamy its perpetrators, investing its victims with a halo of imperishable
glory, and generating the very seeds which, in a later age, were to blossom into
world-wide administrative institutions, and which must, in the fullness of time, yield
their golden fruit in the shape of a world-redeeming, earth-encircling Order.’
~~ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, page 37
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

I traveled with my mother to Mashhad to be the guests of an old friend of the family. I was
carrying a letter of introduction from Tehran. My itinerary was to hold a public meeting, to
stress the importance of the first Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice. In

addition to offering an intensive study class on Some Answered Questions for the youth.
However, when I met with the committees, I felt an unusual vibe. I was told that the community was dealing with protection issues; a young pioneer who spent a few years in a mass teaching country and had success in attracting a large group to the Faith was back visiting his relatives in that region. His two uncles who saw a gleam of vain glory decided to work on the ego of this young man and convinced him that he could foolishly claim the station of a new manifestation of God. As absurd was this claim, it was affecting the Bahá'í community like an infected sore, leaving behind an unpleasant stench.

The Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhajir and an Auxiliary Board Member Mr. Vahdat, (who was later martyred during Islamic Revolution), were in Mashhad to heal the ill and protect the Bahá'í community. Although Dr. Muhajir had close family who lived in that city, he decided to stay with Mr. Vahdat at the Bahá'í Center and focus on this grave task. He was not having any visitors or was holding any social meetings.

I felt sad not to be able to have the bounty of meeting the Hand of the Cause, and even more depressed to walk into a tense environment where the gravity of the situation made my humble teaching project infinitesimal.

I turned to prayers for His assistance and guidance. I also found a new friend who opened my eyes to one of the purest forms of devotion and trust in the Almighty. This friend was an old and materially humble lady who lived in the basement of the home of our host. This precious soul was illiterate, poor, and homeless. She had very few belongings in that spotless basement. As her mind sometimes wavered, people did not often strike a conversation with her. I could hear her melodious voice chanting numerous prayers and tablets that she knew by heart. She was often scolded for chanting so loud that agitated their Muslim neighbors. However, even the threat of eviction did not stop her from the only

solace that she had. I visited her in the basement every day and purified my soul with her
unconditional and undemanding love for the Beloved. She told me that she was a descendant of one of the companions of Bábu'l-Báb at the Fort Tabarsi, who was
martyred and left his young family behind. She believed that her ardent prayers were her
contribution for the cleansing of the ills which had to befallen the Mashhad community
and she had no choice but to continue with her prayers. I begged my hosts to be kind to
this precious soul, and they graciously accepted to let this lady stay in the basement.

Meanwhile, I had the bounty to visit the House of Bábíyyih, a humble but spacious abode
with a large courtyard, where a staircase led to two upstairs room, designated as the
temporary residence of Mulla Husayn and Quddus. It had the usual characteristics of all
the Mulla Husayn's residences; simple furnishing to provide basic comfort for the
occupant. The Bábu'l-Báb's room had an annex for storing the bedding and belongings
of the owner. In this windowless storage, we were shown a small opening in the earthen
floor, where the Holy Writings of the Báb used to be hidden to protect them from frequent
raids of Moslems. Mulla Husayn used to take them out at night and study them in that

storage room. Having access to all the Bahá'í books, and the relative freedom to read
them in the privacy of my home, this blessed spot was the dearest and most touching
place in that house. Rendering prayers in that sacred spot and a heart to heart spiritual
communion with my hero were not only a soothing balm for my despondent soul but for
the outpouring assistance for my humble project.

I was informed that the Assembly had scheduled me to address the audience at the Bahá'í
Center for a gathering which was arranged for Dr. Muhajir. As under those difficult
circumstances, no other meetings could be held. It was my only chance to complete what
I traveled hundreds of miles to achieve. It created high anxiety for me to

deliver my humble
speech after the intense and potent lecture of a Hand of the Cause of God. So, I asked
my hero, Bábu'l-Báb, to give me courage and strength to fulfill my humble mission to
serve the Beloved.

In that historic meeting, hundreds of Bahá'ís were present. When I found my way to the
front row of the great hall, I had a glimpse of one of the youngest Hands of the Cause of
God. Each member of this august body had a unique attribute; This Hand was the
embodiment of humility, pure devotion, and passionate love for his Faith. It would take a
stranger a lifetime to pass beyond the layers of his unassuming demeanor and
comprehend a fraction of an exceptionally brilliant mind. Dr. Muhajir, in any country, could
set into motion a most revolutionary and bold teaching plan and mobilize a corps of
diverse people to achieve its goals. His unique talent was to nourish the souls of the
Bahá'ís and make them each feel "noble in the eyes of God." Then, he would unlock the
potential of each soul and help them to choose their path of service. He asked us to act
with determination and conviction, without questioning whether we were successful or
not. As each act of service had the potential to live in the timeless realm of God and come
to its fruition at any given time.

When the chairperson introduced Dr. Muhajir, she addressed him as "our spiritual father."
Dr. Muhajir responded with a smile that he could not be a spiritual father, as his daughter
was only a few years old and he was in his early forties.

Dr. Muhajir did not want to assume the station granted to the older Hands, like his father
in law Mr. Furutan. I remember once he told me that he did not consider himself a sage
like Mr. Faizi, or a charismatic orator like Mr. Furutan. His strength was to mobilize the
believers to teach and to bring "new blood" into the Faith.

In that gathering, I was so nervous to remember what Dr. Muhajir said, but I had the
distinct feeling that I had no right to open my mouth after that talk. His talk was followed

by a potent speech by Mr. Vahdat. The chairperson announced another speaker who was
then in her eighties. She was Ms. Ghudsieh Ashraf, who was one of the first Persian
female students who had gone to the U.S. for further education. She attended the
groundbreaking of the House of Worship as a young and shy girl in western clothing.
Abdu'l-Baha asked her to come forward and partake in the ceremony as the
representative of the Eastern women. Ms. Ashraf was a pioneer most of her life and had
just returned from her pioneering post. By the end of her speech, I was on my nerves'

ends. I heard my name as the next speaker, I gave my short speech, concluding with
following “call to action” passage from the Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of
Justice:

‘From the beginning of this Dispensation the most urgent summons of the Word of
God voiced successively by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, has been to teach the Cause.
'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His own words, "spent His days and nights in promoting the Cause
and urging the peoples to service." Shoghi Effendi, discharging the sacred mission
laid upon him, raised the Administrative Order of the Faith, already enshrined within
the Sacred Writings, and forged it into a teaching instrument to accomplish through
a succession of plans, national, international, and global, the entire Divine Plan of
'Abdu'l-Bahá, and he clearly foresaw in the "tremendously long" tenth part of the
process already referred to a series of plans to be launched by the Universal House
of Justice, extending over "successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith.
The first of these plans is now before us. Opening at Ridván 1964, while the
memories of the glorious Jubilee of 1963 still surge within our hearts, it must, during
its nine-year course, witness a huge expansion of the Cause of God and universal
participation by all believers in the life of that Cause.’

~~ THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

I am not sure if many among the audience heard my talk after the two hours of speech by the prominent Bahá'ís who preceded me. What I know is that I found a spiritual mentor and friend whose constant guidance and friendship impacted every stage of my life.

As soon as I uttered my last words, I was surrounded by the previous speakers. Dr. Muhajir showered me with loving praises, and Ms. Ashraf embraced me. I was overwhelmed by the intensity of this undeserving love and felt the presence of Mulla Husayn in that gathering! Years later, Dr. Muhajir told me that in that meeting, he had to focus on the issues relating to the Covenant and protection of the Faith. He would have loved to talk about the teaching goals of the Nine-Year Plan. So, when he heard, my (short and humble) talk about the Nine-Year Plan, it was like a "breath of fresh air" wafting through that somber gathering.

In that memorable meeting when I first had the privilege of meeting with my spiritual mentor, I had no idea about the far-reaching consequences of his impact on my young life. Dr. Muhajir's kindness towards me helped the Mashhad Assembly, to allow me to hold a class on "Some Answered Questions" for the youth. I received other invitations to speak at the Feasts and other gatherings.

Before Dr. Muhajir left Mashhad, he held a meeting for the youth and discussed our roles and responsibilities for the future of the Bahá'í community. He shared with us his goals and aspiration when he was young and asked us to develop our individual plan for our spiritual progress and teaching the cause of God. He told us that when he was young, he set a goal to visit all the Bahá'í Holy Places in Iran. He explained that the inherent spiritual energy that emanates from these spots impacts the lives of the pilgrims forever. He asked us to do the same, bearing in mind that some of these Holy Places would not last on this earth for long.

He concluded his talk with this statement; "On the onset of the Heroic Age, a young man from this region (Mulla Husayn), knelt in front of his Beloved - the Báb, and pledged his life to serving him. Let us hope that you will follow the footsteps of your spiritual ancestor and offer your services for the progress of His Faith. For the years to come, I always remembered this statement of faith and tried my best to follow this advice.

The wayward youth, who made the unlikely claim to be the new Manifestation of God, did not acquire any followers. He decided to go back to the Far East, hoping to gather a flock among those who had accepted the Faith through his teaching efforts. But his hopes vanished when no one in that region recognized his claim. Not many people have heard from him since then. This claim of vain glory reminded me of the story that beloved Mr. Bakhtavar told us regarding the misconceptions of the Covenant Breakers about their station: In the early period of Islamic Era, when the grandson of Muhammad and the second Imam of Shi’at, Imam Hassan was reigning the Shi’at Community, he lived a simple life and did not have many worldly possessions. The believers presented a cow to the Imam as a gift. The cow of Imam Hassan developed the habit of roaming in the neighborhood yards and gorging on what it could find. The Moslems tolerated the cow's transgressions because of their love and respect for their Imam.

Hard times fell on the Shei'at community, and Imam Hassan decided to sell his cow. The next day the cow, ignorant of changes in its fate, set off in its usual round, but anywhere it went, was faced with hostile owners, who mercilessly shooed it off. The cow did not comprehend that the bestowal of love and privileges that it had received was because of its connection to Imam Hassan. When that relationship ceased to exist, so did the status of that cow. Mr. Bakhtovar’s humorous metaphor was an analogy of the station of the believers who broke the Covenant. Bahá’u’lláh, as promised in the writings, would call upon the

cohorts on High to assist those who arise to serve Him. The privilege bestowed upon these servants is for their selfless endeavor to serve God. A covenant breaker who misconstrues his station with that of self-importance, assuredly loses confirmation from God. His action leads him to the path of self-destruction.

Some Precious Memories of Dr. Muhajir

Dr. Muhajir had a great admiration for Mulla Husayn. A man who lived his life with absolute devotion to the Cause of his Beloved. When the Báb addressed the Letters of the Living to be as “unrestrained as the wind," he obeyed. He did not marry and had no earthly possession when he was martyred at the age of 36.

Dr. Muhajir, years later told me that on one of his journeys to Mashhad, he asked permission to spend a few nights in the House of Bábíyyih. As a Hand of the Cause, his request was granted. He arrived late and went straight to Mulla Husayn's room. He felt Mulla Husayn’s spirit present. So, he whispered; “It is late, and I am too tired. So, I will go to bed now and will be having a heart to heart talk with you tomorrow”. Next morning, he was able to meditate and have a spiritual conversation with the Bábu'l Báb.

In one of my conversations with Dr. Muhajir, he told me how visiting the house of Mulla Husayn in Boshruyeh, inspired him to go pioneering. In this simple room where Mulla Husayn spent his youth, there was a wall hanging of his handwritten poetry, describing his longing to seek his Beloved:

‘As waves of the sea, life is an expression of motion

We cease to exist when we stand still!

Hearkening to the Call of the Beloved, I traverse this earthly realm to attain His Mystic Presence.’
(Author’s translation)

Soon after, the young Dr. Muhajir and his bride left for Indonesia and became the Knights of Bahá’u’lláh; a title granted by the Guardian to those who opened virgin territories to the

Faith.

Dr. Muhajir talked about some of his experiences in that exotic land. His first assignment was a government doctor in the remote villages of Indonesia. He remembered one time when he was traveling in a rowboat to see his patients. It was so hot that he used his straw hat repeatedly to fetch water from the river and pour it over his head. He then realized that the top of his hat had fallen apart, so he lost his only protection against the blazing sun. The boatmen had to navigate the river while fending off crocodiles with their oars. To have some distraction the young doctor averted his eyes to the branches of the trees, arching above their head. Then he saw snakes hanging from the trees with their mouths open.

I heard another story about Dr. Muhajir's days in the jungles of Indonesia. On one of his trips, he had a severe case of malaria but continued with his journey. On the way to visit a remote village in the jungle, he had to cross a river. While he was getting out of the water, he realized that his body was covered with leeches. Suffering from a high fever, he was too weak to rid himself of those blood-sucking creatures. As the leeches feasted on his blood, he lost consciousness. He woke up a while later, feeling the fever was gone and his energy renewed. When he got up, he noticed some dead leeches around him. By the grace of God, the leeches had sucked the infected blood out of his body and cured his ailment.

In 1957, Dr. Muhajir was appointed by the Guardian to the distinguished rank of the Hand of the Cause of God. He told me that he never envisioned leaving his pioneering post.

However, his function as a Hand was the protection and propagation of the Faith worldwide. Therefore, he had broadened his arena of service to all the territories around the world. The Beloved Guardian was aware of this devotion and called Dr. Muhajir a "true Pioneer," as the literal translation of "Muhajir" in Persian is

“Pioneer.”

A reporter once asked Sir Edmund Hillary why he climbed Mt. Everest. He answered because it was there. For Dr. Muhajir, pioneering and teaching seemed as Mt. Everest was, for Edmund Hillary. The ecstasy and exhilaration of doing what he loved did not need any justification. His mastery was his ability to tap into the inner souls of the youth like me and emanate his boundless spiritual energy within us; to empower us to follow his vision to the end. All throughout this process he was a hollow reed, transmitting the unconditional love of the Almighty, without leaving a trace of self, serving his Beloved with absolute humility and devotion; "just for the love of Him."

One of the unique attributes of this “Father of mass conversion”, was his compassion for the floundering people who were trying to undertake the noble task of reaching the hearts of strangers and transforming them through the love of Bahá’u’lláh. Sometimes when we were troubled about the inappropriate conduct of a Bahá’í, we asked Dr. Muhajir for his advice. He listened intently to our concerns and then described the goodly deeds and attributes of that person. He advised us to help the “poor soul” overcome his/her tests, and let the Assembly handle the situation. He was counseling us with such kindness and sincerity that we felt empowered to act constructively to resolve the conflict and concentrate on the task of joyful service.

During my training with Dr. Ghadimi, I learned to be a perfectionist and very disciplined. Dr. Muhajir helped me through the years to come, to be gentle with myself. He taught me to take the time to enjoy good food, have a walk in a park, have a good talk with friends, and even enjoy an occasional good movie. It created an essential balance in my life that prevented burnout and stress while I was in my pioneering posts.

His advice for the Bahá’ís was to follow what Bahá’u’lláh asked the believers to do in the Tablet of Hikmat; that, ‘Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow

richer than
its yesterday.’ Then, put this goal into practice one step at a time. The way the Master
admonished the Bahá’ís to act; "Little by little, day by day...”

THE TURNING POINT

After my years of training in public speaking and my studies at the University of Tehran, I
had a definite plan of action. I loved Persian literature and was considered by my peers to
be a young scholar. My aspiration was to pursue my doctorate and become a University
Professor. I did not see any obstacle to my level-headed plan, which won the approval and
admiration of my parents. Although my two elder brothers were residing in the United States,
I had no desire to join them. However, a few incidents drastically altered my plans. One was
the graduation speech of Mr. Faizi, which opened my eyes to new horizons. The other
entailed my soul awakening encounter with Dr. Muhajir and his larger than life perspective
of spiritual life. The excitement of a pioneering life and mass teaching enkindled a fire in my

inner being. I felt that there was once in a lifetime chance for me to live like the early believers
and follow their footsteps. It was at first just a dream, but the harsh realities in this period of
my life, made this dream become my utmost goal and desire.

The turning point of my life occurred during the last semester of my University study. I have
already graduated from Dr. Ghadimi’s class and could spend fulltime to prepare for my final
exams. I was still anxious about the incident with Dr. Khonsari and expected some retaliation
from him. The customary procedure for Dr. Mahadavi's oral exam was that he had his four
Associates, including Dr. Khonsari and beloved Dr. Davoudi present in the room, and
together they would ask questions and evaluate the poor student who had his/her turn to be
tortured in that chamber. As usual, the oral exam was during the Bahá’í Fast period. My
throat was dry, and my blood sugar was low. I entered the room and expected the worse.
Dr. Mahdavi turned his stern face to his Associates and asked them to give

their assessment
of my class performance. The gentle and friendly face of Dr. Davoudi was my only comfort.
Dr. Khonsari gave his opinion of me by mentioning that I was one of his best students, who
not only attended his class but took the time to attend his Arabic classes and studied books
which were not a part of the curriculum. I was astounded. I placed my hand on the picture
medallion of Abdu'l-Baha, under my lapel, and felt warmth going through my veins. I have
previously shared my concern with Dr. Davoudi, about Dr. Khonsari' s reaction to knowing
that I was a Bahá'í. I noticed my beloved friend leaning back in his chair, so not to be seen,
smiling with a wink. I could hardly control my response to this friendly gesture, but the
situation was so tense that I was quickly brought back to the "torture chamber."

The other associate gave a similar account of my performance which made the Professor
grin with amusement. When the first question was asked. I gathered my thoughts and started
to answer. Halfway through the answer, I noticed that Dr. Davoudi had moved his chair back
and gestured that my answer was wrong. I swiftly changed course and maneuvered to give
the correct answer. I saw a nod of approval from Dr. Davoudi. Upon completion, Dr. Mahdavi
inquired about the sudden change. I told him that I was giving a comparison for further
elaboration. My quick wit made everybody smile. I passed a significant crisis with my trust in
God and a little help from my beloved Bahá'í Professor.

I was not so lucky in what happened next. Sociology was one of the subjects which were
dreaded by everyone because of our Professor Dr. Sadighi, who was a bitter and extremely
obnoxious human being. He was a close associate of Dr. Mossadegh, during his short-lived
revolution. When the Shah was restored to power, Dr. Sadighi was arrested, tortured, and
imprisoned for a long time. When he got out, he was left with only half his stomach and was
in so much pain that he had become addicted to opium. His miserable life had one comforting

feature, which was expressed by using his class as a platform to air his political views and
to humiliate and ridicule students to their breaking point. He had a passionate hatred for the
Faith and did not spare the Bahá'ís of his vicious insults.

He had a routine of asking students to present their term paper on the life and work of
different philosophers. At at the mid of their delivery, he used to halt the presentation to lash
out the most obnoxious criticism at the presenter. One woman was so offended that she
dropped out of college due to the Professor's humiliation. She could not face the hundred or

so, students who heard Dr. Sadighi' s comments about her. When it was my turn, I took the
podium and started my speech. He stopped me cold, after the first paragraph and poured
out his criticisms about my statement about the time period when William James was living.
He thought that it was ludicrous to call this period oppressive, compared to the time when
Genghis Khan was making towers from the decapitated heads of the captured men. His
sarcastic comments were hilarious; I laughed as much as anybody else in the class, and it
amused him tremendously. Fortunately, the bell rang, and class was dismissed. The next
session I was ready to resume my presentation, but the professor decided to devote his time
to a new lesson. He was totally involved in his lecture when he heard a noise and stopped
dead. He was furious with the wisecracking that he heard and showered us with unpleasant
remarks about being worthless and undeserving of his lecture. He looked at his roster and
called me to finish my presentation. I said a prayer in my heart, gathered my strength and
delivered a 45 minutes presentation. During my talk, there was dead silence in the class and
no disputing remarks from the Professor. At the end of my presentation, the class was
dismissed. A month had passed, and it was time for the torture of another poor student at
the podium. The student was a tall, well-built man who, after a sarcastic remark from the
Professor, responded that he was so unnerved that he could not continue with

his presen-
tation. Dr. Sadighi was aghast at his statement. He searched for me in the class and asked me to stand up. Then he said; “Look at her size and then look at yours; if she could deliver her talk so well, you should not have any problem, being twice her size!” This was the closest to any semblance of a compliment ever uttered by this bitter man.

The next semester we were relieved to have a new Sociology Professor who was Dr. Sadighi’s Associate. I was looking forward to having Dr. Rasekh as my Professor since he was a distinguished Bahá’í and was well respected in the community. Dr. Rasekh was a gentleman with a quiet and reserved disposition. I did not have any previous personal contact with him except sitting in his lectures. His calm and professional demeanor was well liked and respected by his students. His wife, Dr. Rasekh was also my Psychology Professor. She was favored by the Empress for her knowledge in child psychology and was appointed as the Educational Advisor and consultant for the Crown Prince and his royal siblings. The reputation of this scholarly couple was so impeccable that it earned respect from other members of the faculty. Dr. Sadighi had a dislike for his Associate, Dr. Rasekh and his success in society. He used to make snarling remarks about Dr. Rasekh in class, and of course, his being a Bahá’í was a good excuse for justifying his dislike.

In the last semester of my BSC Degree, as I have already graduated from Dr. Ghadimi’ s class, I had more time to study for my college courses. Therefore, I was sure that graduating as a Summa Cum Laude, was within my reach. I was planning to take my entrance exam for the graduate school in the summer and start my Master’s Degree in Psychology by the Fall Semester. My last test was in Sociology. Dr. Rasekh told the class that he was attending a seminar in Switzerland and since he would be away, he would ask Dr. Sadighi to administer the test. I was confident that I would be able to gain a high score in this class. On the day of

the exam, we took our seats and got ready to start the test. Dr. Sadighis, instead of the
customary roll call before the test, called out every other name from the list. I happened to
be one of them. He asked us to stand up, gather our belongings and leave the class. He
explained that by the written directives of Dr. Rasekh, all of us were deprived of our rights to

take the test. We were to report back at the end of the summer to take the test. This was the
usual time that repeat students were given a second chance to make- up for their failing
grades. The shock wave in the class was indescribable. This action automatically deprived
us of participating in the graduation ceremony or sit for the Graduate Entrance Exam. Our
future was a house of cards crumbled before our eyes. When some of the braver students
raised the question for the reason of this deprivation, Dr. Sadighi curtly answered that there
had been no explanation given by Dr. Rasekh, and we could take it up with him at the end
of summer. The anger and frustration were directed at Dr. Rasekh. I was personally hurt and
confused of this unjust action of a Bahá'í.

I saw my classmates graduating and starting their professional lives or passing their
Graduate Entrance Exam. I found myself hopelessly lost in a maze of uncertainty and indeci-
sion. These painful few months passed. The time for the repeat test arrived. A group of
despondent students gathered in the hall and grudgingly took what was a straightforward
test. No one could look at Dr. Rasekh in case he would notice the hurt and anger, causing
further retaliation. When I got out of the class, I saw a few students approaching the
Professor. They politely asked the reason for this atrocity. A look of shock and disbelief
appeared on Dr. Rasekh' s face. He responded that he did not give such directives. In fact,
he was surprised by noticing such a large number of students taking the repeat test. I could
see the pain and agony on his face for what had been done by his deceitful colleague, in his
name. He uttered words of apology and sympathy for such a misunderstanding. He

was
regretful for not being present during the Summer to remedy the situation. He told us that
following an investigation, he was going to put us on the graduating list of the last Spring
that at least it would not affect our overall performance. But of course, it was too late to do
anything else. Dr. Sadighi had succeeded to stab him in the back, and we paid the price.

As it showed in the future, the miserable act of this hateful person did not affect Dr. Rakesh's
progress. Dr. Rasekh went on to become the Executive Director of Social and Economic
Planning Department of Iran, which was one of the most influential positions in the country.
He was later, appointed by the Universal House of Justice, as a member of the Continental
Board of Counselors.

In the last tumultuous year of unrest, before his overthrow, the Shah was desperately trying
to appease the progressive revolutionaries. He invited the leaders to meet with him and
offered Dr. Sadighi to be his Prime Minister. Dr. Sadighi refused and shortly after, died, still
bitter and unhappy.

After Graduation, I faced a trying time of uncertainty and frustration. Dr. Sadeghi's action of
depriving me of timely graduation had a rippling effect. It caused me to miss the deadline for
taking the Graduate Entrance Exam, thus denying me of entering the Master's Degree
Program. I tried to get a job in a public sector, but as I had to state my religion as Moslem,
which I would not do, I was sure that my application would be outright rejection. I felt useless,
rejected, and unwanted in my country because of my belief. A few Bahá'í owned companies
that employed most of the Bahá'ís were in the production industry and did not have a position
that suited my qualifications.

The gloom intensified when my parents decided to go through a separation, I was left to take
over the role and responsibilities of my father. I felt that I was living in a nightmare, longing
to wake up. The only consolation was my weekly class with Mr. Ishragh-Khavari.

It was said
that the Beloved Guardian called him “the Philosopher of the East; a sage
that there will be
no other like him in the Bahá’í Era.” Mr. Ishragh- Kahvari, due to poor
health, was not holding
any regular classes. However, when Dr. Ghadimi asked him to have a deepening
class for
the graduates of his course, Mr. Ishragh- Khavari made an exception and agreed.
We had
the bounty of having him exclusively for our group. We were able to delve into
the depth of
the ocean of the Bahá’í writings, having this savant as our guide. What we
encountered was
unequal to any other learning experience I have had before. In Speech Class we
read the
Writings, now we could study them in depth, and discover the hidden treasures
gleaming in
each verse.

Mr. Ishragh-Khavari was in the same Islamic Clerical School as Mr. Alavi. They
had a friendly
rivalry with each other. It was told that Mr. Ishragh-Khavari lightheartedly
said that if Mr. Alavi
became a Bahá’í, he would join him in this "misadventure." When the former
learned that
the latter had become a Bahá’í, he had no choice but to investigate this
unbelievable
happening, and he too became a Bahá’í. Mr. Isragh-Khavari then lost his
teaching position
in the clerical school and was ostracized by his former colleagues. Since then
he had
devoted his life and talents to the Faith. He developed volumes of in-depth
study of the
Bahá’í writings based on painstakingly lengthy and comprehensive research.
His specialized
field was a compilation of Bahá’í writings based on specific topics. Then
systematically
researching references to the names, terminologies, and quotations mentioned in
the Tablet.
His research product was an encyclopedia revolving around that Tablet. He not
only cited
the literary references to each topic but also expanded on their historical and
religious
connotations. He then quoted other explanations and interpretations of the same
theme from
any other tablets by the Central Figures of the Faith. His research on the Book
of Certitude

alone constitutes six volumes of cross-references.

Mr. Ishragh-Khavari was keenly aware of the Islamic opposition, and their efforts in misinforming the public about the tenets of the Faith. He followed Abul-Faza'el's undertaking to write weighty answers to abate the ills, which was created by their accusations. His writ-ings and face to face meetings with the representatives of this group was a force to be reckoned with. It worked as a deterrent to their effort to harm the Faith. His mastery of the Arabic language and Islamic laws and tradition helped to compile documents on most of the issues that needed explicit and forceful repudiation. His existence was a threat to the enemies of the Faith, and therefore his life was in constant danger of being extinguished by their hands.

When I had the privilege of knowing this sage, he was in his late sixties, suffering from a serious heart ailment and was legally blind. However, none of these problems had a diminishing effect on his vibrant and compelling spirit. It was difficult for such a savant who was intellectually in another plateau compared to the rest of us, to deal with a group of stumbling youth who were trying to grasp the depth of his lessons. But our efforts were appreciated, and his sense of humor kept us hopeful. I was fortunate to have basic knowledge of the Arabic language and Philosophy to show some signs of comprehension.

He showed his satisfaction by jokingly mentioning that I was one of the few who showed some signs of comprehension. My connection with him was that of an apprentice to the Maestro. I was aware that this motherlode of knowledge would not be with us for long, and I treasured this fragile and ephemeral connection while it lasted.

Mr. Ishragh-Khavari's class

Front row: Left to Right: 2nd; Shahla Behroozi,3rd: Behin Paravarpisheh, Center; Mr. Ishragh- Khavari. Back row: 3rd from right; Hashem Farnoosh.

That year of forced "sabbatical," gave me an ample time to meditate on the

real purpose of
life. I knew that I had done my best to acquire knowledge and understanding of the Faith.
However, I also realized that while it was comforting to live in this secure environment, it
would not be fulfilling for my soul. I realized that I had to take the next step and put my
knowledge into action, to break the cage of confinement and soar in the unknown field of
pioneering. That was what expected of me, and that was what I had to accomplish. The more
I thought, the less I was satisfied with my life. I talked to my mother about it, and she agreed
that together, we move to Greece to start a new life there.

‘O OFFSPRING OF DUST!
Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself of everlasting
rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the dust-heap of a mortal world. Up
from thy prison ascend unto the glorious meads above, and from thy mortal cage
wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless.’
(Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

THE HOLY LAND

In January 1967, we received our invitation to go for the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My
mother and I chose this opportunity to take a tour of Europe and visit Greece, in preparation
for our upcoming pioneering.

As a young girl, when I was reading the “Memoirs of Dr. Afroukhteh,” I imagined traveling
through time and being in the presence of Abdu’l-Baha. Now being in Israel, I had the
opportunity to walk the earth, blessed by his footsteps and breath the air which was perfumed
by his presence. Attaining his pleasure was my heart desire. He had always been my spiritual
father and the Perfect Exemplar. Now I had the blessing of praying at his Shrine to guide me
on my path of service. During the past year, I used to go to a quiet room in my house, facing
His picture, with tearful eyes, beseeching Him to help me to achieve God's pleasure. Now
he had given me the gift of paying homage to his Father and also the blessing of being in

the most Potent Blessed Spot, where every prayful soul faced to utter his/her obligatory
prayer. I was in a state of ecstasy, as I was attaining my heart's desire to offer my pledge of
sacrifice at His threshold.

The beloved Guardian likened the heart of a pilgrim to a sponge. The pilgrim may absorb
an ocean or a thimbleful from this spiritual experience. If the heart is full, it will quench the
thirst of that soul for years to come. There were some, whose hearts were set on fire after
their pilgrimage and those whom this blessing had little effect on their spiritual progress.
I have had the blessing of going on pilgrimage six more times since then, and each one had
a unique impact on my life. My first one was an invigorating ecstasy for this youth to reach
the threshold of her Beloved.

The newly established Universal House of Justice still observed the tradition set by the
beloved Guardian for the Pilgrimage. Nine eastern and nine western Pilgrims were invited
for nine days to be the guests of the House of Justice in the Holy Land.

The Eastern Pilgrims House was at the entrance to the Garden Gate of the Shrine of the
Báb. The cypress trees in the garden brought back the memory of these magnificent trees
famous in Shiraz, the birthplace of the Báb. The Eastern Pilgrims House was where the
Master and later, the beloved Guardian met with the all the pilgrims. The air was perfumed
with the memories of their presence. From the balcony of this house, Abdu'l-Baha revealed
one of his Tablets. Standing on that blessed spot was an electrifying experience. There, on
the wall of the receiving parlor, hung a portrait of the Master. We were told that the artist
masterfully captured the likeness of the beloved. His powerful but gentle gaze followed the
beholders as they moved.

Haifa Pilgrim House.

‘Soon after the entombment of the remains of the Báb, one of the believers from ‘Ishqábád, Mírzá Ja‘far
Rahmání, begged ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to allow him to build a Pilgrim House in

the precincts of the Shrine for the
convenience of visiting pilgrims. The request was granted, and this believer personally supervised the
construction work and paid for all expenses.

“During the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, many meetings were held in His Presence with the pilgrims and
members of the local community. Later, when Shoghi Effendi became Guardian, he too met the assembled
friends and talked to them in this Pilgrim House before leading them in prayer when visiting the Shrines of
the Báb and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.’

~~ Visiting Bahá’í Holy Places;
(2003) by Bahá’í World Centre

The Western Pilgrims, who resided in the Western Pilgrims House, joined us for the formal
meals which were prepared by the same staff who served the beloved Guardian. We had
the bounty of having lunch each day with a member of the Universal House of Justice and
each dinner with one of the residing Hands of the Cause of God.

For the Persian Bahá’ís who had experienced the loss of beloved Shoghi Effendi, the
Guardian who has protected them from the winds of persecution and sedition, seeing these
vibrant and mostly young members of the Universal House of Justice was exhilarating.
Although due to language barriers we were not able to communicate directly with some of
them, their sheer presence was enough to generate a cohesive and invincible bond between
us.

Dr. Hakim was the oldest member of the House. As a longtime companion of the Guardian,
he shared precious memories of him during our mealtime visits.

Our guide was Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Furutan. He was one of the most beloved and
popular Hands among the Iranian Bahá’ís. His charming personality, his fantastic sense of
humor, his anecdotes, his unmatched knowledge of the Holy Places and history of the Faith,
made the pilgrimage a rich, happy, and loving experience. He was able to relate to each
pilgrim whether young or old and guide us to follow the proper protocol while visiting the Holy

Places.

Mr. Furutan asked the Pilgrims to always silently meditate when entering the garden path to the Shrines, remembering the names of those who had requested prayers on their behalf. One early morning, I dreamed of a beloved Bahá'í, who I did not know personally. He had served as the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly for years and had passed away recently. In my dream, he was standing by my door, asking me to get up and join him to go to the Shrine of the Báb. I woke up, got ready and joined the group for my visit to the Shrine of the Báb. On the garden path, I repeated this gentleman's name and offered a prayer for him at the Shrine. When Mr. Furutan came for the morning session, I told him about my dream. He relayed to me that this dear Bahá'í has been longing to come for pilgrimage. However, as an Iranian Army officer, he was not able to travel to Israel. After his retirement last year, he was planning his pilgrimage when he passed away. Now, he had come to your dream that you make the pilgrimage for him.

One of the most unforgettable events of this journey was the night that we spent at the Mansion of Bahji. Ethereal, could be the description of what I felt during this encounter. We were going to spend a night in the abode of the Manifestation of God. From the great hall, we could see the room of Bahá'u'lláh and felt his presence encompassing the surroundings. It was overwhelming for some and awe-inspiring for others.

The Guardian designated a room to Abu'l-Faza?el. A larger than life portrait of this great teacher and a library of his manuscripts dominated the room. There was a single bed in the room, and I decided that I would spend my night in that room. I had spent weeks reading his books, so I felt a spiritual bond that made us connect beyond the material and tangible world of existence.

Late into the night, I quietly found my way to the room of Bahá'u'lláh. There, it laid a simple white bed where the Beloved Ascended from this ephemeral world to the Abha

Kingdom. A
pair of slippers were placed beside his bed. An awesome feeling came over me that if I
touched his slippers, I would cease to exist. The experience was not dissimilar to that of the
last moments on earth when one knows that the end is in sight. I noticed some red rose
petals inside the slippers. I gently touched a petal and felt a surge of pure white light going
through my veins. Then, I chanted Tablet of Ahmad. A river of tears flowed down my face, I
was so immersed in my meditation that I did not notice the presence of another pilgrim in
this room. I was completely alone with the greatest power in the universe. Reminiscing about
the sufferings that the Blessed Beauty had endured while in this desolate mansion.
Recounting the majestic power which had emanated from his words when the Mouthpiece
of God addressed Professor Browne in this same room. It revealed to me that the essence
of a lover's life is to endure suffering in His path. That the elixir of everlasting life is clinging
to the hem of the robe of His grace, and that the true lover should never be dismayed, nor
lose hope when the winds of tests are blowing. That I was, but a mere instrument for the
promotion of His Cause on this earth. In my inner being I recited His assurance for His
servants:

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever
will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse
on high and a company of Our favoured angels.

~ Baha’u’llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992
edition) pp. 38-39. http://reference.bahai.org

I found the purpose of my life on this earth that night when I was alone with my Beloved.

When visiting the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and Mansion of Bahji, Mr. Faizi was our guide. During
this time, a spiritual bond developed between the two of us. I was overwhelmed by
indescribable emotions, and Mr. Faizi intuitively tapped into this whirlwind of emotion and
offered me a balming affection. When we entered the Shrine, Mr. Faizi chanted the verse of

"Ya Elaha'l Mostaqas" nine times, a supplication which was revealed by the Báb. Then, he proceeded with the Tablet of Visitation. I knew that God was answering my prayers at that sacred threshold. Later, I had the rare privilege of talking to Mr. Faizi alone. Describing my plans for pioneering and my doubts about my mother's wholehearted commitment. Mr. Faizi was so pleased that he spoke to my mother and uttered words of praise and encouragement for my lofty aspiration. He then went on to share this news with the Persian members of the House. I had the exhilarating experience of discussing these plans with Mr. Nakhjavani and Mr. Fatheazam. They came to know me personally, and this rapport impacted the future events of my Bahá'í life.

This period of ecstasy was drawing to a close. The ninth day was upon us, and it was time to bid farewell to the Holy Land. The last night of our stay was exceptional. As the Bahá'ís of the Holy Land and the Pilgrims accompanied the Hands and members of the House to the Shrines. Late into the night, after completing our homage to the Shrine of the Báb, we

gathered in the Shrine of Abdu'l-Baha. There was absolute silence; then a most heavenly voice chanted the Tablet of Visitation. At the beginning of this Tablet, Abdu'l-Baha indicates that chanting this Tablet has the effect of being in His presence and meeting Him. This was the only occasion in my life that I had a vision of Abdu'l-Baha, standing on the roof of the Most Great Prison, with tears running down his face, chanting. I was overwhelmed with exhilarating emotions. When the chanting was over, and we left the Shrine, I found out that my beloved Mr. Faizi chanted that prayer.

I was always envious of those pure souls who have had the privilege of dreaming of the Central Figures of the Faith, as I never had. The vision of Abdu'l-Baha was the one and only extraordinary experience of my life. It was an answer to my heart's desire. All those past years, while reading the memoir of Dr. Afrookhteh, I prayed to offer my life

for a glimpse at
Abdu'l-Baha. He responded to my supplications that evening. Now, it was time for me to
fulfill my pledge.

From Israel, my mother and I set out to visit our future pioneering post, Greece. We had the
address of the only Persian pioneers in Athens. A young couple with two small children. In
1967 pioneering in Greece had a lot a common with pioneering in the Arab Emirates. The
pioneers were not allowed to teach the Faith, but they were free to practice their religion.
This young couple who knew little of the Greek language, could not communicate with their
neighbors and therefore, could not establish any friendship with the local community. As
there were no working opportunities for foreigners, they were living on their small savings
which demanded real material sacrifice for their young family. The generous hospitality of
this precious couple was heartwarming. Although we had a hotel reservation, they asked us
to spend the night with them. We had the most tender moments of friendship with our
newfound kindred in spirit. When we left them, we promised to see them soon. However,
this promise never materialized. Years later I heard that they were still living in Greece. Their
dedication and perseverance led to their success in serving as members of the Bahá'í
Institutions, in addition to finding employment with the Iranian Embassy. God showers His
Confirmation on those who rise and persevere to serve Him.

Our journey was culminated by paying homage to the resting place of the beloved Guardian
in London. We walked through a misty path which was lined with magnificent trees. There
stood the majestic testament to the embodiment of unconditional love and absolute
detachment of our Faith. The monument of the beloved Guardian, as described by Ruhiyyih
Khanum:

'A single marble column, crowned by a Corinthian capital, surmounted by a globe, the
map of Africa facing forward - for had not the victories won in Africa brought

him the
greatest joy during that last year of his life? - and on this globe, is a large gilded
bronze eagle, a reproduction of a beautiful Japanese sculpture of an eagle which he
greatly admired and which he had placed in his own room. No better emblem than
this symbol of victory could have been found for the resting-place of him who had won
so many victories as he led the hosts of Bahá'u'lláh's followers on their ceaseless
conquests throughout the five continents of the world.’
https://bahai-library.com/khanum_guardian_bahai_faith&chapter=14

The grave of the Guardian, the one who created the magnificent Bahá’í monuments and
gardens on Mt. Carmel, was standing alone far from his beloved Holy Land. It manifested
the true meaning of his love and selfless service. Now, it was time for me to follow his
example and dedicate myself to the path of serving my Beloved Faith. The time for action!

RETURN

On our return to Iran, we were set to sell all our belongings and leave for Greece. Announcing
this news was not welcomed by my family. There was a concerted effort to work out a
reconciliation with my parents. I had no objection to this action and welcomed the chance to
leave independently for my pioneering post.

The Naw-Ruz festivity was upon us. As the traditional Persian New Year, my brother who
was not a Bahá’í invited all the extended family for the Naw-Ruz gathering. I arrived late,
carrying a keychain that I bought in Israel. It was a brass medallion with the engraving of the
Shrine of the Báb. One of my relatives who was like a father to me noticed it in my hand and
asked to have a look. I handed it to him, explaining what it was. He curtly threw it back at
me. It landed on the floor. I heard him say; get this filthy thing, I do not want to touch it. It is
defiling my hand. I was in total shock, I slowly got up, picked it up, and said; “You should be
honored to have the bounty of holding this in your hand.” Everyone noticed the encounter
with shock. I left the room in complete silence. My brother took me to a room

and started to
scold me for being so impolite and rude to his guests. I told him that I would not allow anyone
to insult my religion. If he were upset with my conduct, I would gladly leave his house. I
walked into the dark and cold street. I did not take my purse or jacket with me. Therefore, I
could not take a taxi. I felt alone and rejected. I was aware that it was difficult for people
around me to understand my love and the extent of my conviction. My family was usually
perplexed by the unconventional demonstration of my faith. My mother never accepted, nor
showed any desire to understand. My father usually showed respect for my undying devotion
but had to fend off the objection of the rest of the family. I, therefore, was alone and fiercely
protective of my spiritual identity. I heard my father calling me from behind. He was short of
breath. He told me that he had just arrived and heard what happened and had come to find
me. We walked together; it was one of those rare occasions that he was lost for words. So,
he did the best thing that he could by keeping his silence and to listen to my side of the story.
I was hurting and choking on my emotions. I could see his pain in seeing me so upset. By
his being with me and listening to me, he gave me the rare gift of affirming the conviction of
my faith. I suspect that he was feeling guilty for not being there to protect his girl from
adversity. It was a turning point for him to make up his mind and come back to our house.
He told me that he did not think my mother was interested in leaving Iran. It was just a pie in
the sky, an idea to keep me happy. But he promised that he would do his best for me to go
alone to a country where a young girl could go and continue her studies. He did not ask me
to go back to my brother’s house. He handed me my jacket and some cash for a taxi. Then
saw me off and did not go back to the party either.

The next few months were full of excitement for me. I contacted the Pioneering Committee
of Iran and started corresponding with different countries and individual pioneers. I was

reading and talking about them all the time while waiting for a response that never came.

I regularly wrote to Mr. Faizi - I still treasure the collection of his letters and the gifts of calligraphies that he sent me during these trying times. They were like crystal clear water quenching my thirsty spirit. He wrote in one letter how pleased he was to see a young soul willing to dedicate her life to her faith. Because usually, people who are in the winter of their life would decide to be the ones to offer their service to reap the rewards in the next world - as the saying goes: “offering spilled oil to ignite the lamp in the Muslim shrine.”

In another letter, he counseled me to be patient and not to insist on what God may not desire. However, he was always encouraging me to persevere. In one letter, he showered his affection as a father, addressing me genuinely as his daughter, assuring me of special prayers at the Shrines. In another time, he wrote that he had just come back from the Shrine, after especially praying for the success of my endeavor. These correspondences sustained my courage to persevere and stay on course.

In this period, I consulted with Dr. Muhajir, about my options for pioneering. He always treated me with affection as a friend, helping me to stay on course. He shared with me the plan of the Universal House of Justice, which called upon the youth to study in the Goal Countries of the Nine-Year Plan. Dr. Muhajir recommended that I explore the possibilities of pioneering to the Philippines, as it was the country that he and his family were residing. So, when he found out that I was planning to go to the Intercontinental Conference in New Delhi, he suggested that since Mrs. Muhajir would be attending, I should take my documents and ask for her help for my university application. This would enable me then to become a student pioneer in the Goal country of the Philippines. This plan was quite agreeable to my father, who valued higher education. My father told me that he could not think of me going to a

remote country and just be a pioneer without any plan for my future. But he would do his best to support me if I would continue my education. I was happy to find a way to achieve my heart's desire with the blessing of my parents and Dr. Muhajir. I started the preparation for my trip to India.

The Intercontinental Conference of India

The India Conference was my first exposure to the sphere of mass conversion and its impact on the Bahá'í Community at large. It was held in the gardens of the Bahá'í Center in New Delhi. In the Eastern tradition, a large tent was set up which provided seating for thousands of participants. The radiant faces of Indian Bahá'ís with their colorful costumes which represented their region were like a sea of colorful flowers decorating that massive tent. Mr. Faizi represented the House of Justice. The most entertaining event was the singing of the students of Panchgani Bahá'í School. The Olinga children were among those that brought applause from the audience. Two of these children were murdered with Mr. and Mrs. Olinga in Uganda years later.

I met Mrs. Muhajir briefly and gave my transcript to her. Gisu, the precious little daughter of the Muhajirs, was with her mother. It was the only time that I had a chance to meet Dr. Muhajir's family. It helped me to have a point of reference in the years to come, to understand the intense love and devotion that he had for his family.

This Conference gave me a chance to witness the impact of mass conversion on the Bahá'í world community. It prepared me for my future endeavors in the mass conversion arena of service.

MAZANDARAN

The following summer after returning to Iran, I had the joy and privilege of visiting the "Fort of Shaykh Tbarsi." The Youth Committee had asked me to make a consolidation trip to Mazandaran and hold classes for the youth. This time I went alone. I had the joy of visiting

friends from the past and have an uneventful and enjoyable trip, fulfilling my itinerary with
ease. I was the guest of a wonderful family, who lived a simple and quiet life in a house
among citrus orchards. The Fort was in a remote area of Mazandaran. There was no road.
Therefore, we had to travel for miles on foot. As it was still a Moslem Shrine, extreme caution
was observed to not attracting the attention of the villagers. We wore chadors, and I left the
talking to my companions lest my Tehrani accent gave us away.

We arrived at that blessed spot, where the Báb designated its circumference as a
consecrated ground. Amidst the jeering of villagers who noticed our intentions, I knelt by the
shrine of Tbarsi and paid my respect to the burial site of beloved Mulla Husayn. I dug my
hand deep into that cool and dry soil and took a handful which I treasured and carried halfway
across the world. I dedicated this consecrated soil to be placed at the future temple of the
Philippines - as Dr. Muhajir asked me to do so. I sat in that humble shrine and felt the spirit
of Mulla Husayn, Quddus and the Bábis who lived and gave their lives in that Fort.

I cried remembering Nabil's Narratives description of the last moments of the Báb'u'l- Báb's
life:

‘I have heard the following account from Mulla Sadiq and Mulla Mirza Muhammad-i-Furughi:
"We were among those who had remained in the fort with Quddus. As soon as Mulla Husayn,
who seemed to have lost consciousness, was brought in, we were ordered to retire. 'Leave
me alone with him,' were the words of Quddus as he bade Mirza Muhammad-Baqir close
the door and refuse admittance to anyone desiring to see him. 'There are certain confidential
matters which I desire him alone to know.' We were amazed a few moments later when we
heard the voice of Mulla Husayn replying to questions from Quddus. For two hours, they
continued to converse with each other. We were surprised to see Mirza Muhammad-Baqir
so greatly agitated. 'I was watching Quddus,' he subsequently informed us,

'through a fissure
in the door. As soon as he called his name, I saw Mulla Husayn arise and seat himself, in
his customary manner, on bended knees beside him. With bowed head and downcast eyes,
he listened to every word that fell from the lips of Quddus and answered his questions. "You
have hastened the hour of your departure," I was able to hear Quddus remark, "and have
abandoned me to the mercy of my foes. Please, God, I will ere long join you and taste the

sweetness of heaven's ineffable delights." I was able to gather the following words uttered
by Mulla Husayn: "May my life be a ransom for you. Are you well pleased with me?"

A long time elapsed before Quddus bade Mirza Muhammad-Baqir open the door and admit
his companions. “I have bidden my last farewell to him,” he said, as we entered the room.
“Things which previously I deemed it unallowable to utter I have now shared with him.” We
found on our arrival that Mulla Husayn had expired. A faint smile still lingered upon his face.
Such was the peacefulness of his countenance that he seemed to have fallen asleep.
Quddus attended to his burial, clothed him in his own shirt, and gave instructions to lay him
to rest to the south of, and adjoining, the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi. “Well is it with you to
have remained to your last hour faithful to the Covenant of God,” he said, as he laid a parting
kiss upon his eyes and forehead. “I pray God to grant that no division ever be caused
between you and me.” He spoke with such poignancy that the seven companions who were
standing beside him wept profusely, and wished they had been sacrificed in his stead.
Quddus, with his own hands, laid the body in the tomb, and cautioned those who were
standing near him to maintain secrecy regarding the spot which served as his resting place,
and to conceal it even from their companions. He afterwards instructed them to inter the
bodies of the thirty-six martyrs who had fallen in the course of that engagement in one and
the same grave on the northern side of the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi. 'Let the

loved ones of
God,' he was heard to remark as he consigned them to their tomb, 'take heed of the example
of these martyrs of our Faith. Let them in life be and remain as united as these are now in
death.'

~~ Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers, page 381
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

I humbly knelt at that blessed spot and communed with my spiritual hero, asking him to help
me to be worthy of the love that we both shared for our Beloved Faith.

THE JOURNEY

'Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself
of everlasting rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the
dust-heap of a mortal world. Up from thy prison ascend unto the glorious
meads above, and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise
of the Placeless.'

(Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

The events of the past year patterned my future life. A seed had been planted in my heart
and it had grown into a sapling. My faith was the sunshine which brought it to fruition. I had
no misconception of my capacity and no sense of egotistic pride or self-importance. What I
believed was that I should follow His Command so that His Confirmation would be bestowed
upon me. I was convinced that I would be able to handle any challenges in a pioneering post
and overcome any barriers that would hinder progress towards my goal. I was not aware

that my parents did not share this view with me. Although they agreed to my plan and gave
me their blessings, in private, they considered my plan a youthful whim which would go away
with time. This was not out of viciousness, but out of concern from overprotective parents
for their daughter.

Although I thought that there was no discrimination in my family between girls and boys, my
mother, due to her upbringing, had a different standard for me than for my brothers.
Therefore, as a girl, I was dictated to either join my brothers who lived in

the States or marry
and have my husband’s protection. I had no intention to go to the States, which was not a
pioneering post, neither did I believe that I should marry a man just for the sake of going
away with him. I felt that it was a step in the wrong direction, as I was aware of the stress of
the pioneering life, and its effect on a marriage of convenience. Also, my path had not
crossed with a man who had warmed my heart and shared my desire for pioneering.

These undercurrent events created a period of vain hope and disappointment for me. I kept
waiting for a response from Mrs. Muhajir but heard nothing. In the Fall of that year, the new
Post Graduate Department of Educational Sciences invited students for the Graduate
Entrance Exam. My mother insisted that I take the test. I responded that I was expecting any
time to leave for the Philippines. We got into a heated discussion, then she revealed what
she really felt about my going to a far and strange island, and her fears of what could happen
to me there. She told me that she and my father both shared the same concern, so they
concealed letters addressed to me regarding pioneering. They also destroyed some. To
prove her point, my mother pulled out a letter from her pocket from the Philippines which
contained my admission to the University of the Philippines. She handed it to me and told
me now it is the time to come down from the cloud, settle down and start my real life in Iran.

I was shaken and enraged by what I considered to have been a senseless betrayal. In
despair, I went to my meditation room with my favorite picture of the Master. At that intense
moment, I was not able to pray or meditate, I just cried my heart out and repeatedly asked
Why! Why!

I knew that Bahá’u’lláh had ordained the station of divine authority for parents, and
commanded children to obey their parents as they obey God. Children were to have the
permission and blessing of one's parents for every endeavor in their life. Now, it became

apparent to me why there was only one exception, that of pioneering. God ordained
parents to put His work ahead of what they thought logically sound for their children. As
God’s confirmations goes beyond logical consequences.

Although pioneers may suffer, or sacrifice their life in this path, they will achieve an
unfathomable spiritual station. That is why the Guardian of the Faith ordained that a
pioneer who dies in the pioneering path, shall have the station of a Martyr. This is the
universal principle of sacrifice; of enduring suffering and sometimes death, to be a part of
the greatest force in the universe, the Cohorts on High.

In those agonizing moments, I adopted a new way to fight back. It was not a healthy attitude,
but that was all I could do; to show a passive resistance. I decided to set myself up for failure.
I paid the fee for my graduate entrance exam and took the test without any preparation. So,
I responded to some questions accurately and the rest without any thoughts. Then I
submitted my paper ahead of the allotted time and left the examination hall. I was quite sure
that I had failed miserably. I asked my mother to be present when I called the Institute to get
the result of my test. The clerk checked the record and said, congratulation you just made it.
I was speechless; my mother was ecstatic. I was told that the Director wanted to have a
follow-up interview with me. At the appointed time, I met with this young doctor who had a
weekly National Radio Broadcast, which was a favorite program of young people like me.

The Director, after reviewing my test paper wanted to see me personally to discuss the
inconsistent pattern of my responses to the test questions. Some were answered in depth
and were scholarly, and the rest was done haphazardly. When the result was brought to his
attention, he decided to review my undergraduate manuscript. He was impressed that I
received an "A" from Dr. Mahdavi, since, although he was an honor student, he only got a
"B" for the same course. He had never heard that Dr. Mahdavi has given an "A"

to any
student before. So, he concluded that maybe I felt sick that day and deserved a second
chance. Therefore, he approved my admission as a conditional student. I was impressed by
his frankness and sense of fairness. So, I went along with his recommendation. I started the
program half heatedly and in semi seclusion. As all my classmates were educators, who had
taken this course for their professional advancement, and I was the only one who had no
job. It gave them the impression that something was wrong with me. I also had no interest
in pursuing the field of education for my future career and had little in common with the rest
of the class. The only subject that interested me was “Education and Mass Media," which
was taught by the same doctor. One of my assignments was writing a paper on the symbolic
interpretation of a movie called the “Snake Pit.” I elaborated on the frame of mind of the
character who was a young schizophrenic patient in a mental ward. To everyone’s
amazement, the professor praised my analytic approach demonstrated in my paper. He
mentioned that it was beyond the level of that class, thus helping me gain respect from my
classmates. The Director called me to his office and told me that he was right in his initial
assessment of my academic ability. He asked me to be his Intern and assigned me to work
on a project for the National Broadcasting Agency. He promised it would pave the way for
my future career in that field. I took the position and had so much fun. What I learned during
that short period, helped me a great deal in my professional life and serving the Faith.

I took unusual steps in pursuing my goal of pioneering. While my mother was convinced that
I had given up on my childish dreams, I broadened my network of friends to help in changing
my parents' minds. I had regular communication with Mr. Faizi, and although he was
pessimistic, he advised me to be patient and not to insist on what God may have ordained

for me. He, like a kind father, felt my pains and prayed for me at the Shrines.

He never
stopped writing to me even when he was traveling in different parts of the world. I was a
regular “customer” of the Pioneering Committee of Iran. In one of my negotiation attempts
with my parents, when they had insisted that they were not going to support me financially,
I asked that if I did not need their financial backing whether they would permit me to go. They
said yes. I rushed to the Pioneering Committee to ask for their sponsorship. They sighed
and told me that my parents just called and stated that they would not allow me to leave Iran.
I was humiliated and despondent. Years later, when I was in Africa, in my conversation with
Miss Gooran, who used to be the Secretary of the Committee, she told me how their hearts
bled to see me suffering from all these conflicting and humiliating statements of my parents,
and how they felt utterly hopeless in giving me a helping hand. Their policy was not to
alienate parents by sending their children to a pioneering field when they did not wish for
that to happen.

During the Fasting period of 1968, Dr. Muhajir made a visit to Tehran. I went to see him. As
usual, he acted as a long-life friend. He inquired after my pioneering plans. I briefly told him
about my parent's objection and pleaded with him to make a short visit to our house and talk
to my parents. Now, when I think about it, I can imagine the degree of selflessness and
compassion of this precious Hand of the Cause of God, when he accepted my invitation. As
the norm dictated the believers to pay homage to the Hands, not the other way around. He
jokingly told me that he would hope that I was not putting him in an awkward position. I
assured him that my parents would respect his presence. We planned the next day, to
accompany him to my house. That evening, when I told my parents about this visit, my father
agreed, but my mother vehemently objected. My father promised me that he would talk to
my mother and everything would be all right.

The next day I took Dr. Muhajir and his two sisters to my house, which as he

told me later,
was one of the most challenging encounters of his life. When we entered the house, my
father informed me that my mother was refusing to come to the lounge and did not want to
talk to Dr. Muhajir. My heart stopped a beat, as I did not know how to handle this unpleasant
situation. Dr. Muhajir sensed the tension and continued with small talk with my father. Finally,
my mother gave in to the pressure and put on an overcoat over her house dress and came
to welcome her distinguished guests. The conversation was short and abrupt. My mother
did not want her young daughter to go to a strange island, but she would let me leave when
I got married. Dr. Muhajir looked at me and said; Shahla Jan (dear Shahla), if this were a
court of law, my verdict would be in your favor. However, as she is your mother, I can't rule
against her. Then he stood up and graciously left the room accompanied by his sisters. My
mother was so upset that she did extend the courtesy of walking them out, but my father did.
When we reached the main entrance, Dr. Muhajir held my father in both arms, looked him
directly into his eyes and said: "Dr. Behroozi, your daughter has been entrusted to you by
God, with the main purpose of serving Him. If you do not fulfill your obligation, you will be
answerable to Bahá'u'lláh in the next world!" Then, he said goodbye and left my father
pondering about his next move. No immediate change came out of this potent statement.

At that period, my father had a severe eye problem, due to glaucoma. He had lost a great
deal of his eyesight and needed immediate medical treatment in England. The family

encouraged him that since he had to go abroad, it would be good for him to go on Pilgrimage.
His request was accepted, and he was set up for his journey. I was aware of the impact of
the Pilgrimage on the spiritual transformation of the pilgrim. I prayed for my father, and his
change of heart and wrote a letter to Mr. Faizi, imploring him to talk to my father and help
him understand the significance of pioneering in my life. I received a letter

from him, the day
that my father left the Holy Land. Mr. Faizi assured me that not only him, but Mr. Furutan,
and members of the Universal House of Justice; Mr. Nakhjavani, and Mr. Fatheazam, all
counseled my father and encouraged him to let go of me, and help me achieve my heart's
desire, which in fact should be the highest aspiration of every Bahá'í
youth.

When my father came back from his journey, in private, he told me how privileged he felt in
having such special treatment from such esteemed personages. He repeated his promise to
them that he would let me go as soon as he could convince my mother.

Unfortunately, my mother was unyielding. This issue was a personal cause for her to prove
her authority, and it veiled her sense of fairness and justice. As I could not comprehend her
claim of love and concern for my well-being, I was not able to relate to her in a warm and
considerate way. I became aloof and quiet and most of the time uncommunicative.

My father could not tolerate my suffering much longer. One night when he came home and
saw my misery, he pulled me into a corner and told me that he had made up his mind. He
asked me to pack my bag and to go and live with my brother, who incidentally was married
to my best friend. He told me to start preparing for my trip to the Philippines and to leave as
soon as possible. He advised me not to mention my intention to anyone for fear of them
blocking my departure. He was aware of the consequences of this action and knew that it
might cost his marriage. But he believed that what I was doing was right, and as a father, he
was ready to go through this suffering to let me serve God. He said, to just remember him
while I was doing God's work, and in this way, he might have a chance to do his share by
helping me. It was an incredibly hard and emotional situation. What he had predicted was
not half as hard as what happened, but his help also brought about a resounding honor for
him that he cherished for the rest of his life, among them, fulfilling the

pledge that he had
made in the Holy Land.

When I left my home, I knew it was a point of no return. I was leaving a part of me behind in
that house. It was also sad that I could not to share my fears and anxieties with anyone who
was close to me. My sister in law was aware of my intentions, but my brother never took it
seriously. I was twenty-two, with an English vocabulary of close to a hundred words. I had
never handled a significant amount of money or paid for my expenditure. Above all, I had to
single-handedly deal with the complicated bureaucracy of obtaining a passport, exit visa,
travel arrangements, purchasing provisions for my trip, and collecting the required
documentation and medical certificate, for my student visa.

I was always questioned by the authorities as why I was going to an Island that they could
not pronounce its name, nor they could locate it on the map. I was aware of the delicacy of
my response, and that by antagonizing a single public servant I would bid farewell to all my

plans. So, I was patient and quiet, until the last day that I was to collect my passport. The
officer told me that his manager wanted to see me. I entered a large room with little
decoration; there were at least ten men who were sitting around the room, drinking tea.
There was no chair for me to sit. I felt like being summoned to a Court Hearing. The manager
who was a middle-aged man stated that my passport was ready, but he wanted to see this
girl who was going to a God forsaken Island. He asked me why I chose the Philippines
instead of Europe or the United States. I calmly stated that I had chosen the Philippines as
a pioneering post to help the Bahá'í community. The humorous tone vanished. I heard a few
chortles, and a sarcastic remark that; "As if these Bahá'ís have already saved us and now
moving to other countries to save them." The supervisor curtly gestured the speaker to be
silent. I calmly informed him that there were thousands of Bahá'ís in that country and millions

in other parts of the world. A gasp followed my comment. The director curtly ended the
conversation and dismissed me. I had a sense of elation that finally, I had become unfettered
from the chain of oppression; that I could openly express my opinion to whoever asked me
about my Faith. At the same time, I kept watching my back to see if I was followed.

I made an appointment with the Director of my master's degree program to let him know that
I was leaving the Institute to study in the Philippines and ask him for a letter of
recommendation. He was quite surprised and asked me for a reason. I told him about my
pioneering plan. He appreciated my honesty and gave me an excellent letter of recommendation.

One of my last unfinished business was obtaining a letter of recommendation from the
University. It was a strange feeling to step into the past after being away from my college for
more than a year. I requested to see Dr. Mahdavi. I entered a classroom where my old
professor and my beloved Dr. Davoudi, were sitting side by side. They greeted me with
warmth and listened to my request. Dr. Mahdavi mentioned that he had never written a
recommendation for any student (or maybe no one dared to ask for one.), and asked me for
what university in the States I was applying? I told him that I was not planning to go to the
States, but to the Philippines. His eyes wide opened and said; how on earth I found this
unknown spot on the globe. I told him that I was going to serve my Faith by helping the
Bahá'í community in those islands. I noticed a most endearing expression on Dr. Davoudi's
face. Dr. Mahdavi was silent, recovering from the shock. He said, do you think that you have
served your country enough to leave it for a far off island? I smiled and said, there are enough
scholars in this land to do my share. He paused for a minute and said, I am not in the habit
of writing these sorts of letters. Therefore, I am going to delegate it to Dr. Davoudi to write it
for me. Whatever he writes I would approve and sign it. He then wished me luck in my future

endeavors and asked me to wait outside. I still have that wonderful letter of recommendation,
which highlighted the qualities of a scholar, rather than an ordinary undergraduate student.
An affirmation for what my Professor envisioned me to become, rather than my actual
achievements. This letter was instrumental in opening doors for me in a foreign land when I
needed it most. Dr. Mahdavi kindly signed the letter, relying on Dr. Davoudi's judgment and
his own fairness to me. Then, Dr. Davoudi shook my hand, commending me for my courage
in revealing my pioneering plan, and bade farewell. I left an era behind me...

'There are certain pillars which have been established as the
unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is
learning and the use of mind, the expansion of consciousness, and
insight into the realities of the universe and hidden mysteries of Almighty
God.'

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 126)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

In the years preceding the Islamic revolution, Dr. Davoudi had been a member of the
National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. After the revolution, he was kidnapped and presumed
martyred. His precious body was never recovered.

One of the most touching moments of my life was my last session of Mr. Ishragh-Khavari
class. I was certain that I would not be able to see this old maestro again and my heart was
aching not to be able to say farewell to him and my classmates who had traveled a long
journey of learning together for five years. We shared a unique spiritual bonding and
comradeship, and soon I would be out of this circle forever. Behin and Mehran were the only
ones who knew what went on in my life, and they were pillars of support and strength for
me. They were the only ones who saw me off at the airport, representing all the precious
friends that I left behind. For years, they kept me abreast of what went on in Iran. Both
become successful pioneers in Africa. Mehran was appointed as an Auxiliary Board in
Cameroon. Behin is still a faithful Pioneer in Africa.

In the last week of my stay in Iran, I went to see Dr. Ghadimi in his clinic. I conferred with him about my immediate departure and asked for his emotional support. He told me that I was a handmaiden of God, and I would be under His Protection. Dr. Ghadimi promised that he would help me in any way he could and told me that he would come to the airport to see me off. He was not able to do the latter, but he stood by his promise of support in the very confusing times that followed my departure. He told me years later, that when my mother learned that I had left the country, she sent a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, asking to order me to return to Iran. Dr. Ghadimi, who was a member of the Assembly, explained my circumstances. The National Assembly wrote a letter to her that I had responded to the call of the Universal House of Justice, and that the beloved Guardian had granted an exception to parental permission when it came to pioneering. Therefore, the National Spiritual Assembly would be praying for my success and hoping that my mother would realize her blessing to be the mother of such a devoted youth.

The night before my journey was heart wrenching and bittersweet. My brother suddenly realized that I had meant what I said, and it dawned on him that I was really leaving the next day. He told me to go home for a visit and say goodbye to my parents, without divulging the exact day of my departure. When we called on my mother, we were amidst a confusing situation. My hosts from Mazandaran had paid a special visit to my parents a few days before, asking for my hand in marriage to their eldest son. My mother thought that it was the best opportunity for me to go Homefront pioneering by marrying me off to this precious family. The arrangement was made for all of us to visit them in Mazandaran, and the entire

families had made preparation for this visit. My heart was bleeding from their disappointment, but I could not tell them that I was about to leave that week. My mother was under the impression that I was calling on her to mend the past and to negotiate to come

home and
get ready for the trip. So, she did not take me or my brothers' words
seriously. I left the house
without her blessing or letting me kiss her goodbye. My father accompanied me
to the door.
We had seen each other frequently for travel arrangements. That night he kissed
me
goodbye for the last time and gave his blessing. We knew that he would not be
able to come
to the Airport because of my mother, so, in the dark of night, I bid farewell
to him and to a
home that I would never see again.

The day that I left Iran was a beautiful and sunny day in Spring. Mount
Damavand was
majestically dominating the blue skies. The spirit of Ridvan was in the air. My
brother took
me to the airport, said goodbye and left. I saw my two close friends, Behin and
Mehran,
waiting for me at the departure gate. I decided to call my sister and say
farewell. We usually
were very close to each other, but I did not want to put her in a predicament.
She was still in
bed, she was taken by surprise and told me that she was on her way to the
airport and hung
up. I was past customs when she arrived. She looked disheveled and hurt. I
noticed that she
was alone, so, I got out of the enclosure for a minute to embrace her and
receive the gifts
that she had picked up in a hurry from her little treasure box. I walked to the
plane, found my
seat, and sat down with a potpourri of emotions. I was free at last,
weightless, with nothing
to hold me back. I also felt uprooted and exposed. I was alone, facing an
unknown world.
When the plane was taking off, I prayed for His guidance and confirmations. I
also fervently
supplicated for what the beloved Guardian commanded all the pioneers; to
destroy all the
bridges behind them and stop any thoughts of return.

This was the most potent pact I made with my God. In the years to come, anytime
I wavered
and changed my mind about returning to Iran, He ordained for me the most
powerful tests
and difficulties. To remind me of the pledge that I made with Him in that
memorable and
exhilarating morning, when at the age of twenty-two, I destroyed all the

bridges behind me.

‘Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another, they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.’

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 205)

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CHAPTER 2

THE PHILIPPINES

1968 - 1971

JOURNEY TO INDIA

In 1968, the Philippines did not have a diplomatic relationship with Iran. The closest Embassy was in New Delhi. Therefore, in order to obtain my student visa, I had to go to India. I contacted the National Spiritual Assembly of India and was granted permission to stay at the New Delhi Bahá’í Center. I did not know anyone in India, but my previous trip helped me feel confident that I could make it. When I arrived at the New Delhi airport, I took a shuttle bus to the Bahá’í Center. My English was limited, but I overheard a group of passengers talking about the Universal House of Justice and the Holy Land. I asked if they were Bahá’ís. They smiled and told me that they were members of the National Spiritual Assembly, returning from the International Convention at the World Center. One of them was Shirin Boman who knew Farsi. So, I was able to a have a conversation with her about my trip. She expressed concern for me as a young woman, staying at the Bahá’í Center, which was a mansion surrounded by a massive garden. There was only a male caretaker living in the building. So, she talked to Mr. Shah, the Secretary of the Assembly, and asked him to look after me.

Mr. Shah's office was at the Bahá'í Center. He made sure I was safe and asked some of the Bahá'í ladies to visit me. He also asked Sidd, a Bahá'í young man, to accompany me to my appointments at the Embassy.

When I met with the Consul, he was concerned that my English would not meet the standard of the elite University of the Philippines, Diliman. He informed me that he would communicate his concerns with the authorities in Manila and let me know of the result in a few weeks. I was devastated by the possibility of having to return to Iran. So, I kept praying, beseeching God for a miracle.

I spent the next two weeks in prayer, practicing my English, and visiting Sidd's family. I also had quality time with Dr. Mounji, one of the learned Bahá'í teachers in India. He was usually in the Center's extensive library, which gave me a chance to have deepening sessions with him in English. Years later, his daughter, Dr. Ross, became a good friend of mine in Kenya.

I also had a bit of mishap in my first week at the Center! I found out that the Bahá'í Center did not have a water heater. So, I thought it would be better to take a shower in the afternoon when water was getting warm. However, when I tried to rinse the shampoo out of my hair, the water turned into scalding hot. I had no choice but to get out of the shower and use the little water in the bucket to rinse off. That evening, when I talked to a lady about my ordeal, she laughed and said that the water tank was on the rooftop and the tropical

sun made it boil by noontime. Therefore, she advised me to always shower in the morning when the water was still cool.

The appointed time came to meet with the Consul. He told me that the authorities talked to my guardian in the Philippines, and they were assured that I would be enrolling in an English class first, before taking courses for my master's degree program. He handed me my visa and wished me luck! I was grateful for this miracle, and the guardian

angel who
made it happen.

‘Know ye that the world is even as a mirage rising over the sands, that the thirsty
mistaketh for water.

...Abandon it to those who belong to it, and turn your faces unto the Kingdom of your
Lord the All-Merciful, that His grace and bounty may cast their dawning splendours
over you, and a heavenly table may be sent down for you, and your Lord may bless
you, and shower His riches upon you to gladden your bosoms and fill your hearts
with bliss, to attract your minds, and cleanse your souls, and console your eyes.

O ye loved ones of God! Is there any giver save God?

...Your Lord is verily the Compassionate, the Merciful.

He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of
inspiration from the Concourse above; He will send unto you sweet perfumes from
the highest Paradise, and waft over you the pure breathings that blow from the rose
gardens of the Company on high.’

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 186)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

JOURNEY TO THE PHILLIPPINES

When I boarded the plane at the New Delhi airport, I felt my dreams were coming to fruition.
I pledged to attain the station of martyrdom that the Beloved Guardian, bestowed upon
pioneers in the Formative Age.

My knowledge of the Philippines was minuscule. I knew that my new home was in the Far
East, somewhere near Japan. I was attracted to the Japanese culture and people, mainly
because of the movies that I had seen. I have never seen a movie that featured the
Philippines. In 1968, there were no economic or cultural ties between the Philippines and
Iran. In fact, no one in my country could locate the Philippines on a map. I was a fledgling
bird, flying from her sheltered and overly protected nest, towards a vast, exciting, and
unknown world. When Dr. Muhajir talked to me about the Philippines, I asked him

to
describe this country to me. He replied that it was beautiful and verdant, with mild
temperature, and educated, friendly people. I wholeheartedly accepted his description of
my future home country.

The plane had a stopover in Hong Kong and landed late at night. The passengers departed
to enjoy the haven of duty-free shopping and good food. My knowledge of this island was
from watching the TV series; "Hong Kong." It featured Bill Cosby and his partner, fighting
off criminals in every episode. I was scared witless to get off the plane. So, I remained
seated on the plane, while the cleaning crew working around me. In the next few years, I
developed a close friendship with a student from Hong Kong. I then, realized how much I
misjudged the Chinese. I could not wait to revisit Hong Kong, and later, I did.

I arrived at the Manila International Airport late at night. I smelled the warm, humid and
unfamiliar tropical air. When I stepped out of the plane, I was welcomed by a tropical
cockroach. Since childhood, I had a phobia of roaches and spiders. This tropical cockroach
was a flying and fast-moving monster, compared to the smaller, slow-moving ones at home.
I watched this creature with apprehension; not knowing that its mates would be my constant
companions for the years to come.

I gathered my courage and walked toward the terminal. Before leaving India, I had sent a
telegram to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Philippines, informing them of my arrival.
However, I was not sure if someone would meet me at the airport. I was hoping to see Mrs.
Iran Muhajir. When I approached the gate of the terminal, I heard from above, the shouts
of Allah’u' Abha. It was an electrifying experience because, in my country, we could only
whisper this greeting in public. I looked up and saw a group of smiling Bahá’ís , waving at
me from the balcony. I waved back and with enormous relief shouted back Allah’u’Abha.

At the airport, I handed my passport and travel documents to the immigration

officers. While
reviewing my papers they started asking me questions, but I could not understand what
they were saying. Their melodious Filipino accent, in addition to my limited English,
hindered our communication. I felt dumb, and I knew it was showing. The only thing I could
do was to smile and nod. I was saved by the arrival of the Bahá'í friends who noticed my
language problem and helped with my immigration process. When I was taken to a

chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benz, I realized that I had not collected my passport from the
immigration officer. I kept saying, "my passport, my passport," but no one understood what
I was trying to say. I finally gave up and left everything to Bahá'u'lláh and the honesty of
the Filipino authorities. I retrieved my passport a few days later, from a bewildered Officer,
who admonished me to never leave my passport with strangers.

We arrived at a grand, seaside bungalow. An elegant elderly lady welcomed me. She was
wearing a traditional Filipino costume, resembling a delicate butterfly. Despite her age, she
had jet-black hair, fashioned after a Flamenco dancer. She was holding a large, hand-rolled
cigar between her teeth. She had a strong voice, and her manner was regal. Everybody
addressed her as "Momsu." Later, I learned that it meant "Dear Lady," which was more of
a traditional title of respect, than a term of endearment.

My host was Mrs. Louisa Gomez, the first Bahá'í in Manila. Momsu was the matriarch of
one of the oldest and most influential families in the Philippines. The Gomez family were
the Sugar Barons of the island of Negros Occidental. One of her sons was the Governor of
Negros, and the other was the inventor and owner of the well known Manila paper factory.
Neva Dulay, her daughter, was the owner of a sugar plantation, and a member of the
National Spiritual Assembly.

Momsu had an affection for the Muhajirs. She considered Dr. Muhajir as her Iranian son in
law. Her love for her adopted Iranian couple was the reason that she sponsored Iranian

pioneers to study in the Philippines. As an Alumnus of the University of the Philippines,
Diliman, she was instrumental in granting my student visa, and my admission to the UP
Diliman. She took her role as my guardian seriously, and as her ward, I had a special place
in her heart. In return, my love and respect for Momsu have never ceased.

She took me to a well-furnished guest room, which was usually reserved for Dr. Muhajir.
When I was alone, deep in my heart, I knew that I was in a safe haven. I did an unexpected
act. I knelt and kissed the ground of my pioneering post.

The Philippines at a Glance

My new home country was a fascinating place. Momsu told me, on different occasions; that
Filipinos were the only Christian nation in the Far East, and mostly Catholic. The only
exception was the citizens of Mindanao, who believed in a unique version of Islam. That
the Philippines was the only country in Asia, which was matriarchal, by its culture and
tradition.

The Filipinos had been consistently dominated by different nations, such as Spaniards,
Japanese, and Americans. Nevertheless, they learned to keep their loyalty as a nation.
Their national hero, Jose Rizal, was a freedom fighter, poet, and scholar. He was revered
by a devoted group of intellectuals, who spearheaded the liberal movement in the political
arena of the country. This was a nation, striving for the independence and national identity.
I entered a period of political awakening among the Filipino youth and intellectuals and
experienced the 1960's social unrest in the Philippines.

In my conversation with the early Bahá'ís in the Philippines, I learned that the inception of
the Faith occurred, in 1937, when Loulie Mathews' boat docked for a few hours, in Manila.
She left a few Bahá'í pamphlets in a college library before her departure. The first Filipino
Bahá'í, Felix Maddela, embraced the Faith after reading these pamphlets and
corresponded with the Publishing Trust of the United States. He was so consumed with the

fire of love for this new Faith that he decided to become a Bahá'í. He wrote a letter to the Publishing Trust, announcing his Declaration to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. In the following years, quite a few Bahá'í teachers visited him. By that time, he taught his family to become Bahá'ís and offered his property as the Bahá'í Center. Hand of the Cause Ms. Alexander was among those who visited and inspired the Filipino Bahá'ís.

Mass teaching in the Philippines

Dr. Muhajir visited the Philippines and found fertile soil ready for spiritual harvest. He launched his first mass teaching plan in the Philippines. I met two of his early teaching companions; Jack Davis, an American pioneer, and Mr. Anunsacion, an older Filipino teacher, whom Dr. Muhajir, affectionately called "Tatang," (father).

Dr. Muhajir used a simple and effective method for teaching the Faith. He believed in total detachment from worldly things and complete trust in God. The teaching teams started their trips by first praying, then walking to the most remote villages in the region. They were in search of the pure-hearted souls, who were fresh and still untouched by the outside world. Dr. Muhajir believed that we should teach the Faith by following the example of Abdu'l-Baha, as demonstrated in the "Paris Talks." He encouraged to apply the analogies of the Master when teaching the tenets of the Faith. This loving and straightforward approach not only attracted people in villages and tribes, but also highly educated and prominent individuals.

When the Teaching Team entered a village, they found a space to gather the villagers and took the following steps:

- Teachers used their own personal scrapbook to introduce the Bahá'í Faith. While showing each page, they explained the Bahá'í Teachings: the12 Spiritual Principles, Progressive Revelation, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and the Covenant.

- The next step was clarifying and responding to the participants' questions.

- In conclusion, they showed pictures of different Bahá'í communities, including the Philippines, handed each seeker a Declaration card, and invited them to join the Bahá'í Faith.

- The final step was deepening the new Bahá'ís on the Central Figures of the Faith, Living the Bahá'í life, Obedience to the Covenant, the basic Bahá'í Laws, and Bahá'í Administration.

- Teachers then gave the new believers literature in their language, identified the key individuals who could carry on with the teaching, deepening and administrative tasks.

Then, it was time for the teaching team to move on to a new location. In less than a decade the Philippines had thirty thousand Bahá'ís.

Dr. Arbab, who accompanied Dr. Muhajir during his teaching trips in South America, developed the booklet of "Anna's Presentation" based on Dr. Muhajir's teaching method and scrapbook. It is a component of the Ruhi Book 6 and is used as a presentation tool for direct teaching.

Bahá'ís in the Philippines

A fascinating quality of the Filipino Bahá'ís was their detachment, sense of obedience, and sacrifice, in matters relating to their Faith. A significant number of the new Bahá'ís had left their homes to become travel teachers. In every village, one could find a Bahá'í who would leave everything behind, to help with the teaching work. In my years in pioneering posts, I have never seen this widespread intensity anywhere else.

An example of this devotion was Dr. Vincente Samaniego. Vic was a young professor at the University of the Philippines, Los Banos Campus - this agricultural college later became the nucleus for the Bahá'í teaching in the Central Luzon.

Vic once told me that when he first heard the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, he became so enamored with the Holy Writings that he devoted all his time to reading and reciting the

Holy verses. He was unable to rest, eat or sleep. Vic continued with a twinkle in his eyes, to say that he swiftly journeyed through the “Seven Valleys,” and seemed to be intoxicated without touching a drink! He felt compelled to give this life-saving message to anyone who had crossed his path. So much so, that his family and friends thought he had lost his mind. He was lucky that his wife Fe had the same devotion and love for their new Faith. Vic left his job and became a full-time Bahá’í teacher. Dr. Muhajir had a great affection for Vic. He used to say that Vic's breath would turn iron into the red hot fire; because anyone who heard Vic, could not help but become a Bahá’í.

Vic had an innate capacity to motivate people. He became my confidant and mentor in the Philippines. In my many lonely and bewildering hours, when I doubted my ability to go on, he was there for me and for many others. He always had a warm and friendly smile to comfort and soothe troubled souls. Vic never judged others or argued with anyone. He was a good listener, showing his undivided attention. During the consultation, Vic always replied by saying; you are right but, how about looking at it in this way; then, he offered his point of view as an option to consider. I never saw him angry or ill-tempered. With this quality, Vic was the trusted friend of anyone who needed his help.

Vic and his wife Fe were among the friends who welcomed me at the airport. He was an Auxiliary Board member for protection, and she was the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly. They lived in a house across from the National Bahá’í Center. Their life was simple and detached. It was centered around taking care of the affairs of this vast, scattered, dynamic and ever-changing Bahá’í community of the Philippines. Later, Vic became a member of the Continental Board of Counselors. He passed away recently, joining his beloved Dr. Muhajir!

Bahá’í Pioneers

The Bahá’í pioneers, besides the Muhajir family, were mostly Americans. I

met Jack Davis
and his wife Tyson Clark soon after my arrival. The couple lived in the guest house cottage
of Momsu and were expecting their first baby. Toni Mantel was a young American who was
an Auxiliary Board member for propagation. She was stationed in Mindanao and could
speak Tagalog and Cebuano dialect. Both these ladies and Jack were a dynamic trio who
kept the mass teaching going. Toni was a symbol of selfless sacrifice and detachment. She
was wholly absorbed in the Filipino culture. She spent her life living and traveling in the
remote villages of the Philippines. At the age of 23, she had the maturity and experience
of a much older person.

When I arrived at Momus’s house, Toni was visiting the Davis's. I met the three, the next
day, during breakfast. Toni told me years later that in those early days she was trying to
have a conversation with me, but I did not respond and just kept smiling. So, she thought I
was a bit dumb. Not knowing that since I did not understand what she was saying, I masked
my anxiety and lack of comprehension with a smile. A trend which was common among all
the Iranian students who came after me. We tried to show that we were polite and friendly,
but we gave a wrong impression that we were a bunch of happy go lucky airheads.

I never had a chance to see Mrs. Muhajir in the Philippines, as the family had just left for
India. Although their home was still in Manila, Mrs. Muhajir never returned. They decided
to settle in India.

A few years earlier than my arrival, Mahshid Iqani, a sixteen-year-old Iranian, pioneered to
the Philippines. She enrolled in the U.P. Los Banos. She spent most of her time in the
villages, teaching the Faith. The Muhajirs and Mahshid were the only Iranians in the
Philippines. In 1967, the Universal House of Justice launched the Student Pioneer Plan. It
encouraged Bahá’í students to choose a college in countries like India and the Philippines
to study. Dr. Muhajir greatly supported this plan. He believed that student

pioneers could
teach future leaders of those countries. A golden opportunity that should be planned, and
executed, with care, and tact. I was the first student who came under this plan. Thanks to
Mrs. Muhajir and Momsu, I was admitted to Diliman, the most prestigious U.P., with alumni
such as president Marcos and most of his Cabinet. It put me in a bind, as everyone had
high expectations of me.

Picture: At the first Bahai Center 1966 - Pol Antipolo, first
pioneer to Laos, Momsu, Belen Panis, and Toni Mantel.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES, DILIMON

A few days later, Momsu's driver, took me to U.P., Diliman, in Quezon City. This campus
is in the hillside suburbs of Quezon City, which is the capital of the Philippines. Diliman
campus is a university town, nestled in a vast rainforest. One could live on the campus for
weeks without needing to leave. In contrast with the modern University of Tehran, this
campus was old and built in a natural setting. Classrooms resembled schools in the rural
areas of Iran. It took me time to relate to the informal interaction between professors and
students. There was no reverence to the rank of the professors and their status.

I fell in love with magnificent tropical trees. Their flowers adorned with such colors and
shapes that I had never seen before. Cotton trees were plentiful, and when the pods
opened, the silky cotton was carried away by the breeze, resembling snowflakes falling on
Diliman. I loved the noisy, colorful birds which flew into my classroom, hopping around and
pecking on my desks. There were times, in those early days, when I silently communicated
with the birds, telling them that I was sure they could understand the lectures more than I
did.

I never got used to the tropical humidity and the heat. Years later when people asked me
about the weather, I used to say earnestly, that there were two seasons in the Philippines;

one was the rainy season which was hot, the other was the dry season which was very hot.
When I was in Iran, I asked Dr. Muhajir, how was the weather in the Philippines? He
responded that it was always mild. Once in the Philippines, I reminded Dr. Muhajir of his
remark. He laughed and said, if he would truly have told me about the weather, I would
have never come! However, he was sure that after getting there; I would stay no matter
what. As usual, he was right.

Upon my arrival, I was enrolled for a few Summer courses and was housed in a dormitory.
Then, I was left to fend for myself, with no mentor, friend, or advisor. My major problem
was communication. I felt like a hearing-impaired person in an unfamiliar environment. I
shared a room with three other girls. There were a bunk bed and a student desk for each
of us. No fan or air conditioning, no refrigerator or water cooler. The dorm provided us with
three basic meals. I put a picture of Abdu'l-Baha on my desk, set up my mosquito net, and
settled down. There was no T.V. or radio in the dorm. Most of the entertainment was talking
with the other girls. I was the only non-Filipino in the dorm. So, I was the center of attraction.
I should say with all honesty that I never felt alone in that dorm. These girls were loving,
gentle, and compassionate. They told me later that they could not understand anything that
I was telling them. However, they showed such interest and friendliness, that I was
encouraged to keep talking until they could make sense of what I was trying to say to them.
My dormmates adopted me as their friend and took care of me. One amusing pastime of
mine was to sit by the screen window, observing an army of mosquitoes that had found an
opening to enter the room. They formed a line and patiently waited for their turn to pass
through the hole. I was impressed by their perseverance and determination to accomplish
their task. This observation helped me to overcome one of the greatest tests that I have
encountered, in the months ahead.

Student Pioneers

I was in U.P. for a month when I was told that I had a visitor. I went down and saw a vivacious young girl, with the most contagious laughter. It was Mahshid. At first, she could not put her Persian words in order. Because she had not spoken it for more than a year. Mahshid was the most down to earth, detached, and exuberant girl that I have ever met. She was genuinely in love with pioneering and teaching. She never thought twice about leaving everything at hand and going to the villages at the drop of a hat. She was in love with Filipinos and learned Tagalog as much as English. She dressed, ate, and lived like Filipinos and enjoyed every minute of it. She accepted lack of amenities and hardship as a fact of life and set her mind to handle it. Mahshid told me that once, she went travel teaching to a remote area and lived with a family who could only afford rice and tomatoes. She was on this diet for months, and genuinely loved it and could not have had enough of it when she came back. This was amusing as Mahshid truly relished good food and preferred it to any other material pleasure.

Mahshid became my mentor. She transformed me from the lifestyle of which I was accustomed, to this new and exciting way of life. In turn, I became a mentor to Jila Samadani, who came one year later, and Jila became the mentor of the next student, and the process continued for years to come. The strong networking and support system of the student pioneers was the backbone of the success of this project. The majority of student pioneers were between the ages of 17 to 23. None of us had any prior pioneering experience, and most had never left our families before. The first group established a sense of loyalty and obedience to the Bahá'í institutions. Although all of us were self-supporting, we accepted the recommendation of the National Assembly regarding our placement. In the year span of 1968 to 1972, there were fifty students pioneers in the Philippines. All of them were scattered around 70 universities on different islands. Mostly alone, some as a

pair. Some of these locations did not have a Bahá'í community. Therefore, most of these students were on their own, with very little knowledge of the language or culture of their new homes. I always believed that the power of God and love for Bahá'u'lláh was the miracle that kept most of us safe and sheltered. The sense of comradeship was solid. We helped each other financially when our allowances were late. We gave a crash course of culture and essential survival skills to the newcomers. We acted as educational advisors, counselors, a friend in need, and source of support for each other. During my stay in the Philippines, most of us would see each other during conferences or visits of Dr. Muhajir and other dignitaries. When we gathered, we formed an active support group. We shared intimate joys and pains, laughed at our goof-offs, and rejoiced at our victories.

The source of energy and guidance among us was Dr. Muhajir. He was well aware of the conditions of the students on the Islands. So, he always insisted on seeing us all when he came to Manila. He wanted to give us a chance to be a group of joyful youths. So, he would treat us to lunch in one of the best restaurants in Manila. Then we went to Luneta Park by Manila Bay for a leisurely stroll, watching the dancing fountains or enjoying a free concert at the Bowl. During this time, he listened to our stories, jokes, and concerns. Motivating, encouraging, and guiding us to the right path, giving the option to choose what we felt was right for us. Many had such an intense devotion to this beloved Hand of the Cause that we

would gladly sacrifice whatever we had, to carry out his wishes. Since we believed that he would do the same for our Beloved Cause. In each visit, Dr. Muhajir lifted our spirit and boosted our courage to scatter and fill the teaching goals. This youthful and small army of Bahá'u'lláh, opened new territories and helped in the consolidation of many mass teaching regions. They helped with the election of the Local Spiritual Assemblies when most were

too young to be eligible for membership themselves.

The commander of this army was Dr. Muhajir. In each visit, he called members of the Institutions, pioneers and active believers to meet for an intensive teaching conference. He helped to develop plans, set deadlines, and assigned tasks for each team to carry out. Then, Dr. Muhajir would leave and let the National Assembly and its Teaching Committee take care of the details. After a day of hard work in these institutes; Dr. Muhajir used to tell me that he had never considered himself as a Bahá'í scholar like Mr. Faizi, or a motivational speaker like Mr. Furutan. He believed his strength was in having a vision, developing plans to achieve objectives, and inspire the souls who would carry forward ever advancing victories for Bahá'u'lláh.

Dr. Muhajir always told me that he would have loved to be one of those soldiers in the forefront, but due to his ever-increasing responsibilities as a Hand, he could not be one. Therefore, he was satisfied to plant the seeds and mobilize friends to bring them to fruition.

I had the privilege and responsibility to look after the new arrivals. As I was the first one who lived in the Capital city, close to Manila and the National Bahá'í Center. I was also appointed to the National Teaching Committee and gave my input regarding students' placement and their safety. Throughout my stay in the Philippines, I took this responsibility very seriously.

Despite the hard work and difficulties that the students faced, when we came together, we were known for our joy and laughter. Bahá'í friends always wondered what made us laugh for hours. It was our sense of humor that kept us going. We joked about riding rural buses which were open on both sides, and how we shared our seats with chickens and piglets. We laughed about mosquitoes that were so persistent that they would drill through layers of clothing into our skins. We told stories about dreaming of snow and ice cream when the temperature was way over ninety degrees with no fans or air conditioning. We

recalled
difficult times when we could not understand a word of English while talking to Immigration
personnel, but kept smiling and nodding to the Officer, so that we could obtain our visa.
We were light-hearted about every obstacle. I guess it was the miracle of youth, and our
total trust in God, believing that everything would be all right, and if not;
"it too shall pass."
This humor turned into serious concern, when any of us was sick, injured, or faced a difficult
situation. At that time, we were there to help each other, as we were genuinely kindred in
spirit.

The inception of this kinship germinated the day that I came face to face with Mahshid. We
spent the day together and left for one of the first Bahá'í Summer Schools in the Philippines.
It was held in Baggio City, known as the summer capital of the Philippines. The town is
nestled in a mountainous area, close to the Rice Terraces, which are considered the eighth

wonder of the world. The regions' moderate climate is coolest in the Philippines. Mahshid
lived in this city. During my short visit, I enjoyed meeting with the Bahá'í participants from
different communities.

My First Teaching Trip

We also visited the Clark Air Force Base, which was the largest American Base outside the
U.S. We were the guests of the only American Bahá'í family at the base. Firesides were
held every night in their home, and there was a stream of seekers who came to hear about
the Faith. I met a G.I., who had just become a Bahá'í and was on fire with his enthusiasm.
This was the heaven that I had envisioned. So, I wanted this way of life to last forever, to
go to the villages and spread the Faith and sacrifice my life for my Beloved Cause. I could
not understand why after all the struggle to come pioneering, I should live on campus and
have a normal life as a student. Therefore, when I returned to my dormitory, I prayed day
and night:

‘Thou knowest, O God, and art my witness that I have no desire in my heart save to attain Thy good pleasure, to be confirmed in servitude unto Thee, to consecrate myself in Thy service, to labor in Thy great vineyard and to sacrifice all in Thy path. Thou art the All-Knowing and the All-Seeing. I have no wish save to turn my steps, in my love for Thee, towards the mountains and the deserts to loudly proclaim the advent of Thy Kingdom, and to raise Thy call amidst all men. O, God! Open Thou the way for this helpless one, grant Thou the remedy to this ailing one and bestow Thy healing upon this afflicted one. With burning heart and tearful eyes, I supplicate Thee at Thy Threshold.

O, God! I am prepared to endure any ordeal in Thy path and desire with all my heart and soul to meet any hardship.

O God! Protect me from tests. Thou knowest full well that I have turned away from all things and freed myself of all thoughts. I have no occupation save mention of Thee and no aspiration save serving Thee.’

~~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
www.bahaiprayers.org/teaching9.htm

I could not wait for Dr. Muhajir to come to Manila and help me to overcome this obstacle, but Dr. Muhajir was not there. So, I consulted with Vic and tried to express myself in broken English. Dear sweet Vic understood the language of my heart, despite the lack of adequate words to describe my thoughts. Vic recommended a plan of action. He told me to drop my classes, leave my belongings at his house, and join a teaching team which was going to a virgin territory in the Mountain Province. The people of the mountains, known as the Igorot tribes, were untouched by the outside world. The rugged mountains had isolated them from the rest of the population. I even heard from some people that the Kalinga tribesmen were headhunters, and I should not venture to their land. I learned later that it was just a myth and had no factual basis.

Vic asked me to report to Mr. Dominador Anunsacion, who was one of the original team members of Dr. Muhajir. Everyone addressed him as “Tatang” (Father in Tagalog). In my initial training to become a mass teaching travel teacher, I was directed by Vic, to "Obey Tatang in every way." I was so excited about this venture that in one week I put my affairs in order and joined Mr. Anunsacion and his team. My buddy was Carol Baris, the only other girl in the team. She was a Filipina, almost my age, but a seasoned travel teacher. Carol became my mentor and my link to survival. We set up for a few weeks trip on foot, covering 45 Kilometers of rugged terrain. We usually climbed the misty mountains early in the mornings when it was cool. The first day, after walking for a while, so much mud had stuck to my shoes that the weight made it impossible to walk. So, Carol advised me to switch to flip-flops; the problem was solved. Our rest stops were mainly to clean the flip-flops. Each of us carried a light bedspread, a few pieces of clothing and items for personal hygiene.

Tatang was like a general, unyielding to the inefficiencies of the rookies like me. We usually stopped each day late in the afternoon, soon after we spotted a bamboo house, one of the many, which were scattered here and there on the mountain range. These homes were built high above the ground. From the gap between the bamboo slats, one could see the ground below and the outside surroundings. They had no entry doors or windows; therefore, they were exposed to the external elements. The food was scarce; mainly tea, corn, or rice, cooked with some wild vegetable. The Kalinga’s were scantily dressed, in their colorful loincloths and skirts. They reminded me of the Amazon Indians. They were sweet, gentle, and hospitable, who invariably fed us and offered their houses to sleep in.

My job was mainly to attract them to attend the firesides. Mr. Anunsacion opened the meetings by telling them that this lady had come from a distant land to bring an important message. I gathered that I was the first outsider who had ever visited these gentle people.

They came in small groups, as the area was not densely populated. I had painstakingly memorized a Bahá'í pamphlet in English. It explained the teaching of the Faith and the station of the manifestations of God. As they listened to me without understanding, I gradually gained confidence in my English delivery. After my short introduction, the rest of the group translated my talk, answered questions and had a follow-up discussion. Usually, the fireside went well into the night. After my ten minutes' talk, I sat for hours smiling and gently showing my interest in the conversation which I did not understand. Usually, the majority of our audience became Bahá'í. When it was time to sleep, we went to these wind-swept shelters and laid down on a handmade straw mat. We had no pillows, and our cover was the thin bedspread that we had carried with us. Most of the nights I was too cold to sleep and too tired to stay awake. So, I drifted in and out of a dreamlike state till morning.

At the end of the teaching campaign, 44 members of the Igorot tribes embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. I shared with them the most primitive way of life and captured the spirit of mass teaching. However, I came to the realization that I could do this for short intervals between my normal day to day life. I think Vic had the same notion when he set me off on this trip. When I went back to Manila, I found out that I made history, not only because I was a member of the team who had opened the territory of Mountain Province, but because there were a few telegrams from the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, and the Universal House of Justice, urging me to go back to the U.P. and continue my studies. I had no choice but to obey.

From left: Fe Sameniego, Naomi Geollegue, Shahla Behroozi, Carol Baris

Being a Student Pioneer

When I returned to U.P., I decided to make changes and gain control of my life. First and foremost was my accommodations. I chose to move to the International Center - IC. It was

an endowment of the Rockefeller Foundation, which served a cultural center and dorm for the international, as well as affluent Filipino students. The IC was a modern building composed of two wings, one for the women's dormitory and the other for men. Both sides were connected by a joint Recreation Center. I shared a room with two Filipino students. As we had our own kitchen, we could cook what we wanted, instead of going to a cafeteria. There was no curfew, and as long as we followed the rules, we could come and go as we pleased. So, I could attend the Bahá'í activities in Manilla. The community center held a series of social and cultural events which helped the residents to feel at home and share their culture with each other. Later, other student pioneers resided at this Center, making it a home away from home, and a venue for Bahá'í activities. It brought the true meaning of the International Center to the IC.

I learned to live a multifaceted life as a student pioneer. One aspect was living a modern life at the IC while teaching the Faith to the students who would one day become leaders in their countries. The other was spending all my holidays and semester breaks in remote villages where life was simple, and modern amenities were scarce. I felt happy and content in both environments.

I had my heart set to continue my dream of becoming a Psychologist. I was directed by my University advisor to take a few prerequisite courses in Sociology, Economics, and English Literature. I enrolled in these courses, purchased the textbooks and attended all my classes. I put my heart and soul into my studies but could hardly understand the lectures. When I took notes, since I did not have the correct spelling, I could not read my own handwriting later. During the mid-term test, I locked myself in my room with a dictionary and studied for three days. I was supposed to review six chapters of my Sociology book but could only read 16 out of 500 pages. I had never felt so inept in my entire life. I was

ashamed of my inability to study in English and believed that I was doomed. Early Monday
morning, I left my dorm in a state of hopelessness. Instead of going to my class, I walked
among the woods, in order “To lose my mind and find my soul.” I did not want to take the
test which I would have failed miserably. My self-esteem was so low that I could not imagine
I was the same person who left Iran a few months ago. I was communing with Abdu'l-Baha
and asking for a sign to show me the way to salvation. Then, I remembered the army of
mosquitos who were streaming to come through a hole in the window screen of my former
dormitory. They just carried on the task the best they could. The little hole was a path to
their survival. Therefore, they kept pushing forward, marching on and on till they
succeeded. I decided to spare myself the agony of defeat and go back to my dormitory.

A few days later, I was in my room at the Center when I was told that I had a visitor. It was
Dr. Iraj Ayman. I had heard of him in Iran and knew that he was the founder of the
Psychological Research Institute of Iran. Vic told me that Dr. Ayman was the United Nations
Consultant to the University of the Philippines. I was amazed at his prestige in U.P. Now, I
was meeting a man who was my professional role model. Dr. Ayman was a real gentleman,

with the aura of an Iranian University Professor. I was awed by his presence. He stated
that he heard about an Iranian student pioneer in U.P. So, he came to find out what on
earth I was doing in this corner of the world. I was overwhelmed by the kindness and lack
of pretense of this distinguished personage. I felt warmth in my heart that he had taken
time to come to my dormitory and reach out to touch the heart of a youth in a foreign land.
He was the answer to my prayers. I told him about my difficulties. He inquired about my
future plans. I replied that I wanted to be a pioneer for the rest of my life. He advised me to
choose Social Work as my profession. He said that U.P. Diliman had a distinguished MSW

– Master of Social Work program, which was recognized worldwide. Therefore, when I obtained my degree, I could find a job in any country that I would go as a pioneer. He advised me to drop my present courses and enter full time in the MSW program. I followed his advice and sent my application to the Institute for Social Work and Community Development. I had an interview with the faculty advisor and enrolled as a conditional student. Dr. Ayman helped me focus on the positive and enhanced my self-esteem by showing his support and much-needed friendship. He continued to see me in his occasional visits to the Philippines. He also mentioned my name to the U.P. President, Ambassador Lopez, who invited me to his office to meet me. I used this golden opportunity to present him with a copy of the Proclamation Book; "Tablets to the King," which was recently published by the Universal House of Justice. My mission as the student pioneer of U.P. had officially started.

A year later, Dr. Ayman became a member of the Continental Board of Counselors. I shared my joy of hearing this news with Dr. Muhajir. He was pleased that Dr. Ayman, a high-level scholar, was now a high-ranking officer of the Bahá'í Administration. His hope for the student pioneers was to produce more of this new class of Bahá'ís.

My Memories of Manila

I learned to find my way to Manila and Quezon City. It was an hour by bus from U.P. to downtown Manila. Downtown was on the bank of a river and had the flavor and smell of South-East Asia. Vendors were selling their products ranging from roast pig to Siopao (dumplings), sweets, clothing, cosmetics, etc... Buses continuously transported a sea of passengers going in and out of the crowded streets. The primary source of transportation was these buses which had wood benches, and wooden shutters as their windows. When approaching a bus stop, the drivers did not stop for the passengers to embark. They just slowed down to let people jump in and out of the moving vehicle. Those who were

getting
on tried to find a foothold and hang on to the railing. Some passengers were quite
accommodating and let four people sandwiched on two-seat benches. I learned that
passengers had to move around and squeezed together, to accommodate the incoming
and outgoing passengers. No one stayed on the boarding steps, as that would block the
traffic. Everybody followed this rule. In case they did not follow, the crowd's justice was
imposed. If a woman entered the bus, men who were seated got up and offered their seats.
I learned to make a hissing sound to stop the bus as it was not customary to shout "Stop,"
or ring the bell.

Downtown was not necessarily safe. In fact, during the student demonstrations, these
busses were the target of the angry crowd. They threw rocks at them or turned them over
with all the passengers in them. The tropical rain was another interesting phenomenon. I
used to write home, that when it rained, God scooped up the ocean and dumped it on
Manila. When caught in the rain, even with an umbrella, we were soaked in a minute. The
streets of downtown turned into a river. We walked knee high in the puddle and could not
see what was under our feet. If we were lucky to catch a bus, it was like entering a sauna.
As all the shutters were down, which prevented ventilation. The good thing was that rain
washed up everyone before boarding. So, there was hardly any unpleasant odor. Filipinos
took great care to keep clean, one could observe this even in the remotest villages.

A few months after my arrival, Luzon started to shake. There were close to three hundred
earthquakes in the span of one or two months. We experienced tremors day and night; in
the Jeepney (mode of transport), while walking, in classrooms, and in bed. Most of the
Filipino houses are made of wood. For this reason, fatalities were limited to a tenement
building in Manila. Three hundred people were injured and died in that old and overcrowded

building. My parents were horrified. They begged me in their letters to return home. A month after the Philippines' quake, Iran was shaken by a magnitude of 7.9 which killed 20,000 people. The Iranian earthquake happened at night. People were asleep in their adobe and brick houses. The roofs collapsed and buried them alive.

My First Manila Visit with Dr. Muhajir

A short while after nature had a rest from the quakes, I had a call from Fe Samaniego that Dr. Muhajir was in town and asked me to go to his house for dinner. I was so happy that I wanted to fly like a bird to get there but instead, took a bus. I arrived late in the afternoon. Dr. Muhajir and a maid were at his house. I had a chance, at last, to pour out all the strange and exciting happenings in my life. He asked me how I got to his house. I told him that I took a bus from downtown. He was amazed and said; you know Shahla, God is preparing you for a new way of life. He is breaking you into pieces and putting you back together, to make a new Shahla; the one who could serve His cause like Miss Martha Root. In this life, we should forget the material things and pursue what is expected from us by God. I am a Doctor, but it has been years since I practiced medicine. I am continually reading and learning how to promote the Cause. My favorite books are written by the missionaries who sacrificed everything to serve their missions. We should learn a lot from them. Also, learn from their mistakes. They tried to change people and their culture, and by doing so, they gradually alienated themselves from the indigenous population. Now it is hard to go where that missionary has been, because these people either are apprehensive to trust us or expect to receive material rewards to serve God. We should always show acceptance of the way that people live their lives. Sometimes what they practice is not right based on the Bahá'í standard. However, we should remember that this has been the way these people were brought up. We should concentrate on the future rather than the past. Tell them that

up until now you have lived this way, but it is time you should try to change. We should never criticize new Bahá'ís who make a mistake. We should show compassion, love, and understanding. We should support them rather than chastise them. This is their country and their way of life. We should not show a trace of discontent. Accept and love them for

their faith in God. Look at the early Bábis; most of them did not have the time to read Báb's writings before they gave their lives for their Faith. The judge of people's Faith is God, not man. Refer the matters to the Administration and do not get involved in the personal struggles of Bahá'ís. Dr. Muhajir was the embodiment of his advice. I never heard a word of criticism from him about anyone's shortcomings. His famous phrase was "poor soul," then he went on to advise us to be kind to that person.

Dr. Muhajir presented a blueprint of his plan for the student pioneers. He wanted us to use every opportunity to get acquainted with dignitaries, professors, and students. He was happy that I was residing at the International Center. He believed that these future leaders needed to know about Bahá'u'lláh and become friends of the Faith. He told me to find new ways to proclaim the Faith: To volunteer to speak in different meetings and tell them about my belief as a Bahá'í. To write my papers, about the Faith. To be sociable, friendly and to constantly broaden circles of my friends and tell them about the Faith. To enroll in an English Lab elocution course, in order to deliver speeches in English, as eloquently as I did in Persian. To never lose heart or be disappointed by the result. As every word uttered in His path would live forever. He told me that Martha Root always prayed in the parks and believed that after she was gone, that spot would be blessed forever. I firmly believed in this powerful doctrine of Dr. Muhajir. This was the key to his unceasing energy and motivation. He was never dismayed or disheartened. He believed that he was doing his best and did not worry about tangible results, as his reward came from God, not

human.
He constantly taught these principles to all his loyal protégés; that every step we took, by itself was an achievement. We should not concern ourselves with immediate results. He used to say that Bahá'í teachers are achieving their mission by letting others know about the Faith. Bahá'u'lláh stated that people who have not heard of the Faith are not responsible for their actions. However, as soon as they hear about the Faith, God would make them accountable for accepting Bahá'u'lláh. Our job was to act as a vessel and let people know about the Faith. It might take a moment or years before this act of Faith manifest itself. Our duty was to let people know diligently. Others who would follow would complete the mission. We were not responsible for other people's souls, as it is the personal obligation of each human being. The Bahá'í teachers should never say that they were not successful because no one came to the meetings or listened. They had done their job and as Martha Ruth used to say; "Let God take over!"

Dr. Muhajir also believed that we should enter every place of worship and quietly utter a few Bahá'í prayers for the guidance of its worshipers. Once, Dr. Muhajir decided to go to one of the provinces for a teaching trip. He told me that when he arrived, things were not going smoothly. So, he went to a church, said a few prayers, and went home. He believed that his prayers would open the way for future travel teachers. After a while, that town became a center of mass teaching. Dr. Muhajir's prayers were answered.

That evening was the onset of the unfoldment of the Student Pioneering Plan. It gradually developed and flourished stage by stage within the next few years in the Philippines. Then it branched out to other countries such as India.

When Dr. Muhajir informed us that his family was settling in India, it saddened the Bahá'ís like Momsu, who had a particular affinity with Mrs. Muhajir. However, the Philippines had a special place in Dr. Muhajir's heart, and he visited Manila as often as he

could. We made
the visits of Dr. Muhajir an exceptional event. As he was our motivator and spiritual teacher,
a link to the outside world. There was always a welcoming party at the airport any time he
arrived. We would spend as much time with him as possible, then accompany him to the
airport to see him off. Once one of the students told us about a song that Dr. Muhajir
arranged when he was young. It was the hymn that Bábu'l-Báb chanted in the Fort Tabarsi.
Dr. Muhajir arranged the lyrics to replace a classical Russian song. Shoghi Effendi, in The
Dawn-Breakers, p 351, translated this momentous event:

'The news of the impending arrival of Quddus bestirred the occupants of the fort of
Tabarsi. As he drew near his destination, he sent forward a messenger to announce
his approach. The joyful tidings gave them new courage and strength. Roused to a
burst of enthusiasm which he could not repress, Mulla Husayn started to his feet
and, escorted by about a hundred of his companions, hastened to meet the
expected visitor. He placed two candles in the hands of each, lighted them himself,
and bade them proceed to meet Quddus. The darkness of the night was dispelled
by the radiance which those joyous hearts shed as they marched forth to meet their
beloved. In the midst of the forest of Mazindaran, their eyes instantly recognized the
face which they had longed to behold. They pressed eagerly around his steed, and
with every mark of devotion (p)aid him their tribute of love and undying allegiance.
Still holding the lighted candles in their hands, they followed him on foot towards
their destination. Quddus, as he rode along in their midst, appeared as the day-star
that shines amidst its satellites…... The forest of Mazindaran re-echoed to the sound
of their acclamations. As the company slowly wended its way towards the fort,
there broke forth the hymn of glorification and praise intoned by the band of
his enthusiastic admirers. "Holy, holy, the Lord our God, the Lord of the
angels and the spirit!" rang their jubilant voices around him. Mulla Husayn
raised the glad refrain, to which the entire company responded.'

The song was powerful and nostalgic, reminding us of the bygone heroes of the Faith. So, all of us, including our Filipino friends learned it. When we heard that Dr. Muhajir was arriving very late in the night, we went to the airport and quietly waited on the balcony. When he arrived, he looked around and did not see any friends. He was slowly walking toward the gate, with his head down, when suddenly our voice boomed in the dark above him, chanting this song. He stopped in his place astounded. He looked up with a beautiful smile, then he shook his head in amazement and went inside. We kept chanting until he joined us. He lightheartedly asked us to stop as everybody would think we were a bunch of nuts. Later, he told me that he was a bit down on this trip. Because when he left India for this journey, his little girl was very sad that her daddy was leaving again. Seeing her face with tears in her eyes made it hard for him to continue this long journey. Our chanting at the airport uplifted his spirit. He felt he was surrounded by love. When I saw him off, he asked me to chant a prayer to help him continue his journey. I saw a vulnerable side of Dr.

Muhajir, differerent from the great motivator that he was known to be. He told me how much he admired his wife, Iran Khanum. She accepted the hardship of him traveling for most of their married life. Holding the fort, taking care of their home and family, while being a pillar of the Bahá'í community. She was always helping and supporting Bahá'í activities and projects, never asking anything in return. He believed that if there was a medal of honor for perseverance and sacrifice, it should be given to her. He wished me to have a family life like his.

Dr. Muhajir was a firm believer in pioneers having a family. He believed that Bahá'í marriage helped the pioneers to feel emotionally and physically fulfilled. Therefore, it enabled them to concentrate on their Bahá'í activities. Otherwise, the feeling of being in the void gradually would affect the pioneering spirit and create a nagging

feeling that they
were missing out on life, for serving God. This belief made Dr. Muhajir an excellent
matchmaker. He always tried to find a match for lonely men and women pioneers. He gave
the address of prospective partners and encouraged them to write to each other.

My Struggles and Joys

My first year in U.P. was an uphill battle, because of my English. So, I developed a strategy
to cope. As I had taken most of my first-year courses in Psychology and Sociology, during
my undergrad studies in Iran, I could comprehend the general concept of the lectures, find
the translation of the keywords, and subsequently, learn the subjects in English. My
professors were understanding and patient with me. However, no one explained to me
about requirements for course completion. When we were close to the finals, my
classmates were discussing their term papers and asked me about my topic. I responded
that I had no clue what they were talking about. They explained that at the beginning of the
year; we were given an assignment for a term paper. We were required to choose a topic,
conduct extensive research, complete, and submit the assignment by the end of the year.
The deadline for the term papers submission was next week. With my limited grasp of
English, I had missed this critical assignment. So, within one week, I frantically started
working on my term papers. I was able to write some from memory of my previous life in
Iran, and a good portion from the Bahá'í viewpoint. I wrote about the organizational
management and Bahá'í Administration, and the Bahá'í perspective on social change.
Furthermore, for my class on Cultural Anthropology of Small Communities, I wrote about
the Bahá'í village that I had visited in Mazandaran. Because of this tactic, my professors
who read my papers learned about the Bahá'í Faith and its multi-faceted models for solving
social problems. I passed all my subjects, and all my term papers were accepted.

Later in that year, I met a student from Baggio, who happened to be the sister

of a Bahá'í
friend. She told me that as a peer counselor for foreign students, she was assigned to me
as my surrogate sister. However, as I was deeply involved with Bahá'í activities, spending
all my free time in the villages or with indigenous people, the advisors decided to leave me
be. They were sure that I had a network of support and did not need surrogates to make
me feel wanted.

During my first year in the Philippines, I had to face another test that I never knew existed,
financial crises. When I arrived in the Philippines, I wrote to my father and gave him my
address for sending my allowance. My father told me that he had sent a check for me and
I would receive it in six weeks. Three months passed, and I had not received my check. I
wrote to him, and he cabled another amount. I did not get that one either. I was penniless
and frightened. I was so desperate that I visited every bank in Manila, that had a foreign
transaction branch. The results were disappointing. There were no banks that had dealings
with Iranian banks. I was frantic. During this period, I was visiting Momsu on the weekends.
She saw me worried and anxious. She took me aside and asked what was wrong, I
explained my problem. She said that her granddaughter was studying abroad, and her
heart would sink when she thought something like this could happen to her. So, she lent
me the money, hoping that someone would do the same for her granddaughter if she
needed help. Since then, any time that I was indeed desperate, I used to go to her house.
One look at my long face, and amidst the cloud of smoke from her cigar, she would say;
Young lady how much do you need? I received the cash from her without a single word. I
was ashamed but profoundly grateful. I borrowed so much money from Momsu that when
I finally got my allowance, it all went to pay my debt, and had to borrow from her till my next
check.

My poor father was frantic. He sent a third lot, and I did not receive that either. Josie Lava,

my Filipino Bahá'í friend who was a banker, took me to the main branch of a major bank to find out if they had received my money. When we arrived, they took us to the President office. My friend explained the situation. The President made the necessary inquiries and told us that regretfully his bank had not received the money. However, since he was a U.P. alumnus, he was going to lend me that amount, till my money arrived. He wrote a personal check and wished me good luck. I was speechless and had a lump in my throat. I could not believe the generosity and trust of a total stranger. It took months before my money arrived.
I went back to him to pay my debt and presented him with a copy of the Centennial Proclamation Book of "Tablets to The Kings." He was surprised by my visit. He laughed and said that he mentioned to his wife that he wouldn't expect to see me or his money again. I thanked him for his kindness and gave him the book and told him that my honesty was because of my Faith, and I would like to let him know about it. He promised that he would read the book and placed it in his office library with a note attached, stating: "a gift from an honest student."

My life out of U.P. was primarily consulting with Vic, attending committee meetings, or occasional visits with Mahshid. When Mahshid was around, it was the time to relax and have some fun. Which was mainly going to the wealthy section of Makati, where the prestigious business offices, shopping center, restaurants, and hotels were located. The additional bonus was that all the buildings were air-conditioned. We enjoyed going to the hotel lobbies, having a cold drink, and seeing the riches of the world. We went to the restaurants and ordered the famous Magnolia ice cream and banana split. Then went to the Bahá'í Center and talked until midnight. The Bahá'í Center at that time was an old and rickety wooden building. The floorboards were eaten by termites and gave way to pressure.
Here and there, we could see large gaps on the floor. At night, roaches were

crawling out
of these holes and roamed around. There was no screen on the windows. So, mosquitos

had a feast on the blood of visiting Bahá'ís. The main hall had a ceiling fan which was
ancient and noisy. However, it did wonders for keeping the mosquitos away. If we had
planned to sleep there, we would have brought a mat and a sheet with us. However
sometimes, in the spirit of the moment, without provisions, we stayed overnight. On these
occasions, we improvised. In one of these nights, we decided to use a sheet of manila
paper for our bedding. We spread it under the fan and slept. Both Mahshid and I were late
sleepers and woke up late in the morning. However, on that fateful morning, I woke up after
six, and since my bedding was uncomfortable, I decided to get up and go next door to the
Sameniego' s to have a wash. A few minutes later, Mahshid woke up. She too decided to
go next door. As soon as she reached the door, she heard a loud noise and saw the ceiling
fan had crashed onto the floor, landing where our heads were resting a while ago. The
blades were still moving, and the motor was smoking. This, was a miracle, an answer to
prayers of those who prayed for our safety. It gave us a day of contemplation on our
mortality. Mahshid told me that a palm reader predicted that she would die young. So, it
was an omen that by the grace of God had passed without striking.

From left: Javanshir Sobhani, Fe Sameniego, Mahshid Iqani

A group of Bahai's in the Philippines 1969 -1970
Seated: Abbas. Standing in the front raw, from left to right: Fred Ramirez, Carol
Baris, Delia Pareja, Lina Sanchez, Shahla Behroozi, Josie Lava, Vic Samaniego,
Farhang Mazidi, Grace Madella Boehnert. Back raw: Jack Davis, Ali Sheidaie, Jamie
Ingertson, Counselor Momtazi, Firouz Tolouie, Javanshir Sobhani

Within the next year, a group of student pioneers joined us in the Philippines. Among them
were; Jila Samadani, Hayedeh Rowshangah, Firouz Tolouie, Farhang Mazidi, and
Javanshir Sobhani. Most of them found themselves in the Los Banos Laguna, where U.P.

College of Agriculture was located. This U.P. campus was in a rural setting. Therefore, it
was easier for students with language difficulties to start in this more relaxed and less
competitive environment. In a few years, most of them transferred to U.P. Diliman. In the
close by village of Los Banos, there was a Bahá'í Center, bustling with activities. The
Center was the residence of the Pareja's. A loving Bahá'í family who had dedicated their
house and their everyday life to the Faith. Every night there was a fireside in progress.
There were students, members of the faculty and the residents of surrounding villages who
used to come regularly to these meetings, and quite a few became Bahá'ís.

I remember the first time that Dr. Muhajir was in Manila, we took a trip to Los Banos. There
was a crowd at the Center awaiting to hear the talk by the Hand of the Cause of God. When
we were ready to start, Dr. Muhajir asked me to get up and talk instead. I was horrified and
pleaded with him not to disappoint the group by having to listen to my broken English. He
told me with a serious look that he was ordering me to talk. I obeyed his order and did the
best I could do. Then the session was open for questions and answers with him. Later, I

inquired about the reason for his directive. He replied that I should do my best to rise to the
occasion. Being shy and embarrassed by my limited language ability would hinder my
activities. Instead, I should try my best to excel. He earnestly humored his own English
while giving a talk, but it never deterred him from elaborating on issues which were
important to him and his audience. I remember vividly his opening remarks that evening.
He said, if we were in a city for the first time, we would need a map in order to reach our
destination. Otherwise, we might take a few wrong turns, end up in the wrong streets and
run out of time. The messengers of God and for this age, Bahá'u'lláh, came to this world to
reveal to us a Divine Map. The wise would treasure this map and would follow its
guideposts to reach their life's destination. The ignorant would resist and get

lost in the dark
alleys of life. We are here to share this Divine map with you. This was an example of the
practical, simple, and effective manner of Dr. Muhajir's teaching techniques.

Sablayan Penal Colony

After one year in the Philippines, Vic asked me to take a teaching trip to Mindoro Island. I
teamed up with Jila Samadani, a newly arrived student pioneer from Iran. We flew to
Occidental Mindoro. First visiting San Jose, a pleasant little town, with a group of wonderful
Bahá'ís. My hostess was Nida Aniversario, a dear Filipino friend, who had a neat and
spacious house. Nida had the sweetest way of showing her warm hospitality. One of her
special treats every morning was placing a garland of Jasmines on our pillows. We woke
up smelling this heavenly fragrance, feeling well cared for and safe. Nida's house was the
meeting place for the Bahá'ís, and we had a stream of dear Bahá'ís visiting us daily. We
made a few teaching trips to the mountains, attempting to visit an all Bahá'í Mangyan tribe.
Unfortunately, after reaching the mountain peak, we found out that they had migrated to a
new location. We decided to return to the city that night. It took us hours of walking in the
dark to arrive at Nida's house.

A few days later, we set off on our eventful journey to Central Mindoro, to visit the Sablayan
Penal Colony. We knew that the Assistant Superintendent was a Bahá'í and quite a large
group of the prisoners had embraced the Faith through his efforts. They had built their own
Bahá'í Center and had regular meetings there. There was no public transport to that
location. So, the two of us rented a rowing boat. The trip took more than three hours. Jila
and I were alone with the two boatmen who did not know a word of English. We were sailing
by the shore of a dense rainforest, inhabited by Indian tribes. We were saying prayers
under our breath, knowing that God was our only protector. As it was easy for our boatmen
to do whatever they wanted with us, then throw our bodies into the swampland,

where
nobody could find us. With the grace of God, nothing bad happened!

We arrived at a little harbor in Calintaan. We knew that Five years ago, a group of travel
teachers had come to this place and a few became Bahá'ís. We had the name of one
family. We asked for their address and headed toward their home. This family had not
heard of the Bahá'ís since their declaration and did not remember much about signing their
membership cards. We refreshed their memories and told them about our plan. They said,
due to the heavy security of Penal Colony, it would be the next morning before Mr. Marco
could send us a boat. As we did not have any place to stay overnight, they invited us to

stay with them. It was Christmas time, and they had a tree branch, decorated with the
flowers of the cotton tree. They sent us to our room, which was a small storage room on
the second floor. There, we saw creatures that frightened both of us to death: an army of
non- poisonous tarantulas. We set up our mosquito net and crawled under it. We had a
fitful night, as there were crowds of Christmas revelers in the street, sounding like angry
mobs. So, with tarantulas inside and noisy people outside, it felt like being in a scary movie.

The next day, being grateful to be safe and alive, we boarded the boat for the penal colony.
It was one of the most unforgettable, and exhilarating memories of our life. This place was
set as a commune with rows after rows of thatched-roof cabins that prisoners had built for
themselves and their families. This penal colony was self-supporting. The inmates earned
their living by working in the fields, harvesting crops, fishing, and hunting wild pigs. They
were allowed to keep their share of food and trade the rest in the prison stores. There was
no restriction to move around the colony, no cells with bars or heavy security. Most of the
prisoners did not want to leave. So, some detainees whos sentences were completed and
were soon to be released, made fake attempts to escape in order to lengthen

their stay.

The Marco house was a little haven. This devoted family had such happiness and contentment, which made it difficult to believe they were living in a penal colony. We had one of the greatest teaching trips of our life. We had meetings with the prisoners every evening. As soon as we finished our talk, a large group of prisoners, lined up to sign their Declaration Cards. We had forty-three new believers. All of them continued their activities by attending follow up Baha'i meetings and teaching the Faith to others. This event was covered in the American Baha'i News as a successful endeavour of the student pioneering initiative.

It was time to leave this little paradise and return to the harbor. We decided to make the best of the opportunity and teach the Faith in this town. We went to the market and distributed pamphlets, inviting people to a fireside at our host's home. That evening, we waited for a crowd to show up, but no one came. We felt let down and went to bed with a heavy heart. Next day we were getting ready to go back to San Jose. Just when we walked down the stairs to leave, there was a knock on the door. An elderly man wanted to see us. As he could not speak English, our host acted as his interpreter. He said: "I am almost ninety years old. Yesterday in the market, I noticed these young foreign girls, pouring their hearts out to tell people about this Faith. They gave me a pamphlet which I could not read. I came today so that you can explain it to me." We sat down and with great difficulty tried to tell him about the tenets of the Faith. Our host told us that she had decided to be a Christian. So, she was not eager to fully interpret our discussion. The old man stood up and said; it was difficult for us to communicate with each other, but one point was obvious to him: If we came such a long distance to give this vital message, then it should be the truth. He was ready to become a Bahá'í and make our heart happy. We were astounded. We knew that this was not the right way for somebody to embrace the Faith. But

who were
we to judge the faith of another human being? We gave him a card, and he signed it. We
said goodbye to the only Bahá'í in that town and left for Manila.

Months later, Vic told me the old man who had become a Bahá'í was the head of a large

and influential family in that town. He went back to his family and taught them about the
Faith, and all of them became Bahá'ís. He passed away a few months later. The family
started the first local spiritual assembly in their town. All because of an old man who wanted
to make the hearts of two strangers happy. The event of this trip was published in the
American Bahá'í News.

I stayed friend with Flora Stefan, a Bahá'í who is originally from Mindoro and now living
in Tampa.

Bahá'í Activities at U.P. Diliman

During the first few semesters, I developed a reputation for being somewhere between a
missionary and a rebel. They knew my priority was Bahá'í activities, and I could easily forgo
my study for that purpose. Therefore, they just let me be. However, I made a great effort in
meeting the requirements to stay in the program, by scoring a "B" plus average.

In my second year, I became more interested in my courses. Since some professors had
revolutionary ideas, they used their classes as a platform for teaching Social Action and
reform. I learned from them the true meaning of democracy in the third world. UP was the
center of student riots and demonstrations that spread to other colleges in Manila. Once, I
joined my roommates and went to the "welcoming ceremony" for President Marcos. When
he arrived, I found myself in the middle of a student demonstration, soon turning into a riot.
It was scary and exciting at the same time. One of my roommates was the daughter of a
foreman of a sugar baron. As a sign of solidarity with the masses, she spent her school
holiday planting rice alongside farmers on a rice plantation.

The anti-Vietnam War sentiments of the Sixties were at its height in the Philippines. My Canadian professor, to show solidarity with his students, participated in a demonstration at the American Embassy. However, demonstrators, thinking that he was an American turned against him. If not for his Filipino wife, he would have been killed or seriously injured.

I had friends in the dormitory, from Vietnam and Cambodia, who had never experienced peace in their young lives. Hearing their stories about the horror of war and its carnage, helped me to offer Bahá'í solutions as an alternative to the violence and riots. Sometimes I became a target, because of providing the message of unity and peace. There were times when the Filipinos cringed when they heard that I was studying in Diliman, a center for revolutionary ideas. In the meantime, I was warned that UP students were going to attack our dorm, as the International Center was housing a "bunch of rich foreigners."

My field placement for Community Organization was in Tondo. It was a community like Watts, in Los Angeles. It was a dangerous place, where bloody riots occurred on a daily basis, on numerous occasions, Jeepneys or buses that I was in, were bombarded by flying rocks. I experience firsthand poverty and chaos around me. Affirming this powerful message:

'The violent derangement of the world's equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of

infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth -- these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day -- a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly-knit world-embracing Fellowship -- a Fellowship destined, in the fullness of time, to be incorporated in the framework, and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences, of a mysteriously expanding, divinely appointed Order, and to flower, in the course of future Dispensations, into a Civilization, the like of which mankind has, at no stage in its evolution, witnessed'

(Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World - 1950-1957)

(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 70)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

My most touching experience is regarding a young American G.I., who came to the International Center, asking if there was a Bahá'í residing there. So, they called me to go and see this visitor. He was a young American in his twenties. He told me that he was on leave from Vietnam and needed to connect with fellow Bahá'ís. As he did not know anyone, he thought he could find one, in the International Center. He told me that he was a medic in Vietnam and had seen so much death and suffering that his heart was broken. The final blow was watching his close friend killed in front of him. He talked, and I listened, pouring his heart out to a friend, and I was that friend. After a while, I offered to take him to the Bahá'í Center. We took a bus to downtown. When I got in, a passenger offered his seat. I sat and saw my Bahá'í friend standing on the boarding steps. The conductor had to close the door and asked him in Tagalog to move up. He was tall, and this made it

difficult for
him to stand inside the bus. So, he thanked the conductor and told her that he would stay
where he was. I could hear the rumbling among the passengers. A riot was brewing. I heard
people making remarks about these two Americans, who considered the Filipinos primitive
like Vietnamese. My heart was pounding fast. I started conversing with a mixture of English
and Tagalog, telling them that I was from U.P. and we held Filipinos in high regard. My
affiliation to U.P. calmed them down. I did not tell them that I was not American and kept
my connection with my friend in focus. I knew by doing so, my life was in danger, but I did
not mind. Finally, I let them know that he was too tall to stand in the bus. A man offered my
friend a seat, and he sat down. The remarks continued for the next half an hour, while both

of us were quietly praying. I was beseeching God to give my friend the wisdom not to
respond. He sat with his eyes closed. It was not uncommon for Filipinos to carry a gun and
to use it in an argument. The ringleader of this group had a gun and was infuriated. He
would have welcomed an encounter to use his gun and shoot us. However, my friend's
silence and outward calm did not give him the opportunity. I was sad to see this tormented
soul who wanted a respite in this land, encountered such hatred and danger. We got out
of the bus and decided to take a taxi. When the cab driver started venting about Americans,
we both sat quietly and did not say a word.

Years later I found out that he was related to Dr. Ruhe, a member of the Universal House
of Justice. I saw him featured in a film about American youths pioneering in different parts
of the world. God bless his endeavor.

The first student who became a Bahá'í in Diliman was from Ghana. Alex was an exchange
student who lived in International Center. He was the first African that I had met. The day
that he declared was the most exhilarating moment of my pioneering life. We were

attending a meeting at the Bahá'í Center. Dr. Muhajir was present. After his talk, Alex got up, faced the audience, and declared that he was a Bahá'í. Mahshid and I, ran toward him and held his hand and cried. We were laughing and crying at the same time. Dr. Muhajir watched us with an approving smile. He told me that now, I could see the fruit of my labor.

The second person who embraced the Faith was an artist and a professional pianist. Later, she became the recreational director of the International Center. She used to put quotations from the Bahá'í writings on our bulletin board. She arranged international nights where each nationality hosted the event for U.P. We learned about each other's food, celebrations, costumes, and dances. Although there were a few non-Bahá'í older students from Iran, Bahá'ís always found creative ways to present the Faith in these events.

The non-Bahá'í Iranian students were an interesting group. They were mostly older professionals who had scholarship to complete a graduate course. One of them happened to be a descendant of a famous Bábi - she did not acknowledge this fact to us. There were others who were fanatic Muslims and smelled of trouble. However, none of them showed apparent hostility toward us. They somehow felt overwhelmed by our bold and liberated spirit. The most memorable event relating to these students was the visit of Mr. Furutan.

The Visit of Mr. Furutan

Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Furutan visited Manila to inspire the Bahá'ís and to proclaim the Faith among dignitaries. I was delighted to see Mr. Furutan again. He was kind to me in my quest for pioneering. He spent the time to console me and persuaded my parents to let me go. He was glad to see me achieving my heart's desire. Through his son in law Dr. Muhajir, he kept abreast of my activities. When he saw me in the Philippines, he asked me to arrange a meeting for him with the UP professors and students. This was an epic

undertaking, as UP policy was not to intermingle religion with university life. Most of the universities in the Philippines were affiliated with various Catholic organizations. UP. was the only secular institution. I prayed for God's assistance to enable me to pay my debt to

my beloved Mr. Furutan. I contacted the Vice President of U.P., who was also the Dean of the College of Education. I had met her before and given her Bahá'í literature. I told her that a Russian educated scholar was visiting the Country and was interested in having a meeting with her. She gave us an appointment for a short meeting. However, when we met, it lasted for an hour. She was captivated by Mr. Furutan' s knowledge and his sense of humor and invited him to a follow-up meeting with the faculty members. Mr. Furutan accepted her invitation and asked if he could also talk to the college students. She accepted the offer and set up a general meeting for Mr. Furutan, to talk at the Lecture Hall of the College of Education. I could not believe this miraculous sequence of events. Mr. Furutan was delighted. I promised to accompany him to the lecture hall. I also cautioned Mr. Furutan about two Iranian students who might cause some disturbance. On the day of the lecture, I asked permission to miss my class to attend Mr. Furutan' s lecture. My faculty Advisor warned me that I had maxed out my absences. I knew that my Bahá'í activities had prevented me from regularly attending my classes but did not know how serious it was. I told her about the important lecture and my excuse to be off. She bluntly informed me that if I missed my class, I would be deprived of taking my final tests. I was distraught but had no other option. I had to let Mr. Furutan go alone. I sat in my boring class, envisioning what was happening in that lecture hall. When I caught up with Mr. Furutan for lunch, I explained my painful decision. He understood my dilemma and thanked me for giving him this exceptional opportunity for proclamation. He was pleased, as there were close to five

hundred students and faculty members in that hall. Mr. Furutan had a standing ovation after his two hour lecture. The Iranian students came and respectfully shook his hand. It was an incredibly successful event in the history of U.P. Diliman. I felt terrible for missing the opportunity, but content for being a humble vessel for its occurrence. In the next decades, anytime I had the chance to talk to Mr. Furutan, he recalled that event and expressed his sadness for my absence.

Mr. Faizi visited the Philippines

Dr. Muhajir made a preliminary trip to Manilla to help us prepare for the upcoming tour of Mr. Faizi. He wanted the trip to be a full-scale publicity event for the Faith. We planned a proclamation campaign, sending news releases to the media, inviting reporters and dignitaries to a brunch to be held in his honor, at the Hilton. Dr. Muhajir always used a small hotel facing his favorite Luneta Park, but this time he booked rooms at the Hilton. He told me that both Mr. Faizi and he always traveled frugally for the Faith. However, the Faith was entering a new phase in the Philippines, and it was essential to leave a lasting impression on the public. He asked us to be the ushers for the event. There were eight Iranian and young Filipinas, who were selected for this job. We made a great effort to look presentable and dignified. The transformation from our usual teaching outfits to elegant gowns, made from handwoven Filipino fabrics was fascinating. It showed the multifaceted life of pioneers. When Dr. Muhajir saw us that evening, he was delighted.

I never stopped communicating with Mr. Faizi, my spiritual father. When he was arranging his itinerary, he made a special effort to come to the Philippines. He wanted to meet this group of youths who became student pioneers. Dr. Muhajir mentioned that he talked about me with Mr. Faizi, who he was looking forward to seeing me in my pioneering post. All 23

students came from all over the Philippines for this special occasion. We went to the airport

to welcome Mr. Faizi. I was chosen by Dr. Muhajir to place a Jasmine Garland around his neck. Mr. Faizi held my head with both hands, brought me closer to his chest while repeatedly whispering the Greatest Name. It was his unique way of greeting. Dr. Muhajir was beaming with joy. He told Mr. Faizi that these kids had been away from their fathers for such a long time. Therefore, Mr. Faizi could be a father for all of us and give us a fatherly hug. Although it was not the formal norm of Persian culture, Mr. Faizi obliged. He held each student close to his chest. It was a warm and glorious moment.

We worked very hard to make this visit a success, and our efforts brought positive results. For my part, I invited UP officials and professors. The Director of my Institute, plus quite a few faculty members attended the reception. The attitude of my professors changed by hearing Mr. Faizi's talk. They developed respect for the Faith. At the end of the trip, all the Iranian students invited the Hands of the Cause to a luncheon. We wanted to honor these precious souls who had showered so much love in return for our humble service. We had a wonderful time. When we were saying good-bye Dr. Muhajir called me and gave me a large amount of cash to cover the expenses. I refused to accept. He told me that he was ordering me to take the money and I had no choice. I told him this time; I was not going to obey, as this was our way of showing our love, and gratitude. He smiled and said if it would make you all happy. I assured him that it would.

As a part of the Proclamation Campaign, I made appointments for Mr. Faizi to meet a number of U.P. professors in different colleges. It included a Syrian professor, who later helped me to meet my foreign language requirement for graduation.

Visit of the Hand of the Cause, Collis Featherstone

Life in the Philippines was going through peaks and valleys. The peaks were events centered around visiting dignitaries of the Faith. We were blessed to have the pleasure of meeting Hands of the Cause, Collis Featherstone, and John Robarts. Most of

these
beloved friends were giving particular attention to the issues concerning the Iranian student
pioneers. For example, one dilemma for us was the subject of dancing. As it was not
encouraged for the Bahá'í youths in Iran. Therefore, most of us chose not to dance or
attend parties where dancing was involved. We preferred not to go, so we don't stand alone
when others were dancing. However, in the Philippines dancing was an expression of life.
Their culture was expressed through their beautiful dances. Western dances in the parties
were a norm. Even in the villages they usually held a party for the visitors, and as the guest
of honor, we were supposed to dance with the dignitaries. We had lengthy discussions with
Vic and other Filipinos regarding our cultural differences. The response was that by not
participating in dancing, we were separating ourselves from the rest of the group.

Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Featherstone held a consultation meeting with us, and we
reached to an agreement that we would dance if there were no physical contact between
our dancing partner and us. We also decided to participate in cultural nights by performing
Persian dances. I became one of the performers. I loved dancing as a child and was very
good at it. Now with the mandate of Mr. Featherstone, I decided to put my talent to a good

cause. I performed on T.V. programs, at the graduation galas and other cultural activities.
I learned to sing a Filipino song and sang it on the radio programs. So many doors opened
for proclaiming the Faith by performing my amateur dancing and singing. I also used every
opportunity to speak as an international student. Some were important occasions at
schools. One time, I talked at the graduation ceremony of an elite Catholic school, when
talking about the Faith was frowned upon. I was invited to go back. On another occasion, I
spoke at one school, where 2000 students packed the courtyard to see the beauty queen
of the Philippines. The magic of my five minutes' talk was my opening

statement in Tagalog.
As soon as the audience heard my greeting in their language, they broke into applause. I
went on to say that I had come from Iran but had a more important message for them and
gave a short talk on the unity of mankind and introduction to Bahá'í Faith.
It was difficult for
anyone to chastise me for getting off the track when the audience applauded by hearing
my farewell in Tagalog.

Veterans Memorial Hospital

One of the requirements of my MSW. was an internship program. In consultation with my
faculty advisor, I was placed in the Veterans Memorial Hospital, an endowment of the US,
Government for the Filipino Veterans of World War II, and Vietnam war. The reason for this
placement was that the Hospital's formal communication was in English. In addition, my
field supervisor, Miss J, was a graduate of a British university.

I was not aware that Miss J. as a supervisor, had a reputation for being "hard as nails," an
ill-tempered perfectionist, and unforgiving of the others' shortcomings. She had several
unflattering nicknames; the one that I could mention is the "Dracula." When Miss J. called
me to her office, she was polite and professional. She asked me to describe the application
of "Social Casework Method" in a hospital setting. As I did not catch the meaning, she
continued by elaborating on her question. I responded that I had not yet taken a course in
"Social Casework Method." She was so enraged that I felt steam was coming out of her
ears. I was terrified of her reaction. Miss J. told me that it was not acceptable to have an
internship before completing basic course requirements. Therefore, I had to leave and
come back the next week after she had a chance to talk to my Advisor. I went directly to
my Advisor and told her about my problem. She directed me to keep my weekly internship
schedule until she sorted it out with Miss J. A week later, I went back to the Hospital. Miss
J. called me to her office and stated that my advisor did not answer her calls.

I learned later
from my advisor that she deliberately did not respond so that I could continue my internship.
Miss J. told me that since she was stuck with me, she was demanding that I spend every
free moment in the Hospital library to read a list of books that she had assigned to me. I
rushed to the hospital library and had a crash course on the major texts from the vanguards
of Social Work. I was fascinated by these ideas that were so close to the doctrines of the
Faith. From then on, anytime I went back to my supervisor I could quote her chapter and
verse on theories and principles of Social Work. There were times when she covered her
mouth to hide her amused smile. My efforts paid off, and I became her shining star intern.
She was the one who helped me to understand Social Work and love my new profession.
My U.P. professors were disappointed that their efforts to make me a full-fledged student
had failed and this rival outsider had become my professional role model. I guess my old

habits were difficult to break. Miss J.'s no-nonsense commitment to learning, reminded me
of Dr. Ghadimi, and I reacted to it like a duck taking to water. She told me that her most
pressing challenge was to bring me down from the idealistic clouds of Philosophy to the
earth, and to the practical field of Social Work. Her remarks reminded me of the advice of
my Baha'i teacher, Dr. Ghadimi, that we should "walk the mystical path with practical feet."

My professional baptism by fire took place at the end of my internship placement. I was
called to finish the intake process for a young girl who had congenital heart failure. She
was alone by herself. A quiet, sick girl who was extremely depressed. I tried to talk to her,
but she refused to answer. I kept visiting her a few times a day and noticed a twinkle in her
sad eyes. It showed that she was looking forward to my visits. I was told by doctors that
she was not eligible to be admitted to this hospital. However, as her condition was grave,
they were making an exception and classified her as a case for the clinical

experiment.
However, they needed her full cooperation to comply with her treatment plan. She was not
an amicable person and had no regular visitors. My intervention helped to improve her
attitude and her connection to her family. In my last visit, I saw her mother, brushing her
long hair. She was sitting up and looking good. I told her that she was scheduled to have
her heart surgery. She was scared, but I assured her that I was going to be at her side. So,
she accepted to have the procedure. The next week when I went back to the hospital, I
found out that they had discharged her without having the surgery. The file indicated that
she had not cooperated, and they had to let her go. I felt a volcano of rage erupting within
me. I rushed to my supervisor, tears welling in my eyes. I gave Miss J. an emotional speech
about our mission to respect the dignity and life of human beings. She treated me with
genuine sympathy and asked me to go and pay that girl a visit and see what had happened.

I went to their small wooden house in a slum area outside U.P. Her mother led me to a
storage room. She was lying on a straw mat. Her body was swollen. She did not want to
talk to me, but I sat down and told her that I was concerned about her, wondering what
went wrong. She looked at me with teary eyes and asked why I broke my promise, like
everyone else in her life. I wondered what she meant. She said that I had promised that I
would be with her when they came to take her to the operation room. My heart dropped a
beat. She did not agree to the surgery because I was not there. I explained that the date of
her surgery was changed, coinciding with the time that I was not working in the hospital.
She told me that all her life she has been rejected by her family. Even now, no one cared
for her except me. We sat and talked like two friends. A friend that she never had in her
short life. She asked me what I thought about death and life after death. I told her about
my Baha'i belief, as I was not allowed to teach her about the Faith, I shared

with her my in-
depth thoughts. It was such an intimate exchange that did not seem to be happening in this
world. I convinced her to go back to the hospital. Then, I went back to my supervisor,
pleading to save the life of this girl. Miss J. picked up the phone and talked directly to the
Chief of the hospital. They arranged for an ambulance, to take me to her house and bring
her back to the hospital. It was late when we arrived back at the hospital, and I had to go
home. She held my hand and asked me to visit her as soon as possible. I promised and
told her to take care. I went home exhilarated, as I had bent all the rules to save this girl's
life. This was what advocacy was all about. Two days later I went to the hospital, everybody
seemed upset and a bit apprehensive to talk to me. Miss J. called me to her office and told

me that my young patient died the same night. I was shocked with grief. She consoled me
for a long time and said that her action to bring that patient to the hospital was more for my
benefit. As the doctors knew that this girl was terminal when they sent her home. They did
not want to be responsible for her funeral expenses. However, when Miss J. observed my
emotional state, she knew that I had to learn how to cope with the inevitable tragedy
inherent in our work. Accepting that even when we do our best, there was a limit to what
we could do for our patients. It was my supervisor's parting gift to her young protégé. It took
me months in my state of grief, to reach the stage of acceptance. My only consolation was
my last talk with her about the other world. I somehow envied that she experienced it much
sooner than I did.

Life in the Villages

My school holidays were times to shift from 20th-century modern living to the down to earth
and unsophisticated life of travel teaching in the villages. It was a cleansing process to
purify the soul and go back to the basics. I traveled to different regions in Luzon, Mindoro,

and Panay islands. My village clothing and traveling gear were plain and neat. Vic insisted that we should not look shabby. He believed that we should keep our appearance attractive and be presentable. It entailed wearing nice, but simple clothing and jewelry. I used to get the itinerary of my trip from Vic, including a list of one or two families who could be my potential hosts. Most of these communities had not been visited for quite a few years. I set off by taking buses and jeepneys to reach my destination. I invariably found the families who invited me to stay with them. Filipinos are very proud and hospitable people. They were insulted if we would offer them money to cover our expenses. Almost all of them were poor, with enough resources to support their families. However, we could not take our food with us and eat separately. So, we became a member of their family during our stay and sharing their food. Usually, there was rice and fish or vegetables. Sometimes there was only rice and fried onions. There was no dairy products or meat. Occasionally, they were creative and cooked some shrimplike insects caught from a close by pond. I remember Jack Davis used to say that on these occasions he used to close his eyes and recite the Greatest Name when swallowing the unfamiliar insects. Occasionally, I used the same technique.

Teaching Trip to Central Luzon

One of my memorable trips was to the rural area around San Jose, in Central Luzon. My assignment was to help with the election of 19 Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the First Day of Ridvan. I went to the first village and made it my base. My host family lived in a “Bahay-Kubo” - a stilt house built of bamboo. I slept in a small room, with a sliding wooden window, which had to be closed every night. However, the gap between the slats made the room cool. I slept on a straw mat on slats and covered my body with a cotton bedspread. The small hallway between the two wings served as the kitchen and dining area. We ate on the

bamboo floor, each having a plate and spoon for utensils. I liked watching a few chickens roaming underneath the slats, pecking grain from the ground. The back porch had a hand operated water pump and was used for washing dishes, laundry, and bathing. When family

members wanted to bathe, they covered the openings with sheets, converting it to a bathroom. The open field was the natural restroom for all the inhabitants.

At nights, we used a primitive wick lamp; it consisted of a small kerosene container and a wick. As there was no glass globe, when lit, it diffused fumes and smoke. We used to sit outside and talk. I did not understand the language of my hosts, except when their daughters who worked in the city visited once a week and translated our conversation. When I sat on that veranda, under the dim glow of the kerosene lamp, I felt I had time traveled back, a few hundred years. I was in that area for 21 days. I found a young and active Bahá'í who could speak English. He took time off from his work and accompanied me on my trips to different villages. As there were no roads, we had to walk through the open fields. I learned that we could walk 3 km per day. So, we made a daily plan for the number of nearby villages that we could visit. To escape the heat, we used to start at dawn and return late in the evening. We visited all the villages that were to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies on April 21st.

We always started with a refresher for the Bahá'ís, who could not remember much about the tenets of the Faith. If there were non-Bahá'í families and friends, we combined it with direct teaching. It was incredible that a majority remembered they were Bahá'ís and greeted us with the Greatest Name. At first, my companion used to translate my talks, but as he learned the subject, he held the sessions by himself. I was delighted to see the progress of this young man. I noticed the ability of these beautiful souls who, with care and encouragement, were empowered to teach the Faith. At the end of the day, we

stopped
by a vendor and bought a local delicacy, a cup of shaved ice, with toppings of coconut and
dried fruits. At first, it tasted strange, but then, I looked forward to having it as a reward for
a day of hard work. Before discovering this delicacy, I used to dream of eating Magnolia
ice cream.

Once a week we went to the San Jose market, where I bought eggs and vegetables for my
host family. The mother cooked the most delicious dish, made of roasted eggplants, which
were dipped in the whipped egg and fried. In the past, when I was in Iran, I used to detest
eggplants. Now it was manna from heaven. When, later, I wrote to my mother that I learned
to make a delicious eggplant dish, she responded: My heart bleeds for you for eating
eggplants, you must be starving! I assured her that I had plenty to eat and truly loved that
dish.

After two weeks in that village, one evening, when I was returning from my daily trip, I had
a surprise visit from Vic. He said, in his usual calm way, that since no one had heard from
me, Bahá'í friends were concerned, so he came to check on me. He left the next day,
having been assured of my safety.

As all the Assemblies needed to be elected on the First Day of Ridvan, we developed a
plan to make it happen. We selected a key person in each locality to hold the election and
collect the ballots. Then, within twenty-four hours, we visited all those locations, tallied the
votes, and registered the members of the new Assemblies. I was so involved in that
process, that knew the names of all the elected members by heart.

This trip was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. However, months later, I
started suffering from headaches and had a problem with my eyesight. The diagnosis was
a severe allergic reaction to the fumes of the wick lamp. It stayed with me for the years to
come.

Trip to Negros Occidental

The International Center dormitory had two separate wings for women and men. When I applied first, the women's dormitory was full. There were two other applicants with the same dilemma. As they were daughters of wealthy families in Negros Occidental, the management found a solution, by giving us a vacant unit in the men's dormitory. They partitioned our unit, which was the last on the second floor, with a separate stairway. We were completely isolated from the rest of the residents.

Because of this unique situation, the three of us developed a strong friendship. My roommates were patient when I tried to talk to them in broken English. We were together the next semester when we moved to the women's wing. One of my sweet roommates decided to quit U.P. and go back home to Negros. She invited me to her house for the Christmas Holidays. I accepted the invitation so that I would introduce her parents to Neva Dulay, who had a Sugar Plantation in that area. I also knew that her mother, Momsu would be there. I spent a few days with my roommate and made the introductions. Then, Neva invited me to her house for the rest of my Holiday. I felt a bit guilty that I was living in luxury, while other students were travel teaching in the villages. Then I found my Filipino friend, Naomi Geollegue, who was staying in the guest house. Together, we arranged a few teaching trips around Negros.

In one of these trips, while visiting a Bahá'í family, Hayedeh Rowshangah, one of the Iranian students, came to see me. She asked me to go to her place in Iloilo, Panay Island. We took a ferry boat to the island, an enjoyable trip. While there, we planned a teaching trip to a coastal village that had no Bahá'ís. We prayed and armed with the love of God, our Teaching Scrapbook, and a few pamphlets in their language, visited people who were outside their houses. We made a presentation and started a dialogue, responding to their questions. A few declared. It was exhilarating that the two of us had opened a

new locality
to the Faith.

Trip to the US Naval Base, Subic Bay

Jamie Ingerson, an American Bahá'í, invited me and Josie Lava, my Filipino friend to her home at Subic Base. They were one of the two Bahá'í families stationed in the Philippines. One in Clark Base, and the other, in Subic Base. The American Bases were quite extensive and self-contained. The residents were not encouraged to venture out of their Bases. Therefore, these families had little contact with the Bahá'ís in the Philippines. So, to be connected, they invited some of us to visit. While there, we had the opportunity to meet the Bahá'ís who lived outside the Base.

When we arrived, my host told me that an Iranian Naval warship was anchored in the Bay for repair. She met the commander in the Base and told him about an Iranian girl who would be visiting her. The commander was quite interested in meeting me and invited us to have lunch aboard the ship. I was quite amazed, as it would have never happened in normal circumstances.

We graciously accepted the invitation for the next day and asked if Josie could have come with us. The response was affirmative. The next day, when we boarded the ship, we were formally welcomed by the commander, the officers, and sailors. We were then, ushered into the Commander's dining room to have lunch with him and his officers. We were all sitting around a stately table, having a conversation about my life as a student in the Philippines. The whole event seemed like being in a movie. After lunch, I presented the commander, the "Tablets to The Kings" Proclamation Book. The Commander thanked me and asked me for a favor. He told me that his crew, have been at sea for the past six months, and have not seen an Iranian lady. So, it would be a boost to their morale If I said hello to them in Farsi. I gladly accepted and went on the deck. The crew was called to

attention, and I was introduced to them as an honored guest. I said a few words in Farsi,
and they eagerly listened and responded with shy and respectful smiles. We left quite
touched by this remarkable experience. It showed that there was goodness and kindness
in Iranians when the occasion arises. I considered this trip a proclamation success.

My last year in the Philippines

By this time, I was thoroughly adjusted to the pioneering life in my new homeland. Life was
full and exciting. I never felt homesick, as there was always a family who welcomed me to
their house and offered me hospitality. My professors came to terms with my unique
lifestyle. They respected my beliefs and noticed my efforts to meet my academic
obligations, along with my Bahá'í activities. I could communicate in English and make
sense when submitting my exams or Term Papers. I was a fully-fledged MSW student and
was chosen to be the representative of the Student Body in the Curriculum Development
Committee. I made constructive suggestions and took my responsibilities seriously. Now
and then I gave the faculty members a jolt. One of these incidents was a luncheon
celebration for the completion of the Committee's mission. I attended the luncheon, but
since I was fasting, I explained that I could not partake of food. I saw a resigned acceptance
in their faces, as once again, I had manifested an affirmation of my Faith.

I was also a Student Body delegate, participating in the 3 International Conferences of
Social Work, Schools of Social Work, and Social Welfare, in Manila. It cemented my
commitment to my new profession. Especially in the Social Welfare Conference, where
some Civil Rights Icons, such as Dr. Andrew Young, and the Secretary-General of the
United Nations were keynote speakers. I developed a passion for the United Nations, and
the Charter of Human Rights. As they reflected the Bahá'í principles, expounded by Abdu'l-
Baha, in the Tablets to The Hague. I aspired to be a United Nations Consultant and

achieved this goal in the future.

In the Schools of Social Work Conference, I met Sattareh Farman Farmaian, the Director of the School of Social Work in Iran. When she found out that I was a Bahá'í, she told me that she was a student of the Tarbiyát Bahá'í School, and had a few Bahá'ís working for her. She encouraged me to join the faculty of the Tehran School of Social Work. I joined the Faculty a few years later.

During the Conference, Manila was hit by a strong tropical storm. As flooding in the streets made them impassable, I could not go back to Diliman. So, one of the American delegates offered me a bed in her hotel room. A keynote speaker had to swim through the flooded streets to get to the Conference hall. Although this was an unusual phenomenon for the delegates, I had experienced a much worse condition before. The year prior to the Conference, a strong typhoon devastated Manila. Most of the inhabitants of the close by villages had sought shelter in the main hall of the International Center. In the evening, we went for a walk and found an eerie situation, most of the faculty houses were blown away, and the home appliances and furniture were scattered among the ruins. For a week, we had no water or electricity. All the shops and supermarket were closed. I went to Momus's house and saw a cargo ship which had washed ashore, and landed on the banks of Manila Bay Blvd. As we had no choice, a few of us decided to go to Mahshid's little house in Baggio. There, we commemorated the Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha together.

I was a member of the National Teaching Committee and based on Dr. Muhajir's recommendation, the liaison and advisor for the Iranian students. Some came primarily for pioneering, and some to join their sisters, brothers or friends. However, all were eager to fulfill the goals of the student pioneers in the Philippines. They had a crash course in pioneering and were sent to their respective posts. Each found a unique way to adapt. I was impressed by a few, such as Farzbod Taefi. He was only 19 when he was sent

to study
in U.P. Mindanao. It was situated in one of the most remote islands in the Philippines. The
majority of people in Mindanao were Muslims. They had a unique culture and different
political view than the rest of the Filipinos. They were naturally suspicious to see strangers
coming to their Island. Farzbod lived in an area where not so many Bahá'ís lived. He had
no support system; socially or Bahá'í-wise. So, he took it upon himself to survive. He was
cautious and calculated. Mindanao was hot and humid, but despite that, Farzbod always
wore a dark suit. He grew a black beard that he trimmed immaculately. By his appearance,
he gave the impression of being a traditional learned man. He became friends with the
Mullah's, and since his Arabic was better than most, he would recite appropriate verses of
the Quran, followed by a Bahá'í interpretation of each verse. His original approach gained
him their acceptance and protection in this tumultuous region which reeked of political
unrest and civil war. Consequently, he was able to mix with local people and teach the
Faith in an entirely different light.

Farzbod shared his concern with me about sending new Iranian students to this Island,
without supervision and support of the institutions. I informed the Assembly about this
matter.

My Dissertation on: The Role of the Bahá'í Faith in the Social Development of the
Bahá'í Youth in Los Banos, Laguna

When I completed all the required coursework for the M.S.W. program, I found another
hurdle to my graduation. I should have taken a foreign language course and have passed
the proficiency test. I told my advisor that English was my foreign language, but it was not
acceptable to the Board. I told her that I could pass a proficiency test in Arabic. The problem
was that there was no Arabic language faculty in UP. I then remembered the Syrian
Professor who met with Mr. Faizi. My Advisor said that although he was not a

language professor, if he were willing to administer the test, the Institute would accept the result. I went to his home office and told him about my predicament. He said that he had no Arabic books to use as a text for my language exam. I told him that I had an Arabic edition of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that I could lend him. I gave him the Book, a few days before the test. On examination day, he told me that since the Writings was in abjad, and there were no vowels on consonants, he was not able to understand the content. It indicated that my Arabic was better than his. So, he arbitrarily opened the book and asked me to translate that page into English. He read the translation and gave me an "A" for my language test.

Now, I needed to work on my dissertation. The Director of the Institute offered to be my thesis advisor. She invited me to her house to discuss the topic of my research. I had not made up my mind and did not want to make a hasty decision. My advisor was the one who came up with a brilliant idea. She asked me why I was not writing my thesis about the Bahá'í Faith. She still remembered what she learned from Mr. Faizi's public meeting at the Hilton. I welcomed her suggestion and developed a proposal to study: "The Role of the Bahá'í Faith in the Social Development of the Bahá'í Youth in Los Banos, Laguna."

This golden opportunity enabled me to do my first scholarly work that integrated my study and the Faith. My constant companion for one year, was the letters of the Guardian to the youth, addressing us as his coworkers; encouraging us to excel in every endeavor. Holding our hands and helping us to move forward, overcoming barriers, and attaining our potential.
The youthful years and energy of the Guardian was a powerful source of inspiration for me.
I was fortunate that I could read and sufficiently understand his writings and messages in English.

In my research, I found that the Bahá'í approach to leadership is unique.

It does not select
a few and train them to become leaders. Instead, it nurtures every youth to achieve their
unique leadership abilities. It promotes “Universal Participation,” not exclusion. The only
qualifying measure for youth would be their motivation to work hard, to have selfless
devotion, and to have firm commitment to excel in the service arena.

I based my thesis on "The Renewal of Civilization,” a book by David Hofman. He was a
member of the Universal House of Justice. I remembered having lunch with him in the
Pilgrim House in the Holy Land. He was a British gentleman who always wore a sports
jacket and a bow tie, like Dr. Mahdavi, my professor at Tehran University. I was not able
to communicate with him in English then. Now, I spent hours studying his theory on social
development.

Excerpts of a letter from my Thesis Advisor to the Dean of Graduate of UP Diliman,
recommending approval of my Thesis:

‘The thesis is unique in the sense that it has suited one of the major religious institutions,
the Bahá’í Faith, which originated in Asia (Iran), while considering how religion, as a social
institution, can be drawn and utilised as an interrelated and supportive resource for
individual and social development. Moreover, it has sought to define that the youth can
play in today’s affairs, while regularly considering the support and inspirations adults can
give in a shared partnership with them. Since high ideals are consideration of youth, religion
properly interpreted to them, can be one of the most challenging sources of inspiration.
Through its structure and administration, religion can be a social institution that can be an
integrative force in our rapidly challenging world filled with constant shifts and uncertainty.
Since the profession of Social Work is primarily concerned with the enhancement of man’s
social functioning and the development of social groups and institutions for human and
social ends, the study has attempted to enlarge Social Work knowledge and

practice.’

Excerpts from the Thesis Abstract:

‘This study attempts to determine the import of Bahá’í teaching, through Bahá’í
Administration, on its young members in a Bahá’í community in Barrio Batong Malake, Los Banos, Laguna. Specifically, it attempts to find out:

1) The participation of the youth in the planning, organization, and implementation of the tenets of the Bahá’í Faith;

2) The role of Bahá’í Faith in facilitating the development of a sense of belonging and self-awareness among the Bahá’í youth.

The Study revealed the following:

- There appeared to be a strong sense of belonging to the Bahá’í community. The
youth viewed their group activities as a preparation for adult roles. They were keenly
aware of their role as a Bahá’í, which had affected their moral and social life. The
Bahá’í Faith, through its Bahá’í Administrative system, can be a means for spiritual
satisfaction.

The interview was used as the principal instrument. It was supplemented by the case studies and observation of different youth activities.’

Among the Case study subjects were my long-life friend Delia Pareja, and two young
professors who had recently become Bahá’ís ; Fred Ramirez, who became an Auxiliary
Board, and his future wife, Zenaida, who later became a Counselor of the International
Teaching Center in the Holy Land.
I dedicated my Thesis to the Supreme Body of the Bahá’í Faith, the Universal House of
Justice, and sent a copy to the World Center. Unfortunately, I lost my original copy while

sending my luggage out of Iran, during Islamic Revolution. However, in my subsequent visit
to the Holy Land, I was honored to find a copy of my thesis in the Supreme Body’s library.
It is also included in the Bahá’í Library Online, the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
Bulletin Online, the National Library of the Philippines Online, and a flipbook on the UP
College of Social Work and Community Development Library Online.

My Trip to Iran

After submitting my Thesis for review, I had a waiting period of 2 to 3 months, for the approval by the Review Board. Since I had nothing to do, I decided to use the opportunity to go to Iran for a short visit.

My mother welcomed my visit and was proud of my achievements. She told me that anytime she has been around the Bahá'í youth, they asked her if she is my mother. Then they said that they were planning to go pioneering and told their parents if they did not allow them, they would leave just as Shahla did.

I felt this enthusiasm anytime I attended a meeting. Once in a large youth meeting in Tejeh Garden, after the devotions, the Chair surprised me by welcoming me and asking to say a few words about my pioneering experience. I also had an interesting time when attending my mother's weekly meeting. I grew up with these wonderful ladies, all my mother's age, who, for the last decades, held these gathering in response to the National Bahá'í Campaign for the Advancement of Women. It combined a program focusing on fellowship, deepening, and fireside. They invited me to one of their meetings to talk about my pioneering experience. In that meeting, the non-Bahá'í, married daughter of the hostess was present. She was antagonistic towards the Bahá'ís and always made disparaging remarks about the Faith. The ladies, out of respect for her mother, tolerated her insults.
This time, after the Chair welcomed me back from the Philippines, this person accused the pioneers of going to a primitive Island, feeding its poor, ignorant people, and paying them to become Bahá'í. I calmly responded that I have been one of these pioneers. An Iranian student who had no home or money to spare. In fact, Filipinos were the ones who fed us and invited us to their homes. In addition, we had University Professors and prominent people who became Bahá'ís. She lowered her voice and said no one had told her about this. I noticed the approving faces of my mother's friends, appreciating my

remarks.

I made a short trip with my sister to Shiraz. There, I met Dr. Ahamadieh, an Auxiliary Board from Belize. We attended a youth meeting at the Bahá'í Center, who were eager to know about my pioneering adventure. We had the bounty of visiting the resting places of the Báb's wife and their infant son, Ahmad.

In our pilgrimage to the House of the Báb, while praying ardently for my future service, I was quietly approached by the guide, asking to recite the Tablet of Visitation. I was quite surprised. When we proceeded to the courtyard, the guide told me that he was one of the students of Dr. Ghadimi.

Trip to the Holy Land

In Tehran, I had the pleasure of meeting the parents of some of the student pioneers. I heard that Hayedeh was visiting too. We connected, and she told me of her plan of going for a nine-day pilgrimage. I was happy for her and asked my mother if I could go for a three-day pilgrimage with Hayedeh. She offered to pay for my trip. I was excited and asked the Samandari agency, to request a three-day permission for my pilgrimage. I was told that it was such short notice that they doubted my request would be granted. However, they would contact the World Center. The next day, I had a call from the agent to see him. The surprised agent showed me the telegram from the World Center, stating: Shahla Behroozi, the pioneer from the Philippines is welcome for the nine-day pilgrimage. The travel agent sated; "this had never happened before, what did you do which was so important?" With tears in my eyes, I replied; just being a humble pioneer.

Hayedeh and I traveled together to Haifa. We checked in a hotel downtown and joined the other pilgrims at the Eastern Pilgrim House. Mr. Furutan was our guide, and Mr. Faizi joined us later. They showered us with their love, telling others about our humble pioneering life in the Philippines. Meanwhile, we consulted with Mr. Faizi about the new

Iranian students
in the Philippines and our concern about their wellbeing. After a few days, we were asked
to meet with two members of the Universal House of Justice. We had the bounty of meeting
with Mr. Fatheazam and Mr. Chance and consulted about the welfare of student pioneers
in the Philippines. When the meeting was adjourned, Mr. Fatheazam turned to Mr. Chance
and said, last time, when Shahla was here, she could hardly put a few sentences together
in English. Now she can have a consultation with us in fluent English. I replied, I am
indebted to him and other beloved friends, who had made this venture possible.

I had a chance to shake hands with Mr. Hofman, during the Universal House of Justice
meeting with the pilgrims. I told him about my dissertation and my use of his book as my
source. He was pleased to hear that and asked me to send a copy to the House. I obliged
and dedicated my Thesis to the Universal House of Justice and sent a copy to the World
Center. I received a letter that the Supreme Body had received my Thesis, and it was
placed in the House Library. I also thanked him and the Supreme Body, for granting me
permission for the Nine-day pilgrimage. Mr. Hofman playfully pulled on my necktie and said
pioneers are dear to the House.

I also had a chance to tell Dr. Ruhe, about my meeting with the young US medic in Manila.
He was happy to know about that. We expressed our gratitude for the pilgrimage. Dr. Ruhe
suggested that we would be enriching our experience by going on foot to the Shrine, and
other Holy places in Haifa. We took his advice and seldom took a taxi or bus for the rest of
our time in Haifa.

My ardent prayers at the Holy Shrines was for Divine guidance for my future path of service.

Return to the Philippines

I returned to the Philippines spiritually revitalized and emotionally replenished. I was told
by Vic, that the Institutions had received guidance from the Universal House of

Justice,
regarding the safeguards for the well-being of Iranian student pioneers in the Philippines.

I passed my thesis oral presentation and received my master's degree Diploma. By this
time Farzbod had also completed his degree and came to Manila. Mahshid was also in the
process of leaving the Philippines. It coincided with a visit of Dr. Muhajir, who called for a
teaching conference in Manila.

The primary objective was consultation on the August 1970 Message from the Universal
House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies. An urgent call for pioneers "to ensure
the success of the Nine-Year Plan in the pioneer field." The Message stated:

'…. After a recent review of pioneer needs we find it is necessary to call upon the
valiant, constantly swelling community of believers throughout all continents to fill
yet another 204 pioneer posts where manpower is desperately needed, in some
territories in order to win the minimum number of Assemblies or localities called for
in the Plan, and in others where vast new mass teaching areas have been opened
to the Faith, thus necessitating additional reinforcements who must arrive soon if the
precious gains are to be retained…'

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986:
Third Epoch of the Formative Age
by Universal House of Justice
compiled on behalf of Geoffry W. Marks.
Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996

This conference was a call to action meeting. Dr. Muhajir listed the pioneering posts
designated to the Philippines and asked for volunteers to fill the posts. When he finished
the Filipino pioneer's assignments, he turned to us and asked Farzbod and me, to fill the
goals for the Pacific Ocean, in New Zealand and Samoa. He joyously announced that we
had fulfilled the final goals for the Philippines.

I knew very little about New Zealand and recalled reading a paragraph about it in my high
school geography textbook. Later, when Dr. Ayman's visited me, I told him about my new

pioneering post. Dr. Ayman smiled and said, Abdu'l-Baha called New Zealand the verdant Island, and Dr. Muhajir was rewarding me by sending me to a paradise. I was excited to hear that. However, I was anxious about my financial situation. When I was in Iran, I noticed my father's problem with his vision. As he was not able to drive or treat patients, he was retiring and selling his clinic. Therefore, he could no longer support me. I had sufficient funds to purchase a return ticket to Iran and a limited amount of cash.

Dr. Muhajir, who soon was leaving for the Pacific, told us that the Filipino volunteers would be deputized by allocated funds for the Philippines. Farzbod and I needed to receive funding from the National Assembly of Iran. He was communicating with Iran for the funds,

but since he was leaving for the Oceanic Conference in Fiji, we would need to join him there for the follow-up planning.

The funds did not arrive, and we held a prayer meeting with the Bahá'ís to find a way. Orpha Daugherty, one of the early American pioneers who knew me well, told me that she had just received a gift from her son, to purchase a plane ticket and visit him in the US. She was willing to postpone the trip and lend me, the money for my trip. In turn, I lent my money to Farzbod for his ticket. In 1971, we put our trust in Bahá'u'lláh, bid farewell to our dear friends and our adopted home, and began our new venture to the Pacific.

Mahshid

Mahshid left the Philippines for India. She then pioneered to Nepal, married a Nepalese man, and started a family. I last met her In Iran with her new baby son. She was happy and content with her life. She later became an Auxiliary Board Member and was actively involved in preparation for the inauguration of the Bahá'í Temple in India. Shortly after, she winged her flight to the Abha Kingdom. I remembered when she mentioned that a palm reader had told her that she had a short life. Sadly, this prediction came through.

A decade later, when I was living in California, my friend Kayvan, called me and said that a young Nepalese student was in her town, living with his non-Bahá'í aunt. He had contacted the Bahá'ís and told Kayvan that his mother, Mahshid, was a Bahá'í, and he would like to connect with the Bahá'ís. Kayvan asked if they could come to meet me. I was delighted to see him and invited them for lunch. When I saw this young man, I held him tight in my arms, crying, and remembering my dear Mahshid. He told me since he was very young when his mother passed away, he did not know much about her. We spent the rest of the day, recalling stories about Mahshid, his mother, and my beloved friend!

The Martyrdom of the three Iranian Students

Hayedeh and Jila became the liaisons for the Iranian students after I left. They told me the poignant story of the three Iranian students who, in 1972, were pioneering in Mindanao. They decided to go travel teaching to an isolated rural area. They never returned, and no one ever heard from them. As no active search was taking place, Jila and Hayedeh, requested to meet with Imelda Marcus, the First Lady of the Philippines. They pleaded to send a search party to find the missing students. Mrs. Marcus immediately took action and asked the authorities to search. After a few days, the First Lady met with them, and with tears in her eyes, told them that the mutilated bodies of the students were found in a shallow grave. She stated that the authorities would be taking care of removal of their remains and their funeral.

The following is an excerpt from the Message of the Universal House of Justice: 'With feelings of deep sorrow, we relate to the Bahá'í world the distressing circumstances surrounding the murder of three Iranian Bahá'í students, pioneers to the Philippine Islands.

Parviz Sadiqi, Faramarz Vujdani and Parviz Furughi were among a number of Iranian Bahá'í youth who answered the call for pioneers. With eleven others they registered at the Universities in Mindanao with the intention of completing

their
studies and proclaiming the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. These three had conceived the
plan of making teaching trips to a rural area inhabited by Muslims. When on July
31st the authorities of Mindanao State University were notified that they had left
the campus the previous day and had not yet returned, search parties were
immediately formed and the assistance of the police and local authorities obtained.
After inquiries and search led entirely by President Tamano of Mindanao State
University, the bodies of the three young men were found in a shallow grave. They
had been shot, grievously mutilated and two had been decapitated. The bodies
were removed and given Bahá'í burial in a beautiful plot donated for the purpose.

Immediately upon receipt of the tragic news, Vicente Samaniego, Counselor in
Northeast Asia, in close cooperation with the National Spiritual Assembly of the
Philippines, acted vigorously on behalf of the Bahá'ís and was given the utmost
cooperation and sympathy by the authorities, police, military and civil. A convocation
was called, attended by more than 900 students, faculty members and University
officials. Prayers were said in English, Arabic and Persian. The President of the
University gave a talk in which he said that the murdered Iranian students are not
ordinary students, for with them is the Message of Bahá'u'lláh which is the way to
unity. The Council of the Student Body asked that their new Social Hall be renamed
Iranian Student Memorial Hall. Three thousand people marched in the funeral
procession and six hundred went to the burial site to attend

the interment. A dignified burial was conducted by the Bahá'ís in the presence of
University authorities and friends.

The relatives and friends of these three young men, who gave their lives in the
service of the Blessed Beauty, are assured of the loving sympathy and prayers of
their fellow believers. The sacrifice made by these youth adds a crown of glory to
the wonderful services now being performed by Bahá'í youth throughout the world.
Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies: They that have forsaken their country in the

path of
God and subsequently ascended unto His presence, such souls shall be blessed by the Concourse on High and their names recorded by the Pen of Glory among such as have laid down their lives as martyrs in the path of God, the Help in peril,
the Self-Subsistent.'

Martyrdom of Three Iranian Bahá'í Students in the Philippine Islands 19 SEPTEMBER 1972 To the Bahá'ís of the World
Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986: Third Epoch of the Formative
Age by Universal House of Justice compiled on behalf of Geoffry W. Marks. Wilmette, IL:
Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996

CHAPTER 3
NEW ZEALAND
1971-1973

The SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN CONFERENCE

On May 1971, I left the Philippines for Suva, Fiji, to attend the first South Pacific
Conference. When I arrived at the airport, I did not find any Bahá'í to guide me to the
Conference accommodation site. So, I took a taxi to the Suva Bahá'í Center. There, I met
the caretaker of the Center, who was surprised to see a "young sweet girl" – as the dear
Bahá'í called me, arriving at her doorstep. So, she asked me to stay in the small guest
room at the Center. I later found out that all the Conference participants, including Farzbod,
were staying at a hostel.

The first day of the conference was quite exciting, seeing beautiful Pacific Islanders in their
colorful customs; joyful for coming together, united in working for one Common Cause.
Every day, we had the pleasure of hearing the prayers and songs in the melodious
languages of Pacific Islanders. That included the Maori of New Zealand and the Aborigines
of Australia.

The Conference commenced with reading the following message from the Universal House of Justice:

'To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference of the South Pacific Ocean

Dearly loved Friends,

We send our warmest greetings and deepest love on the occasion of the first Conference in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Praise be to God that you have gathered to consult on the vital needs of the hour!

Recalling the promise of Bahá'u'lláh "Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and, raising His voice, proclaim: 'I am the lifegiver of the world!'" we now witness its fulfillment in the vast area of the Pacific Ocean, in island after island mentioned by the Master in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. How great is the potential for the Faith in localities blessed by these references!

At the inception of the Formative Age, the Cause was little known here. Agnes Alexander had brought the Teachings to the Hawaiian Islands. Father and Mother Dunn had only recently arrived in Australia. Later the name of Martha Root was to be emblazoned across the Pacific. Still later, at the beginning of the Ten-Year Crusade, a vanguard of twenty-one Knights of Bahá'u'lláh raised His call as they settled in the islands of this great Ocean. The names of these valiant souls, together with the names of the army of pioneers and teachers who followed, will be forever enshrined in the annals of the Faith.

Their mighty endeavors brought about the enrollment of thousands of the peoples of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia under the banner of the Most Great Name, the opening in Australasia of more than 800 centers and the establishment of ten pillars of the Universal House of Justice. We can but marvel at such triumphs attained despite great difficulties imposed by the vast expanse of ocean separating the island communities, especially when it is recalled that in many of these islands even the Christian Gospel was unknown as late as the 1830s.

How great is the responsibility to continue spreading the Word of God throughout the Pacific. It was in the Tablets of the Divine Plan that 'Abdu'l-Bahá called for teachers "speaking their languages, severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God," to "turn their faces to and travel through the three great Island groups of the

Pacific Ocean - Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia … With hearts overflowing
with the love of God, with tongues commemorating the mention of God" to "deliver
the Glad Tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts to all the people."

The Nine-Year Plan, the current phase of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, is now
approaching its final stages. It is incumbent on the friends to assess what has been
accomplished and to anticipate and plan for such rapid acceleration of the teaching
and consolidation work as is necessary to win all goals by 1973. Time is short; the
needs critical. No effort must be spared; no opportunity overlooked.

Our prayers ascend at the Holy Threshold that every session of this historic meeting
will attract Divine blessings, and that the friends will go forth, armed with the love of
God and enthusiasm born of the Spirit, fully prepared to scale the heights of victory!

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]'

~ Message to the South Pacific Oceanic Conference- May 1971 To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference of the South

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19710501_002/1

Dr. Muhajir was one of the Hands of the Cause who represented the Supreme Body. They
expounded on the objectives of the Message and helped the delegates in developing
strategies to achieve the remaining goals of the Nine-Year Plan.

After each day of consultation and planning, the evenings were filled with the music and
dances, representing the culture of each nation. In addition, we had the wonderful Bahá'í
music and choir, some conducted by Russ Garcia, and accompanied by the solo
performance of Gina Garcia. Russ was a well-known Hollywood composer, and Gina, a
lyric writer, and singer. In 1969, the couple decided to become travel teachers. They left
their glamorous life behind, and sailed in their trimaran; "Dawn Breaker," to the islands in

the Pacific.

I had the pleasure of going to their boat one evening, with the New Zealand friends. The Garcia's eventually settled in New Zealand and graced the Bahá'í meetings with their wonderful music. They had taught the Bahá'ís to sing their soul-stirring songs and thus, fulfilling the following wishes of the Master:

"Therefore ... set to music the verses and the divine words so that they may be sung with soul stirring melody in the Assemblies and gatherings, and that the hearts of the listeners may become tumultuous and rise towards the Kingdom of Abha in supplication and prayer."

("Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,1976), p. 378)

In between the sessions, Dr. Muhajir met with Farzbod and me, to inform us that Mr. Sabet, a prominent Iranian Bahá'í, had agreed to deputize both until the funding from the NSA of Iran was approved. Dr. Muhajir asked me to go with him to the New Zealand consulate to obtain a tourist visa. Then, we purchased our plane tickets for New Zealand. He advised me to stay in Auckland until his arrival, to consult with the National Spiritual Assembly about my stay in the country.

New Zealand at a Glance

New Zealand is an island nation, in the southern hemisphere. It is comprised of 2 major islands of North and South and several smaller ones. The South Island is the last landmass before Antarctica. Therefore, although within the Pacific region, the New Zealand climate, geography, and culture, vastly differs from its neighboring islands of Fiji, Tonga, and New Caledonia.

Due to the isolation from the continents, there are animals and plants unique to New Zealand. One of them is the national bird of New Zealand called the Kiwi, a flightless, nocturnal, and shy bird. New Zealanders call themselves Kiwis and use it as a

brand
name for their sports teams, products, and the Kiwi fruit.

New Zealand was the last land mass in the world which was occupied by humans. The
Maori nation originated from the Eastern Polynesian seafarers, who settled in New Zealand
in the mid-13th Century. They adapted to their new environment and developed their own
unique culture and language. In 1642, Abel Tasman, a Dutch explorer, was the first
European, who reached the Islands that he called New Zealand. In 1769, James Cook, a
British Explorer opened the Islands to the British and other European settlers. The history
of the New Zealand settlers and Maori is not dissimilar to the American Indians and
European settlers. It eventually led to the Treaty of Waitangi, in 1841, which made the
New Zealand a British Colony. In the early 20th Century, New Zealand became a member
of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The system of government is Constitutional
Monarchy, with Parliamentary Democracy. The Queen as the Head of State appoints a
Governor General on the advice of the NZ Prime Minister, as her representative.

History of the Bahá'ís in New Zealand

Excerpts from the "Bahaikipedia.org/ New Zealand." website:
'The first New Zealand Bahá'í, Margaret Stevenson, was born in Onehunga on 30
November 1865. She initially heard of the Bahá'í Faith through reading an article in
The Christian Commonwealth sent to her by her sister, Amy, who was studying
music in London. Margaret, though, later admitted that she "did not think any more
about it."
However, in 1913 Miss Dorothea Spinney, a professional actress who performed in
many parts of the world, arrived in Auckland from California and stayed at the
Stevenson home in Devonport. During that visit, there were many opportunities for
Miss Spinney to tell the Stevenson family about the Bahá'í Cause.
After embracing the new Faith, Margaret began to speak to others of her new-found
beliefs – a courageous act for a middle-class woman in the then conservative society
where following a new religion was considered odd. As New Zealand's only

Bahá'í,
she held on steadfastly to her faith for many years.
Finally, after the visit of the first Bahá'í traveling teachers to New Zealand in
December 1922, a handful of individuals from Margaret's social circle also became
Bahá'ís. A class was established at her home in Parnell to study the Teachings in
more depth and was held there regularly for 10 years. In January 1923, the first
Bahá'í Nineteen Day Feast, which is a gathering of the Bahá'ís to pray, consult and
socialise together, was held at her home.
Margaret held various administrative roles within the Bahá'í community and
remained an active and dedicated Bahá'í until her passing in Auckland on 11
February 1941. She is buried in Hillsborough Cemetery
… 1948. The first person of Maori descent, Albert Tikitu White, became a Bahá'í in
Whangarei. His wife, Florence also joined the Faith. Albert, who descended from the
Ngatiawa tribe, and Florence naturally taught their children about their new Faith
and four of their six children who reached adulthood became Bahá'ís.

Some New Zealand Bahá'ís of the past whose names stand out are Hugh Blundell,
Ephraim Te Paa, and Shirley Charters. These are just a few names among many
early, influential Bahá'ís who spread the message of Bahá'u'lláh and strived to put
His teachings into practice by serving their communities and working towards
fostering unity among the diverse peoples of Aotearoa

…. In October 1958, a prominent Bahá'í from Uganda, Mr. Enoch Olinga, met with
Maori chiefs at Mangatoatoa Pa during a six-day visit to New Zealand, the main
purpose of which was to meet the Maori people. He went to Ngaruawahia where he
met with King Koroki's advisers, and to Rotorua where he was welcomed onto
several maraes and met Guide Rangi. During his visit, Mr. Olinga spoke to a
gathering of two hundred Maori at Kihikihi.'

Journey to New Zealand

I arrived at the Auckland airport in June, the New Zealand's Winter. It was late at night and
cold for me, having lived in the tropics for the past three years. I was recovering from a cold
virus that afflicted most of the conference participants in Fiji, wearing a woolen coat and

pants. My dear host, Wayne Lindsey, welcomed me, barefooted, dressed in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. He drove me to his home in Howick, a suburban city of Auckland. I stayed with Wayne and his wife Lisa, for the first few weeks and went through a learning curve of getting to know my new pioneering post.

I learned that the New Zealand language and culture was more British than American. In the Philippines, I took a language lab to learn the correct pronunciation of the American English. Now, I had to start adapting to the Kiwis English, dialect, idioms, and spellings. It felt like re-experiencing my first few months in the Philippines; I had problems understanding Kiwis, and they found it hard to understand me!

At that time, New Zealand had no relationship with Iran, and most of the Kiwi's thought Iran was in the Arabian desert; that I rode camels for transport and was not familiar with the "city life," such as shopping in supermarkets.

I remember one time; I was invited to a neighbor's home. She offered me British Tea, which was always served with milk and sugar. As in Iran we always had black tea, I politely turned down the offer. She laughed and said I should be a camel for not drinking tea. Then, later in the afternoon, she got up and announced that she was going to prepare "Tea." I smiled and stated that I was okay and didn't need any. She seemed surprised and asked, "you are not going to have dinner?" I then realized that for Kiwis, "Tea" also meant dinner. I responded, of course, I would have dinner and thanked her for the offer.

Auckland Bahá'ís

Auckland was the largest city in New Zealand; a smaller version of London. The National Bahá'í Center and Office were in Parnell, where the National Spiritual Assembly met every month. Most of the Bahá'ís in Auckland were my parent's age, accustomed to the formal Bahá'í Feast and meetings. While the suburban communities like Howick had a younger generation of Bahá'ís and were more vibrant. I was taken to the Bahá'í

Center to meet
with the National Spiritual Assembly's Secretary. She shared with me the Assembly's
concern, of my coming to New Zealand with just a tourist Visa. As the country's immigration
policy was strict, and there was a risk of my deportation like many others who came and
were not able to stay. Therefore, the National Spiritual Assembly was in a predicament and
would be consulting with Dr. Muhajir about my precarious situation. I spent the next few
weeks with my young Howick friends, including Margaret and Chris Wright, praying
anxiously, waiting for Dr. Muhajir's arrival, to help me with this predicament.

Shirley Charters

I met Shirley Charters, a dynamic and dedicated Bahá'í teacher, who was unlike her other
middle age compatriots. In that period, New Zealand was going through the subcultural
revolution of the "New Age" youth movement. Shirley was in tune with these young people
and attracted quite a few of them.

She believed in teaching the Faith by reciting the "Pure Words." Therefore, she always
carried a few books of the Bahá'í Holy Writings and knew most of the verses by heart.
Each section was highlighted in different colors, and there were notes on the bookmarks
for various topics. She used to go to the coffee shops, sat at a table and observed the
customers. When she spotted the "receptive souls," she went to their table, opened the
book to a highlighted section, and started the conversation by reading the quotation and
talking about the subject that interested the listener. She was always right in answering
what they were seeking. Quite a few youths, along with their family and friends,
embraced the Faith. These young Bahá'ís considered Shirley as their spiritual mother.
They became close-knitted friends and the driving force in the mass teaching campaign.

Dr. Muhajir's Visit

Dr. Muhajir's visit was the start of the new age of mass teaching in New Zealand. I remember his vision for New Zealand was to become the first Bahá'í nation in the world. As the probability of reaching a Bahá'í majority, in the 3 Million population of New Zealand would be achievable. He carried the message of the Universal House of Justice to the New Zealand Bahá'ís, stating:

'It is incumbent on the friends to assess what has been accomplished and to anticipate and plan for such rapid acceleration of the teaching and consolidation work as is necessary to win all goals by 1973.

Time is short; the needs critical. No effort must be spared; no opportunity overlooked.'

(The Universal House of Justice, May 1971, To the Friends of God assembled in the Conference of the South Pacific Ocean.)

bahai-library.com/uhj_messages_1968_1973

I was invited to meet with Dr. Muhajir and the members of National Spiritual Assembly, at the Bahá'í Center. One member was Manoo Ala'i, a brother of Mrs. Gloria Faizi. He was among a few Iranian Bahá'ís in New Zealand. Manoo always treated me as his younger sister and offered me advice and support throughout my stay in NZ. The two other members; Ron Pratt and John Giffin, were both American pioneers, residing in Napier and Gisborne. They both played key roles in the implementation of mass teaching in New Zealand.

I was relieved to learn that the Spiritual Assembly of Iran would be deputizing me until I found a job and supported myself. I was informed that based on that assurance, the National Assembly would sponsor me for my visa application. I also received reference letters from prominent professionals in Iran, such as Dr. Ayman, the director of Psychological Institute, and Dr. Rasekh, my professor, who was the CEO of the Social Planning and Development Agency of Iran.

Dr. Muhajir asked the National Assembly to send me to Wellington, the Capital of New Zealand, in order to contact the government agencies for employment. Brian Smart, an Assembly member, offered me hospitality, to stay with his family in Wellington. Pam Ringwood, another Assembly member, who was a lecturer of Family Law at Auckland University, offered to be my character reference in New Zealand. I felt empowered to arise and serve!

‘Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty … Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.’
~ The Báb

(Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers, p. 94)

https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Later that day, I had a consultation with Dr. Muhajir. He said that he had asked the National Assembly to appoint me as a member of the National Teaching Committee, with the objective of coordinating and implementing a mass teaching plan in New Zealand’s North Island. He wanted me to transfer my mass teaching experience from the Philippines, with modifications to adapt to the New Zealand culture. Dr. Muhajir stated that he was aware of the New Zealand immigration policy and knew that the only way for me to obtain a working visa, would be to personally meet with the Director of the Social Welfare agency. The strategy was to call and make an appointment, to present my resume and reference letters and ask for a suitable position. I told him that I would do my best, but asked; what would happen if I could not make it? Dr. Muhajir said, emphatically: “Shahla, you are the pioneer of the Universal House of Justice, if you cannot stay in your post, no one else would be able to do so!” He asked me to pray, to cast away my doubts and act as if it had already happened. I followed his advice, and repeated 19 times each day, the verses that Mr. Faizi had recited at the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh:

‘O Lord! Open Thou the door, provide the means, prepare the way, make safe the
path, Yá Allahu’l-Mustaghath! ‘

http://bahai-library.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=69

Dr. Muhajir’s Teaching Campaign

Dr. Muhajir had a meeting with the young Bahá’ís in the Auckland region and was pleased
to observe their energy and enthusiasm for service. He asked us to participate in a teaching
camp which was going to be held on the outskirts of Raetihi, by Mt. Ruapehu. I was able
to attend this meeting on my way to Wellington. Hooshang Mosaed, a cousin of Manoo
Ala’i, was the organizer of this gathering. I stayed at his home, with his family for a few
days, then went with him to the campsite. It was a rustic mountain lodge, composed of
sleeping halls with bunk beds, and a common room that served as a dining room and
meeting hall. I learned from other participants where to set up my sleeping bag, then joined
Dr. Muhajir in the meeting hall. That night, after dinner, Doctor Muhajir slept on a cot by the
wood burning stove in the meeting hall.

The surrounding area of the lodge was covered with snow. I felt like being back in Tehran
by Mt. Damavand. I had never experienced this type of camping before. It was the first of
many other occasions when all the Bahá’ís came together; prayed, ate, women and men
slept on the opposite sides of a hall, planned teaching activities, and joyfully served the
Faith. It was the beginning of a strong bonding among us, joining in spirit, and becoming
the members of “One Bahá’í Family.”

This was the first of many teaching conferences that Dr. Muhajir held throughout New
Zealand. In this meeting, the members of the new National Teaching Committee for the
North Island, and a few members of the National Assembly were present. He urged us to
plan and implement a mass teaching campaign, concentrating on street teaching, coffee
shops, community centers, and other public places.

Journey to Wellington

I bade farewell to Dr. Muhajir, and my new Bahá'í friends and took a train to Wellington.
Brian met me at the station and took me to his house to meet his wonderful wife, Janice,
and their beautiful children. It became my home for the next few months. The house was
on a hill overlooking Wellington Harbour. Brian used to be a headmaster in the Cook Islands
prior to coming to Wellington. Therefore, he and Janice could understand my anxiety for
facing the unknown. Janice became a loving friend who helped me to contact government
agencies and took me around Wellington to get familiarized with the city. I became
independent by learning to take the cable car and buses to go to town for appointments
and shopping. I could go on my own to the homes of young Bahá'ís, such as Barbara Hunt,
who lovingly, invited me to meet her friends and enjoy an evening of food and friendship.
It was at that meeting that I was first introduced to the sparkling grape juice/apple cider.
The young Kiwi Bahá'ís dubbed it as the "Bahá'í Champagne"; they raised their glasses
with that, instead of refusing to drink and standing out like a sore thumb among the public.
I remember in the Kaye and Paul Vessey's wedding, young Bahá'ís at our table had so
much fun and laughter, that others presumed that we had too much to drink - the bottles of
the nonalcoholic "Bahá'í Champagne" was very much like the real one. We jokingly
admitted that we were drunk from the "Wine of Astonishment."

I fell in love with Wellington, a more European city than Auckland. It was built on the hills
of the southern tip of the North Island and was usually compared to the city of San
Francisco. Wellington is a cosmopolitan city, bustling with people from different
nationalities. In downtown Wellington, there are an array of Greek, Polish, French and
German shops, and cafes, adding to its international flavor.

As soon as I was settled, I followed Dr. Muhajir's advice and called the Office of Child

Welfare Services, requesting an appointment with the Director. I received a call from Mr. K, the Deputy Director, to meet with him the next day. I took a cable car to the Government Office for the meeting. Mr. K. was a professional social worker, who later became a consultant to the future Prime Minister of New Zealand. He was impressed by my resume and reference letters and mentioned that there were very few social workers with master's degrees in the country. He then, wondered why I had chosen to work in New Zealand. I responded that I was invited by the Bahá'í community and was hoping to serve the people of New Zealand. The interesting point was that Mr. K. was Jewish, and as a member of a minority, he welcomed diversity. He promised to find a suitable position for me in the Department. I was quite excited and relayed my conversation to Janice. She asked me to invite Mr. K., and his wife, for a Persian dinner at her house. When he accepted my invitation, I started searching for the ingredients for making a Persian dish. However, I could only find some Japanese eggplant in a Mediterranean shop. So, I ended up making my least favorite Persian dish. The dinner was a success, and my Kiwi friends enjoyed the novelty of tasting a new recipe. We had a warm and friendly dinner, and as a parting gift, I gave Mr. K., a copy of the "Tablets to Kings," the Centennial Proclamation book of the Universal House of Justice.

At the follow-up meeting, Mr. K. told me that there was an entry-level position available in the Child Welfare Office in Pukekohe, in the Auckland region. If I were interested, I had to report to the office in 2 weeks. He said that since the job required driving for home visits, I would need to exchange my International Driver's License for a New Zealand one. I stated that I had never driven a car before and had no International Driver's License. The Department arranged for me to go to a Driving School, for two weeks, and pass my test to obtain a Driver's License. The driving school assigned its best instructor, a

middle-aged
Englishman, with a Cockney accent. He tried his best to teach me using a stick shift, to
start and stop on a steep road, do a 3-point turn and parallel parking. In addition, I had to
learn the New Zealand traffic regulations. The hardest part for me was driving on the wrong
side of the road – British rules of the road. The instructor told me that the pressure had
made him a chain smoker!

I passed my written test by the deadline. The next day, I took my driving test with an Officer
who was overdramatizing his reactions to my way of driving. As I did not have my own car,
I was driving the School's VW Bug. While I was gingerly driving uphill, on a narrow road,
out of nowhere, a vegetable truck turned and hit me side on, totaling the little car. I
screamed "O my God!" covering my face with my hands. I was sure it was my fault, but the
Officer took me by my shoulders and said, "sweetheart, it was not your fault!" He ordered
me to leave the scene, then ran out of the car, yelling at the other driver, for not using his
signal, and looking for oncoming traffic. I was in shock, knowing for sure that my job was

in jeopardy. I spent the rest of the day, wandering in a shopping mall, trying to calm my
nerves. When I got home, Janice seemed quite worried. She told me the driving school
had called and gave her the news. They wanted me to know that they had informed the
Department, about my no-fault accident. However, it was not advisable for me to take the
test, as I had the traumatic experience and their car was totaled. Mr. K called and asked
me to meet with him the next day.

I went to our last meeting, feeling quite despondent! Mr. K. was empathetic and stated that
he asked the supervisor in Pukekohe Office, to enroll me in a driving school for the extra
practice, so that I obtain my license in Auckland. Then, he handed me my working visa,
which granted me a permanent status.

He also gave me my employment papers, indicating that I was officially hired on

that day.
Therefore, the Government was covering my settlement expenses, including my transportation and hotel accommodation in Pukekohe. I thanked him for his help and got
ready to leave for my new job and new life. I thanked God for the Ocean of His Mercy and
that within a few months, I was able to overcome so many obstacles and achieve the far-
reaching goal of being a self-supporting pioneer in my new post.

‘He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that
remembereth Him.’
~ Bahá’u’lláh
(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 203)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

My New Life

I said goodbye to the Smarts and thanked them for their loving support in making my new
life possible. Then I took a train to Pukekohe, 50 Kilometers south of Auckland. It was a
small town, serving a large rural area. My hotel and the Child Welfare Office were both
located on the same street, along with the other major shops and government agencies. It
was the first time in my life that I was living in a small rural town.

The small Child Welfare office consisted of a Supervisor, 2 Child Welfare Officers, including
me, and a few clerks. Mr. C, my supervisor told me that I would be attending a Staff
Development Training in Wellington. However, it would be after the 6 months of
probationary period. Meanwhile, I would be learning my job by riding along with him and
shadowing my coworker, Mr. F. No one was happy to see me, a foreigner and stranger,
joining them in that tightly knit office. However, Mr. F. took me under his wing and became
my mentor. He was an ex-insurance salesman and knew very little of social work methods.
We were serving the horticultural community of Pakehas (whites) and Maori. After one
week stay in the hotel, I boarded with Mr. F’s mother, an elderly New Zealander.

Mr. C. told me that since there was no driving school in that town, he would help me

practice, in order to get my license. He also said that he wanted me to be stationed in

Papakura, a small urban city, 23 Kilometers from Auckland. He thought, rightly so, that I would be more suited to the clientele population of that area. So, a few days after my arrival, he asked me to drive the latest model office car, a brand-new Ford, to Papakura. He sat beside me and showed me the entrance to the highway that connected Pukekohe to Papakura. I was nervous and tried my best to follow the traffic rules while listening to Mr. C's one-way conversation. After a long and uneventful drive, we arrived at Papakura's first intersection. However, I did not notice that we were there. So, when Mr. C. abruptly told me to turn right, I did so, without slowing down! I went straight toward the cars parked on the side of the street. My car went over the back bumper of a new, little sports car. I was devastated, and Mr. C. was in a panic. The accident happened in front of the Court and Police Department of Papakura, where Mr. C. was taking me to be introduced as their new Child Welfare Officer. The Police Officers rushed out to inspect the accident. From then on, I became the butt of jokes among the Law Enforcement Officers. Everybody knew of my accident, and anytime they saw me, they teased me by saying: "Watch out! The dangerous driver is coming!". The owner of the sports car was the Clerk of the Court. When I was introduced to him, he blurted: "what did you do to my beautiful car?". It was one of the most embarrassing times of my life. Mr. C. told me that it was his fault to put me in such a precarious position. He should have known better, as my supervisor, to ask me to drive a new car in an unfamiliar area. He arranged for me to commute to Auckland, for driving lessons. I got my license at the Papakura DMV, where I had my accident. The Officer was joking that he was licensing me to operate a lethal weapon! I may have broken the record of having 2 major accidents before getting my driver's license! Since then, I was always given the oldest car while working in that office.

After a month, I found a modern, one-bedroom, furnished apartment in Papakura. I spent most of my time in Papakura and went only once a week to the Main Office for reporting and submitting my paperwork. Mr. F. continued to be my mentor. After a while he helped me to buy my first car, a used Hillman. I then became an independent working woman.

My Bahá'í Life:

I was the only Bahá'í, in both Pukekohe and Papakura. The closest Bahá'í was an isolated believer in Waiuku, a farming town close to Pukekohe. Diane Mc Allen Smith lived in a beautiful, modern ranch house with her children and her husband who was not a Bahá'í. They had a sprawling sheep farm. Diane and I developed a close friendship, we both valued our spiritual connection.

The other Bahá'í close by, was Farivar Bashir-Elahi, a Persian pioneer who lived as an isolated believer in Manukau, a town close to Auckland. His wife was not a Bahá'í, and we enjoyed our new-found friendship.

After moving to Papakura, I was able to go to the Auckland Bahá'í Center for Bahá'í activities. I heard from the National Office that Mr. Furutan was visiting Auckland and was asking about me. Although I did not have a car at that time, I was able to take a bus to the Bahá'í Center to meet him. I was so delighted to see that precious soul again. He told me that Dr. Muhajir had asked him to find out how I was doing and if everything was okay with

my stay in New Zealand. I told him about my life, and he was pleased that things were working out for me. I said that I had been trying very hard to follow his advice, as he stated in this story:

'The Blessed Beauty often remarked: 'There are four qualities which I love to see manifested in people: first, enthusiasm and courage; second, a face wreathed in smiles and a radiant countenance; third, that they see all things with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others; fourth, the ability to carry a task, once

begun,
through to its end.'
~ Ali-Akbar Furutan, Stories of Bahá'u'lláh

http://bahai-library.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5017

Implementation of Dr. Muhajir's Teaching Campaign in the North Island

The National Spiritual Assembly appointed four members to the National Teaching Committee of the North Island, to initiate the implementation of Dr. Muhajir's teaching campaign: Margaret Wright and Caroline Joseph, who were my age, both married with small children. The fourth member was John Milne, a devoted Bahá'í, who despite his physical disability, was committed to travel extensively with us, to the teaching events throughout the North Island.

In the beginning, when I did not have a car, John used to pick me up from the bus station for the NTC meetings. The other three members were New Zealanders from Auckland, all of us were committed to giving it all, to make the campaign a success.

Dr. Muhajir asked the National Spiritual Assembly to publish 1000 proclamation pamphlets, like the ones that were used in the Philippines and other mass teaching countries. It explained in simple and concise language the 12 Spiritual Principles of the Faith; emphasizing the Oneness of God, Oneness of Humanity, and Oneness of Religion; expounding on progressive revelation, the station of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and a short explanation of the Bahá'í Teachings. It was attached to a self-stamped interest card, which invited the readers to investigate the Faith by checking the boxes, to either attend a Bahá'í meeting or to be contacted for further information.

We contacted the Assemblies, National Youth Committee, active Bahá'ís, and pioneers, asking them to join us in a Teaching Campaign, by developing their own teaching plans, and sending us the dates and locations for its implementation. The National Teaching Committee compiled the reports and sent out the Master Plan and Calendar, to the North Island Bahá'í communities, urging and encouraging everyone to participate.

The National Spiritual Assembly members in each area helped with mobilizing the community and galvanizing the teaching teams to carry out the plan.

Each community, in their designated month, implemented the following plan:

For the first three weeks;
• They frequented coffee shops and community centers, made contacts and developed friendships with the interested individuals.

• They went to the receptive neighborhoods and distributed proclamation pamphlets by either placing them in their mailboxes or handing copies to those who were out in the gardens or on their porches.

The last weekend of the month was the time of Intensive Teaching Campaign. A hall was rented in a central location and accommodation was provided for travel teachers and their families who converged from across the North Island. The NTC members, pioneers, and a few NSA members joined the group and supported each teaching project throughout the year.

During each weekend, all the travel teachers gathered in the hall, ate meals together, prayed together, and had a crash course on the mass teaching techniques. They formed the teaching teams, and went to their assigned locations, mainly on major streets. Team members started offering proclamation pamphlets to people. If their offer was accepted, the teacher started sharing the contents with the seeker. The other members, observed and silently prayed. If the seeker showed interest, the rest of the group joined in the discussion and at the end, asked the seeker to become a Bahá'í. The teacher then accompanied the new Bahá'í or interested seeker to the meeting hall to join the Bahá'ís for further discussion and fellowship.

In the meeting hall sometimes, simultaneously, we held several firesides to meet the needs of those who were arriving at different times. A more experienced teacher who was conducting a small group fireside, welcomed the new seeker, and based on their inquiries,

started a fireside discussion. Thus, there was no rigid program, as each fireside was unique, creative and loving, to meet the needs of the individual seekers.

We embraced the new believers as members of the Bahá'í family. The next 3 weeks, the members of the teaching team continued deepening the new believers, visiting their families and developing friendships with their family and friends. The emphasis was on an all-encompassing approach so that we did not isolate the new believers from their families.
Most of the new Bahá'ís were youth, they joined the travel teachers in the upcoming mass teaching events across the North Island.

At the end of each teaching activity, we had a feedback session. We prayed and lovingly consulted on what had worked, and what needed improvements. We were all open to the new ideas which made us more effective teachers.

The Qualities of the Teaching Teams

The Dr. Muhajir Teaching Campaign, for the period of 1971-73, resulted in attracting 779 new believers, 500 of them were youths.

The most noteworthy aspect of this campaign was the "can do attitude" of the team members, the enthusiasm, and energy of the young Bahá'ís, the active involvement of the Assemblies and the overall support of the National Spiritual Assembly. We usually had 20 to 50 travel teachers, mostly young, who carpooled from a driving distance to the event, carrying a sleeping bag, a small overnight bag, and their prayer books. Some brought a guitar to help with singalongs which filled the meeting halls with the love and joy of being a Bahá'í among our extended family.

I membered the urging of Dr. Muhajir to spend every ounce of my energy teaching the Faith. So, like other teachers, I spent the weekends traveling to the target areas and helping the teaching teams with the campaign. I usually coordinated the street teaching and helped with the small group firesides in the hall.

The travel teachers, besides the National Teaching Committee members and their family,
were a blend of pioneers and New Zealanders:

- From New Plymouth, we had Ron and Jan Pratt, with their young family; Pat Doyland
and her teenage daughters, Alice, and Anita;
- From Gisborne, we had John and Valerie Giffin;
- Barbara Hunt joined us from Wellington;
- From Taupo, Peter and Keni Suchnigg and Ian Schutz joined us;
- The key organizer in Wanganui was Doug Weeks;
- We always met in the community meeting halls which attracted the neighborhood
population, including a number of Maori Maraes. Chuck Aranga, a young Maori, and a
new believer joined us for a Maori teaching weekend in Taumarunui Marae. Rochelle
Brader, a new Bahá'í, joined us from New Plymouth.
- In Hamilton, the Teaching Committee worked closely with the participants of the
National Youth Conference, in organizing a weekend of Mass Teaching activities. It led
to the involvement of a group of enthusiastic youth, who actively participated in most of
the teaching events. Among them were, Sytze and Gayl De Boer, from Hamilton; Kaye
and Paul Vessey, Peter King, Ian Cookson, Peter Manins, Bos O Sullivan, and Chris
Wright, from Auckland.

We were all united in our love for Bahá'u'lláh, and followed the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
in acquiring the true qualities of a Teacher:

"Ye are all torches that I have lighted with mine own hands. Go forth, light others
till all the separate waiting servants are linked together in a great Unity.

Those who are working alone are like ants, but when they are united, they will become as eagles.

Those who work singly are as drops, but, when united, they will become a vast river carrying the cleansing water of life into the barren desert places of the world.

Before the power of its rushing flood, neither misery, nor sorrow, nor any grief will
be able to stand.

Be United! It is rather dangerous to be an isolated drop. It might be spilled

or blown
away."

~ 'Abdu'l-Baha, as recorded in Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway

Remembrance of God: A Meditation, https://wilmetteinstitute.org/

A newsletter from New Plymouth, courtesy of Rochelle Brader

Fiftieth Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the passing of
‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Message of the Universal House of Justice:

‘We have noted with deep satisfaction that some National Spiritual Assemblies have
already initiated plans to befittingly commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the
passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the inception of the Formative Age of the Bahá’í
Dispensation.

We feel it would be highly fitting for the three days, November 26 to 28, during which
the Day of the Covenant and the Anniversary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
occur, to be set aside this year by all National Spiritual Assemblies for specially
arranged gatherings and conferences, convened either nationally or locally or both,
on the three following main themes: The Bahá’í Covenant, The Formative Age, and
The Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

We hope that these gatherings will serve to intensify the consecration of the workers
in the Divine Vineyard in every land, and provide them with the opportunity,
especially in the watches of the night of that Ascension, when they will be
commemorating the passing hour of our Beloved Master, to renew their pledge to
Bahá’u’lláh and to rededicate themselves to the accomplishment of the as yet
unfulfilled goals of the Nine Year Plan.’

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19710712_001/1

I joined the Bahá’ís from Auckland to commemorate this historic milestone, in Whangarei,
a city north of Auckland. Hylton and Helen Grigor helped with organizing this event. I was
asked to chant the Tablet of Visitation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Arabic, “in the watches of the night

of that Ascension." When I lifted my head, there was no dry eye among the participants.
Then, we all prostrated to rededicate our pledge, and beseeched the Beloved Master to
aid us in achieving the goals of the Nine-Year Plan. A public meeting was held, featuring
Gina and Russ Garcia and their famed "Dawn Breakers fireside." It was one of the
highlights of my time in New Zealand.

Kaikohe Summer School

Kaikohe is in the far northern district of New Zealand. Manoo Ala'i had a sprawling sheep
farm close to that town and was the coordinator of the Summer school. It was held at the
Northland College, that contained a hostel, swimming pool, and a recreation area. As it
was during the Christmas holidays, I had time to spend a few days with the Ala'i family.
Manoo's wife, Margaret, was hospitable as the wife of a Persian; caring as a New
Zealander, and gracious as a Maori Princess- she was descendant of a Maori Chief.
We had a large number of young, enthusiastic Bahá'ís who attended the Summer School.
We all spent a part of the day in the streets, teaching the Faith, and bringing the interested
individuals to the firesides. Suzanne and Paree, the teenage daughters of the Ala'i's, were

instrumental in bringing a large group of friends to my firesides. These friends enjoyed our
lively conversations, and after each declaration, they applauded the new believer for
accepting the Faith, hugging them, and going out to bring other friends to the fireside. It
was an amazing experience to see the love and excitement of these youth, who decided
to participate in the remaining sessions of the Summer School.

I was asked to teach the Dawn Breakers at Summer School. I found it rewarding to help
the young souls, to take a glimpse of the Heroic Age. To learn about its heroes, mostly
young, who gave their all to their Beloved Báb, who was also in the prime of his life. I was
amused when Terry, a young Bahá'í came to me and asked to tell him more about "this

chap, Bahá'u'lláh!" That was my first encounter with Terry Gillbanks. I heard from Ron Pratt, that when he held a public meeting in New Plymouth and was planning to show a Bahá'í film, he prayed for help in using the projector. When Ron was on street teaching, he met a young man, who, after learning about the Faith, signed his declaration card, and accompanied him to the meeting hall. Terry, the young man, was an elementary school teacher and offered to run the projector - Ron's prayers were answered. Terry started attending Bahá'í activities and decided to come to the Bahá'í Summer School in Kaikohe.

One day, Manoo Ala'i asked me to let everybody know that they should not walk on the new lawn. As the School officials were complaining that the participants were not using the pathways and had been trampling the new grass. I always walked on the pathway and was not aware of anyone walking on the lawn. So, that afternoon, while I was on my way to the swimming pool, I noticed Terry, walking on the grass. When he saw me, he happily greeted me by saying "Good Day!" I was still concerned about Manoo's directives. So, I responded; "Good Day to you! Please use the pathway and don't walk on the grass, as the school officials have been complaining to Manoo." I continued giving this message to all the participants. However, Terry said that he resented me for telling him off. So, we started our relationship on the wrong foot. Terry still talks about this anecdote, after 45 years of marriage.

Kaikohe Summer School, courtesy of Suzanne Mohan

Front row standing: First from right, Kaye Vessey, Fourth – Suzanne Ala'i, Sixth - Shahla
Second row standing: Fifth from right - Paul Vessey
Back row: second from left – Terry Gillbanks
Standing on stairway: first step - Russ Garcia
Top of stairs: from left, first - John Milne; fourth- Manoo Ala'i, fifth - Ron Pratt

Life in Auckland

I was in Papakura for nearly six months, trying to find my footing in my new job, dealing with issues of child abuse, in an unfamiliar culture. Most of the New Zealanders that I came across asked how, as an Iranian, I could work with clients from a different culture. On one occasion, when I was in an interagency gathering, I was asked the same question. I responded that as human beings we are all the same, with the same basic needs and problems. One person in the group was Mr. C's sister, a Salvation Army Officer, who was in her sixties. I heard later from my supervisor, that his sister was upset, complaining that I was presumptuous to think that I was the same as New Zealanders! I responded, of course, I was the same and would have expected more empathy from a Salvation Army Officer.

This encounter manifested the duality of my life in New Zealand. In one aspect, when I was with the Bahá'ís on the weekends, we were all one big, happy family. On the other, while dealing with the general population, I had to struggle with the stigma of being a stranger in a foreign land.

Somehow, life had an exciting adventure in store for me. It occurred when I had a conversation with Pam Ringwood, the NSA member and a Lecturer in Family Law, at Auckland University. I was sharing my challenges as a Child Welfare Officer when she told me about a position with the Auckland City Council. She heard they were advertising for a Community Advisor, in the Town Planning Division. She thought about me and was willing to make a recommendation to the Deputy Mayor. I thanked her for thinking of me and asked her to help me with my application. I was quite excited, and since my MSW major was in the Community Organization, I believed that I had a chance to succeed. I sent them my job application and received a date for a job interview.

At that time, Auckland City Council building was the tallest skyscraper at Queen Street, downtown. My interview was in the Deputy Mayor's office, on the top level of the building.

The Interview panel was composed of the Deputy Mayor, Dr. Ferguson, an aristocratic medical doctor; the director of town planning division and P, the present community advisor, who really wanted an assistant, rather than a coworker. When I sat in that office, waiting for my turn, I was overwhelmed with the magnitude of the situation and was sure that I had no chance as a newcomer to the country, with no relevant job experience, to get that position. I silently chanted a prayer. At once, I felt the presence of Abdu'l-Bahá, placing his hand on my shoulder and telling me: "I am with you always!" I knew at that moment that there was no greater power in that chamber equal to Abdu'l-Bahá; I entered the room smiling, confident that under His protection, all was well! I told them about my thesis on the Social Development of the Youth, my Bahá'í beliefs, my education, my international experience, and my meetings across the North Island. P., later told me, that Dr. Ferguson was impressed with my interview, and wanted me for the job, despite P.'s, insistence to employ a Maori applicant, who had extensive community organization experience. This man got the third position after six months. I could not think of any reason for my selection, but the love of Abdu'l-Bahá for this humble maidservant. So, within eight months of my pioneering to New Zealand, I had one of the highest managerial positions in the richest and most powerful city councils in New Zealand. When I gave my notice to Mr. C, he told me that he just received my registration form for the Staff Development Training Course, in Wellington.

Within two weeks, I found a one-bedroom apartment in Auckland, and stepped into my corner office, on the top level of the Council building, with a panoramic view of Auckland Harbor Bridge. I chose my own office furniture and had a secretary and receptionist.

P., who was politically savvy, helped me through the whirlwind of local politics. The previous year, in a predominantly Maori area, he had established the first Citizens

Advice Bureau –
CAB. Therefore, he recommended hiring a Community Advisor, who would be familiar with
Maori culture. Since my appointment, he had to make an adjustment to his overall plan. He
decided to start a new office in Glen Innes, a low-income State Housing suburb of
Auckland. The CAB was a community service neighborhood center, staffed by volunteers,
who offered free advice to the citizens to connect to community resources, receiving legal

advice, budgeting, and financial planning. My role as the Community Advisor was
promoting CAB, recruiting, and coordinating suitable professionals to volunteer their
services, and fundraising. The unique position of Glen Innes was in its proximity to
Remuera, one of the most affluent suburbs of Auckland. When the Council publicly
announced the establishment of the new CAB, I was placed in the forefront of publicity. I
was interviewed and featured in the New Zealand Herald, the largest newspaper in the city,
followed by articles in local newspapers. There was a flood of volunteers, mostly wives of
affluent residents of Remuera, including Councilmen, who wanted to be involved. I spent
most of my evenings speaking in service clubs, such as Lions, Rotary, and Jaycees. I was
usually the only female in these “all gentlemen” club gatherings. I was also regularly invited
to lecture for free, in the University.

As the publicity continued, it aroused backlash from the political figures. First, from Sir
Robert Muldoon, the powerful leader of the National Party, who later, became the Prime
Minister of New Zealand. In a press interview, he expressed his dissatisfaction with not
being informed of the establishment of a CAB in his district. P. helped with damage control
by releasing a public statement from the Council about its full cooperation with Muldoon. I
received a call from Muldoon’s office to meet with him in his district office in Glen Innes. I
was extremely anxious and intimidated by his reputation. We had a pleasant meeting, and
he stated that he just wanted to be acknowledged for his role in the betterment

of the
constituents in his district.

The second backlash was from the Mayor of Auckland, Sir Dove - Myer Robinson, known
as “Robbie.” He was also a powerful political figure, who was elected for the second time
as the Mayor of Auckland. As I was reporting to the Deputy Mayor, Robbie was not happy
that he was not mentioned in articles about the CAB. His office called and asked me to
accompany the Mayor to an official Maori ceremony. Again, knowing his reputation as
being a colorful political character, made me anxious for the upcoming meeting. On that
day, I wore a full-length Persian lambskin coat; embroidered leather, with fur trimming. A
gift from my mother, fashionable among the young hippies in the 70’s. I met the Mayor, and
we were escorted to the backseat of the mayoral limousine. I sat beside him, exchanged a
few words, and soon after, he fell asleep for the rest of the trip. When we arrived at the
destination, we got out of the car and received by the ceremonial Haka; a Maori welcome
dance. It lasted for half an hour, followed by speeches from the Mayor and other dignitaries.
There was full media publicity of the event, and later, I learned that I was dubbed as the
“Queen” of “Queen Street,” because of my lambskin coat, and the Council’s location in the
Queen Street.

Bahá’í life in Auckland

As there were no Bahá’ís in Papakura, and being a member of NTC, I was practically a
member of the greater Auckland community. When I found out that the Bahá’í Center at
Parnell, was only open during Bahá’í activities, I volunteered to open the Center two
evenings a week. It gradually attracted young people to come to the Center for a cup of tea
and discussion. Hugh Carden offered to keep the Center open for other evenings. We had
regular “drop-ins,” who came for informal discussions, or using the library.

Soon after my residency in Auckland, I was elected to the Assembly, as the

youngest
member. The wonderful Assembly members were quite interested in learning about our
mass teaching efforts, and supportive of any creative ideas to be implemented in Auckland.
A few ladies who were older than me somehow adopted me as their Bahá'í daughter and
a member of their family.

Terry had moved to Auckland and was living in a flat with Paul Vessey and Bos O' Sullivan,
as his flatmates. Terry offered to help with driving when we carpooled for weekend trips to
the teaching activities. Paul and Kaye became our close friends, and these friendships
sparked romances that led to Bahá'í marriages.

Recently, I requested friends to share memories of this period. Paul Vessey wrote:

'The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Whangarei: Kaye and I were there - we had just
become engaged (I proposed to her at Sytze and Gayl's wedding in November.) On
the way to Whangarei, we were in the back seat of Hylton Grigor's car, and Hylton
was driving and talking to Kaye – he said he'd heard that she had recently become
engaged and wanted to know who – hopefully a 'nice Bahá'í boy' - (not realising it
was me!!). She said, "he's sitting right next to me." Hylton was so surprised, he
turned around (while he was driving) to shake my hand…! We nearly went off the
road…!! Very funny.

We named a daughter, Shahla, after you – we wanted to make a statement and give
our first born a non-Christian name. (Just to wind up my family, we said we were
going to name our first-born Ahmad…!! They were freaking out…!!). You were
hugely influential on many of us – up till we met you, most of the Bahá'ís were either
old or middle-aged, and the only youth were the children of the Bahá'ís . Caroline
Josephs was a bit older than us, but still youngish and more importantly, she had
some "spark" '

The interesting point is that Terry and I announced our engagement at Kaye and Paul's wedding! First, we were thinking to hold our wedding where they held their reception. However, when announcing our engagement, we found out that our Bahá'í friends across North Island wanted to attend. Their number exceeded the limit for our budget. When consulting with friends, we ended up having the most unusual wedding. My friend Diane, from Waiuku, offered to have the wedding at her beautiful ranch house. The house was modern and spacious, settled in the middle of a sprawling farm. We sent out invitations to all the Bahá'ís, asking them to bring a cushion to sit on. Manoo Ala'i offered a rack of lamb for Persian Kebab. Caroline and her mother Jean offered to bake a beautiful wedding cake. Our wedding was planned for July 22nd, which was winter in NZ. The motherly ladies in Auckland offered to make me the wedding bouquet. I told them that I wanted a single red rose, instead. They searched for a red rose at quite a few glass houses of growers and finally found a few roses that they kept in the fridge until the wedding day.

I asked my mother to send me a wedding dress, with a white velvet robe. When it arrived, it was too big. So, my Lebanese Christian friend from Papakura altered it for me. Her husband who was a professional Opera singer and pianist offered to sing at my wedding.

On the wedding day, Terry, and a dear Iranian pioneer, Taraz, spent the entire morning barbequing Persian Kebab, and I made Persian Rice. One by one, close friends came and helped with the setup. More than 60 friends from across the country came, it was a beautiful and lively wedding. Gina, Caroline's daughter, on the spot, accepted to be my flower girl. Sytze and Gayl took a turn to recite a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on divine love:

Love is the mystery of divine revelations!

Love is the effulgent manifestation!

Love is the spiritual fulfilment!

Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit inspired into the human spirit!

Love is the cause of the manifestation of the Truth (God) in the phenomenal world!

Love is the necessary tie proceeding from the realities of things through divine creation!

Love is the means of the most great happiness in both the material and spiritual worlds!

Love is a light of guidance in the dark night!

Love is the bond between the Creator and the creature in the inner world!

Love is the cause of development to every enlightened man!

Love is the greatest law in this vast universe of God!

Love is the one law which causeth and controleth order among the existing atoms!

Love is the universal magnetic power between the planets and stars shining in the loft firmament!

Love is the cause of unfoldment to a searching mind, of the secrets deposited in the universe by the Infinite!

Love is the spirit of life in the bountiful body of the world!

Love is the cause of the civilization of nations in this mortal world!

Love is the highest honor to every righteous nation!

- Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas, P 526

http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-573.html

Kaye and Paul read the wedding prayers. Nui Tuataga, the Auxiliary Board from Samoa, gave a short talk about Bahá’í marriage, then, recited what used to be called the “Marriage Tablet.” An eye-opener for Terry’s family to learn about this new religion of their son. Dear Farivar, the Iranian pioneer, officiated the wedding.

The loving advice, attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, then known as the “Marriage Tablet”, became the beacon, guiding us through the peaks and valleys of our married life:

‘The bond that unites hearts most perfectly is loyalty. True lovers once

United must
show forth the utmost faithfulness one to another. You must dedicate your knowledge, your talents, your fortunes, your titles, your bodies and your spirits to
God, to Bahá'u'lláh and to each other. Let your hearts be spacious, as spacious as
the universe of God!

Allow no trace of jealousy to creep between you, for jealousy, like unto poison,
vitiates the very essence of love. Let not the ephemeral incidents and accidents of
this changeful life cause a rift between you. When differences present themselves,
take counsel together in secret, lest others magnify a speck into a mountain. Harbour not in your hearts any grievance, but rather explain its nature to each other
with such frankness and understanding that it will disappear, leaving no remembrance. Choose fellowship and amity and turn away from jealousy and hypocrisy.

Your thoughts must be lofty, your ideals luminous, your minds spiritual, so that your
souls may become a dawning-place for the Sun of Reality. Let your hearts be like
unto two pure mirrors reflecting the stars of the heaven of love and beauty.

Together make mention of noble aspirations and heavenly concepts. Let there be no secrets one from another. Make your home a haven of rest and peace. Be hospitable and let the doors of your house be open to the faces of friends and strangers. Welcome every guest with radiant grace and let each feel that it is his
own home.

No mortal can conceive the union and harmony which God has designed for man and wife. Nourish continually the tree of your union with love and affection, so that
it will remain evergreen and verdant throughout all seasons and bring forth luscious
fruits for the healing of the nations.

O beloved of God, may your home be a vision of the Paradise of Abha, so that whosoever enters there may feel the essence of purity and harmony, and cry out

from the heart: Here is the home of love! Here is the palace of love! Here is the
nest of love! Here is the garden of love!

Be like two sweet-singing birds perched upon the highest branches of the tree of

life, filling the air with songs of love and rapture.

Lay the foundation of your affection in the very center of your spiritual being, at the very heart of your consciousness, and let it not be shaken by adverse winds.

And, when God gives you sweet and lovely children, consecrate yourselves to their instruction and guidance, so that they may become imperishable flowers of the divine rose-garden, nightingales of the ideal paradise, servants of the world of humanity, and the fruit of the tree of your life.

Live in such harmony that others may take your lives for an example and may say one to another: Look how they live like two doves in one nest, in perfect love, affinity, and union. It is as though God had kneaded the very essence of their beings for the love of one another.

Attain the ideal love that God has destined for you, so that you may become partakers of eternal life forthwith. Quaff deeply from the fountain of truth and dwell all the days of your life in the paradise of glory, gathering immortal flowers from the garden of divine mysteries.

Be to each other as heavenly lovers and divine beloved ones dwelling in a paradise of love. Build your nest on the leafy branches of the tree of love. Sail upon the shoreless sea of love. Walk in the eternal rose-garden of love. Bathe in the shining rays of the sun of love. Be firm and steadfast in the path of love. Perfume your nostrils with the fragrances from the flowers of love. Attune your ears to the soul-entrancing melodies of love. Let your aims be as generous as the banquets of love, and your words as a string of white pearls from the ocean of love. Drink deeply of the elixir of love, so that you may live continually in the reality of Divine Love.'

http://core-curriculum.bahai.us/downloads/MFL2006%20couples.pdf

After the ceremony, everyone enjoyed the food, while the photographer took half an hour to take our wedding pictures. By the time that we came back, the food was finished, and

the guests were gone - We forgot to ask the friends to leave a plate or two for the bride and the groom.

We packed and cleared everything and went back to my flat early evening. I changed and since we were starving, made some omelet before leaving for our one-night honeymoon. We arrived at the rustic lodge in Waitakere Ranges, late at night. The owner was quite upset and told us that if we were not newlyweds, he would not have allowed us to stay.

That weekend, the National Assembly had its monthly meeting, and the members could not come to our wedding. However, they asked us to meet with the Assembly for lunch on Sunday. Therefore, the next morning, we had to check out of the resort, early in the morning, to go to the meeting with National Assembly in Parnell. The Resort owner was flabbergasted by this unconventional act.

As I had just started my job, I did not have any vacation time. Therefore, except for P, who attended the wedding with his wife, the rest of the Council did not know that I was getting married that weekend. They learned about it on Monday, when they read the article with my wedding picture in New Zealand Herald, courtesy of one of the dear Bahá'í ladies.

We had a wonderful honeymoon later, after the South Island Summer School. We took a cruise to Milford Sound, visited the Te Anau Glowworm Caves; stayed at Mt. Cook Lodge, and flew to the Franz Josef Glacier. They were the most pristine and stunning natural wonders that I had ever visited in my life.

Our wedding ceremony with Farivar, the officiator and Gina, our Flower girl.

The First South Island Bahá'í Summer School

I was invited to be one of the speakers at the Summer School, which was held at Lincoln College, Christchurch. It was an amazing time to be with the vibrant Bahá'ís of the South Island and become familiar with their mass teaching efforts. I could see first-hand the

success of the Doctor Muhajir's Teaching Campaign and the maturity of the new believers.
It led me to believe that I had accomplished my mission as the Nine-Year Plan pioneer to
New Zealand. This realization helped me to resolve a dilemma that I was facing; keeping
my job or starting a family. In that time in New Zealand, the social norm dictated that a
married woman in my position left her job and stayed home during her childrearing period.
Mothers received Child Welfare allowance to compensate their family income. They re-
joined the workforce after their children were older. I could not envision this life for me,
putting my career on hold for 10 years or longer. I thought about Iran, where professional
women, worked through their pregnancy, and child-rearing years, and hired nannies while
they were at work. I corresponded with the director of the Tehran School of Social Work,
whom I met at the Manila conference, about a teaching position. She sent me an
encouraging letter, offering me a position as an Associate Professor. My family was quite
happy to have us back in Tehran and meet Terry for the first time.

In 1973, I was elected as a delegate to the National Convention. The following Message
from the Universal House of Justice brought joy to my heart, and an affirmation that I
would be able to leave my pioneering post:

'We announce with joyful and thankful hearts the completion in overwhelming victory
of the world-encircling Nine Year Plan. The Army of Light has won its second global
campaign; it has surpassed the goals set for expansion and has achieved a truly
impressive degree of universal participation, the twin objectives of the Plan. With
gratitude and love, we testify to the unceasing confirmations which Bahá'u'lláh has
showered upon His servants, enabling each and every one of us to offer Him some
part of the labor, the devotion, the sacrifice, the supplication which He has so
bountifully rewarded. At this Centenary of the Revelation of the Most Holy Book, the
Community of the Most Great Name lays its tribute of victory at His feet,
acknowledging that it is He Who has bestowed it.'

~ Ridván 1973 – To the Bahá'ís of the World
https://www.bahai.org/library/

It was not easy to leave this beautiful country and wonderful Bahá'í friends who had become my extended family. I pledged to abide by the bidding of Abdu'l-Baha in my days to come!

'In brief, let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity. Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity. Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Bahá'í.'

(Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace) P 453

https://www.bahai.org/library/

CHAPTER 4
RETURNING TO IRAN
1973-1974

Journey to the Philippines

On the way to Iran, Terry, and I, had a stopover in Manila, to have a glimpse at my former life as a student pioneer in the Philippines. We checked into the YMCA, and in the afternoon, went to visit Vic and Fe Samaniego, at the Bahá'í Center. Vic was out of the country, so, we had a lovely meeting with Fe, who told us that Hayedeh' s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rowshangah, were pioneering in Manila. I knew the couple in Iran, so I called them to ask if we could come for a visit. They invited us to lunch for the next day. We spent the rest of day, touring UP Diliman during torrential rain, which made me nostalgic but entirely overwhelmed Terry. We had a Filipino dish in my favorite cafe on the Campus.

Dear Momsu invited us to her home and was so happy to see us both. She talked to Terry about me, being her first ward, and how proud she was that I graduated from UP. She gave us a bamboo tray, with an embedded map of the Philippines. I still have that gift after 45 years.

The next day, Hayedeh and Jila joined us for lunch at the Rowshangah' s. We had a lovely

time reminiscing about the old times and getting an update on what was happening in the
Philippines. By late afternoon, I started feeling nauseous, and feverish. I felt so sick that
my hosts insisted on staying with them that night, so that they could take care of me. Months
later, I learned that I had contracted Toxoplasmosis, a blood infection caused by a parasite,
mostly found in the tropics. It had flu-like symptoms and did not require any treatment.
However, if the patient were to get pregnant within the first six months, it would have
catastrophic effects, such as miscarriage or birth defects. My first test was on its way!

We left for Hong Kong the next day. I was feeling much better by then. I was happy to see
Hong Kong and get together with Mae, my Chinese college friend. We stayed at the Bahá'í
Center in Hong Kong, with Mr. Tehrani, a dear pioneer whom I met a few years before
when he came to Manila to help with acquiring property for the Bahá'í Temple in the
Philippines. After a tour of Hong Kong with Mae, and some shopping, we flew to Mehrabad
Airport in Tehran.

A Glimpse at Iran in the Early 1970's
We arrived, at the height of the prosperity of modern Iran. Since 1969, the Nixon
Administration considered the Shah of Iran as the "stabilizing force in the Middle East" and
the Shah, as its most trusted ally. To ensure the American vested interest, the Shah was
given the power to use the Iranian oil revenues to buy armament to safeguard the Middle
Eastern sovereignty. In 1972, this support was extended, when the US agreed to empower

the Shah to give military help to the Kurd's, fighting for their independence from Iraq. The
Shah also used the oil revenue to boost the economic growth of Iran and strengthen his
position as one of the most influential leaders in the world.

The White Revolution was an agent of change for the Shah to forcibly modernize Iran. He
redistributed the feudal lands to more than 4 million farmers and nationalized water and

forests. Shah called it enforcing a “new original kind of socialism.” The Shah, in addition to modernizing the Imperial Armed forces, created a military division to enforce his White Revolution initiatives in provinces and rural area in Iran. The military draft produced a flow of soldiers to serve in the “Army of Knowledge,” or “(Sepahe Danesh,)” “Army of Development,” or (Sepahe Tarvij and Abadani), and “Army of Health,” or (Sepahe Behdasht). The enlisted soldiers, based on their qualifications, helped in building schools and teaching children; creating medical clinics and offering health services; or working on rural development projects. College graduate of both sexes, who were under 30 years old, had to serve in one of these divisions. The term of service was for 18 months, and they received a stipend of less than $50.00 a month. If the enlisted woman were married, she could serve her military service in her hometown. The government also offered free nutrition program for all school children in Iran.

The Shah had decisively replaced traditional Islamic culture, with a pre-Islamic Persian identity. In 1971, after restoring ancient Persepolis, the seat of the Archimedean Empire, he held a lavish “Light and Sound” celebration, to demonstrate the might of the Persian Empire. Most of the world leaders attended this outlandish ceremony, staying in air-conditioned tents by the ruins, feasting on peacocks and pheasants. He declared himself as “Shahanshah Aryamehr,” the King of Kings, the Light of the Arians. He stated in an interview that Iranians were proud of their heritage which bonded their glorious past to the rapid modernization of the last 10 years.

The Shah became a dominant force in OPEC, and although Iran did not participate in the 1973 Arab oil embargo, he pushed to increase oil prices 470% in one year. The Shah used the revenue to promote his status as the most successful leader in the world. The US, Japan and Western countries all courted Iranians for investment.

The Bahá'ís of Iran in the Early 1970's

The Bahá'í community in Iran enjoyed relative freedom in this period. Despite the systemic discrimination, such as employment, there was no overt persecution of the Bahá'ís. As the Shah was aware of the Bahá'í doctrine of loyalty to government and noninvolvement in party politics, he gave trusted positions in his Court and Administration, to qualified Bahá'ís. His personal physician had always been a Bahá'í with military rank. His physician currently, was Dr. Ghadimi, my beloved teacher. The educational consultant for the Shah's children, was Dr. Mehri Rasekh, my Psychology Professor at the University of Tehran. The influence of Bahá'í teachings was present in the charter of Shah's White Revolution. However, he had no real love for the Bahá'í Faith or the Bahá'ís and mainly used them for his grandiose self-promotion.

According to "Bahá'í World," in the late 1960's and early 70's more than 1500 Bahá'í youth became homefront pioneers in Iran. The White Revolution Army, which was also compulsory for Bahá'ís, enabled young people to fill pioneering goals while serving in their military posts. Local Youth Committees were established, to coordinate the efforts of the youth to fulfill the goals of the Nine Year and Five-Year plans.

The "Bahá'í World" reported that by 1973, illiteracy among Bahá'í women under the age of 40 was eradicated in Iran. Women became more and more involved in a broad spectrum of Bahá'í activities. Hadiqa, the permanent site of the Bahá'í Summer School, was established on the outskirt of the Alborz mountains, near Tehran.

Life in Tehran

I was warmly welcomed by my family, who were excited to meet Terry, and showed him Persian hospitality and affection, which was entirely different from his New Zealand upbringing. For example, it is customary for Persian men to embrace and kiss each other on the cheek. While Kiwi men, including members of the same family, just shook hands.

I remember once, I was invited to talk to the youth at the Hadiqa Summer

school. While we
were waiting in the dormitory, Terry went to a large window, overlooking the mountains. He
sat on the ledge, with his legs hanging from a second story building, deep in his thoughts.
A few young men who were horsing around and having fun, happy to see a western Bahá'í,
approached him from behind, gave him a bear hug, then lifting him up and taking him to
the middle of the room. They were laughing and talking to him in Persian, asking him to
join their friendly horseplay. Terry had no idea what was happening, he turned red and
started defending himself by fighting back. Everybody was in shock. I had to explain to both
sides on what has gone wrong. It took time for everybody to understand and start acting
friendly towards each other.

When my turn came to go to the youth session, I introduced Terry and talked about our
teaching activities in New Zealand. Then, I told them about Seals and Croft, the Bahá'í
musicians, and played their song "Hummingbird," a tribute to Bahá'u'lláh. The hundred and
so participants got on their feet dancing and clapping. It was a great joy for them to know
the popularity of a Bahá'í band and their songs in the west, in contrast with the stifling
atmosphere of Iran.
After my session. I had a chance meeting with my first Bahá'í teacher, Mr. Bakhtavar.
He was pleasantly surprised to hear the enthusiasm of the youth participants in my class.
He said; I told you that if you didn't sit in the sun and didn't eat sour pickles, you would
become "somebody"! It was a Turkish proverb to humor his young, enthusiastic student.
That was the last time that I talked to my beloved teacher. I also met Farnoosh, my
classmate from Dr. Gahdimi's class and his young wife. Who could have thought that both
precious men would be drinking the cup of martyrdom shortly?

Soon after my arrival, I met with Sattareh Farmanfarmaian, the founder, and Director of the
Tehran School of Social Work. The School was in a modern building in the northern part of

Tehran. The Director had a close relationship with the Empress, Farah Pahlavi, and the
Royal Court. It was the only institution that offered Social Work education in Iran and
received financial support from the government. It trained staff for the Community Welfare
Centers in Iran, which provided family health education, literacy classes, childcare, nutrition
and related social services.

I soon learned that the School of Social Work was practicing discrimination against its
Bahá'í employees. It was a norm for my Bahá'í colleagues to receive salaries lower than
their coworkers. I first accepted this discrepancy, but later, I demanded to receive equal
pay, as was promised to me by the Director. When I threatened to resign, the Human
Resources agreed to my terms.

Terry secured a teaching position with the Tehran American School, affiliated to the US
Embassy. The Bahá'í National Office referred us to Steve Foster, an American who was a
long-term resident of Tehran. He knew a network of western Bahá'ís, and together, we
convened the East and West Committee. We held monthly gatherings for interested
Iranians and Westerners, who were either stationed in Iran or had Iranian spouses. It was
a wonderful support system for all, a social space for fellowship, deepening, and firesides
with non-Bahá'í friends.
I was eager to share with Terry my Iranian and Bahá'í heritage. We were blessed to take a
pilgrimage to the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran, which for its safeguard, only Western
Bahá'ís could visit. After years of restoration, the palatial House was considered as a
historical landmark by the government. However, for the faithful, it was the birthplace of the
Blessed Beauty and Abdu'l-Baha; where the Holy Family lived, where Mulla Husayn
delivered the message of the Báb to Bahá'u'lláh, where Tahirih the Pure one, met with the
Bábi leaders and encouraged them to arise. The Blessed Beauty returned to this house
after his imprisonment in the Black Dungeon and departed from it for his 40 years of exile.

The House of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran

bahaihistoricalfacts.blogspot.com/2014/11/house-of-bahaullah-in-tehran.html

We made a trip to Shiraz, foremost for a pilgrimage to the House of the Báb. The House had been restored to its original beauty and like a jewel emanated the spiritual power of the Beloved. We left the House finding our way to the Ilkhani Mosque, where Mulla Husayn and his companions undertook a vigil to encounter the Promised One. I noticed some "Tablighate Islami's" were following and harassing us in English. They were targeting Terry, as it was evident that he was a foreigner on pilgrimage. I told them adamantly, to leave us alone. They did not expect such reaction and left immediately. It was Terry's first encounter with hostility against Bahá'ís.

On this trip, we visited the historical Persian landmarks in Shiraz and Isfahan and attended the "Sound and Light Show" in Persepolis. An epic display of ancient Persian history.

In Tehran, we found a modern apartment in the northern part of Tehran, close to our work. We occupied the first floor, with an enclosed courtyard and a fishpond. We went to the carpet bazaar and purchased beautiful Persian carpets for the house. We bought furniture in the Persian style of the Safavieh period, which was fashionable at that time, and decorated the house with antique Persian tapestries and heirlooms from my mother. We felt that we were all settled to start a family. As I learned from my recent visit to Dr. Ghadimi's clinic, that I was expecting our first baby.

I was in my third month when we made a trip to Mazandaran and Ramsar, on the shores of the Caspian Sea. While on the train, I realized that I was losing the baby. We immediately returned to Tehran and checked into the hospital. My miscarriage was a blow to my family and us. The biopsy of the fetus and my blood test showed traces of Toxoplasmosis. Only then, I realized that my sickness in the Philippines five months before was

Toxoplasmosis.
The doctor told me that maybe it was a blessing in disguise to miscarry a baby, instead of
having one with severe birth defects. He assured me that after a few months we could try
again and have a healthy baby.

A few months later, I was with child again. Gradually recovering from the trauma, and
despite bouts of morning sickness, I was coping with my daily activities and work.

One Friday – the Iranian weekend, we were planning to visit a new exhibit at the Persian
Archeological Museum. When I was ready to leave, a man came to the door and asked for
a donation to a children's charity. While I went inside to get my purse, unbeknown to me,
he managed to unlatch one side of the double paneled entry door. I gave him the money,
and we left the house to go to the Museum. When we returned, the door was open, and
our valuable belongings were stolen. The police told us that we were the victim of an
organized scam, and the apartment supervisor had colluded with the robbers. As this
supervisor was living next door to us, we did not feel safe to stay in our half-empty
apartment. So, we temporarily moved to my mother's house.

Soon after, I received a notice from the Government that since I was still under 30 years
old, I had to enlist in the White Revolution Army for 18 months. I should start my service
after my delivery and serve in one of the Welfare Centers in Tehran. I would be receiving
the military stipend, which was less than $50.00 a month. A fraction of what I was earning
as an Associate Professor.

At the same time, Terry learned that since he was not an American Citizen, he could not
teach in the American Embassy School, with a US salary. He found a teaching position in
the "Iranzamin International School," where he received an Iranian salary.

We took the following quotation to heart and prayed for His mercy and steadfastness:

'O thou servant of God! Do not grieve at the afflictions and calamities that

have
befallen thee. All calamities and afflictions have been created for man so that he
may spurn this mortal world -- a world to which he is much attached. When he
experienceth severe trials and hardships, then his nature will recoil, and he will
desire the eternal realm -- a realm which is sanctified from all afflictions and
calamities. Such is the case with the man who is wise. He shall never drink from a
cup which is at the end distasteful, but, on the contrary, he will seek the cup of pure
and limpid water. He will not taste of the honey that is mixed with poison.
Praise thou God, that thou hast been tried and hast experienced such a test. Be
patient and grateful. Turn thy face to the divine Kingdom and strive that thou mayest
acquire merciful characteristics, mayest become illumined and acquire the attributes
of the Kingdom and of the Lord. Endeavour to become indifferent to the pleasures
of this world and to its comfort, to remain firm and steadfast in the Covenant and to
promulgate the Cause of God.
This is the cause of the exaltation of man, the cause of his glory and of his salvation.'
~~ Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, P 320
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-198.html

A New Door Opened
Terry and I were resigned to cope with the adversities of life, praying for His guidance and
relying on His mercy. Then, I learned that beloved Dr. Muhajir was visiting his family in
Tehran. It was a personal visit, and therefore, he was not receiving any visitors. I gathered
my courage to call and request a visit. He graciously accepted and invited me to his family's
home. It was a delightful visit. He told me that he was not aware that I was in Iran and
married to a New Zealander. Then he said that he really liked Terry and told me that I had
made a good choice and found a "patient" husband. I did not want to bother him with our
problems and did not bring it up. He shared with us that he truly loved Tehran and used
every opportunity to visit his family. Then, he said: "Shahla, it was a wonderful idea to bring

Terry to Iran, visiting the Holy Places, and making him acquainted with your family and
Persian Culture. Since you have done that, it is time to leave for a pioneering post as a
family". He told us that Kenya needed pioneers from Iran and was a nice place to raise a
family. He encouraged us to contact the Pioneering Committee and offer to fill the Persian
goal for Kenya. Although until then, we did not envision such plan, we realized that it was
the answer to our prayers! Dr. Muhajir chanted a prayer, wishing us success in our new
endeavor.
We made an appointment with the Pioneering Committee and received their approval to
be deputized for six months by the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. They told us that

the African Pioneering Coordinator, Hassan Sabri, would be taking care of us in Kenya.
They also informed the Counselors and the National Spiritual Assembly of Kenya of this
plan.

My family was flabbergasted to learn that I was planning to pioneer once again, to leave
for a far-off country while pregnant. They asked me to get the approval from my doctor.
They were sure that with my previous complications, the answer would be a definite no!
The doctor, after learning that we were going to Kenya, which had modern medical facilities,
approved my travel. The conditional approval was to leave by my seventh month and stay
in Nairobi until the delivery. My brother, who was not a Bahá'í, and was still being blamed
for my first trip, asked for a serious meeting with us. He explained the risks of going to
Africa, the unforeseeable medical complications, and raising a baby in Africa. Terry listened
to his arguments, thanked him for his concerns and stated that we were proceeding with
our plan. My brother was shocked, he told him; "before we had one crazy person in our
family – which was Shahla, but now we have two – pointing at Terry."

My Work at the School of Social Work
I gave my notice to the Director, to leave my job at the end of the Academic

year. Within
that year, as an Associate Professor, I was teaching the Senior level students on
Community Development and Social Planning. I also teamed up with the visiting
professors, such as the Director of a School of Social Work in Manila, a rival to the UP
Diliman's. Although we have never met before, she was proud that a graduate of one of
Philippine's universities was holding such a high position in Iran. She always mentioned
me in her lectures as a credit to the Social Work education in the Philippines.

I was the School's representative to the organizing committee of a conference sponsored
by the UNDP- United Nations Development Programme. It was my first involvement with a
United Nations organization that I had always been aspiring to join.
In my last day of School, one of my master's degree students dropped by my office to say
farewell. She was a young woman who had been dealing with her father's end-stage
Cancer. I had been offering her personal counseling by sharing my Bahá'í belief, such as
what Abdu'l-Baha had described in the following quotation:
'A friend asked: "How should one look forward to death?"
`Abdu'l-Bahá answered: How does one look forward to the end of any journey, with
hope and expectation. It is even so with the end of this earthly journey.
In the next world, man will find himself freed from many disabilities under which he
now suffers. Those who passed on through death, have the sphere of their own. It
is not removed from ours: Their work of the kingdom is ours; but it is sanctified from
what we call time and place.

Time with us is measured by the sun. When there is no more sunset that kind of
time does not exist for man.
Those who have ascended have different attributes (conditions) from those who are
still on earth, yet there is no real separation.
In the prayer, there is a mingling of stations, a mingling of condition. Pray for them
as they pray for you.'
~ Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p 96
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/ABL/abl-52.html

At the end of the visit, she handed me a box, containing a gift for my unborn

child. To my
amazement, it was a Greatest Name gold pendant. She mentioned that she searched quite
a few jewelry stores to find the one who was selling Bahá'í jewelry to the public. She knew
that it had a great spiritual value for me. I was deeply touched, as it reflected the respect
of an Iranian Muslim for my Bahá'í beliefs.

The 3 Day Pilgrimage

When making provision for our journey, once again, I decided to seek advice from Mr.
Nakhjavani, a member of the Universal House of Justice. He and his wife Violette were one
of the early pioneers to Africa. He responded to my letter, encouraging Terry and me to
make a 3-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was the start of summertime when pilgrimage
tours were suspended. However, as pioneers to Africa, we were granted special permission
for a 3-day visit. We flew to Tel Aviv, while I was in my seventh month of pregnancy.

As soon as we checked into the hotel, I called Mr. Nakhjavani, who informed me that the
Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh would be closing for the summer the next day. Therefore, that
afternoon was our only chance to go there for pilgrimage. He offered to call the caretakers
of the Shrine, Mr. and Mrs. Zabih, and let them know of our permission for visitation. Mr.
Nakhjavani told me that Mrs. Nakhjavani was now in Haifa and we would meet both the
next day. I was excited to hear the news, as Mrs. Nakhjavani had been traveling as the
companion of Amatu'l-Baha, Ruhiyyih Khanum, in the Amazon Basin and Andean
Highlands. So, it meant that they were back from the Green Light Expedition.

When I was in Tehran, I had read Ruhiyyih Khnum's Manual for Pioneers, preparing myself
for my new pioneering post. This manual is a textbook of practical information for the
pioneers. It contained suggestions for decorating homes to meal recipes. It gave advice on
how to cope with the culture shock, and ways to adapt to a new culture. I had met Amatu'l-
Baha during my last two pilgrimages, but after reading her book, I felt a special affinity with

her and would have loved to seek her advice in person. However, Mr. Nakhjavani told me,
as Ruhiyyih Khanum had just arrived, she would not accept any visitors.

That afternoon, although we were not settled yet, or recovered from the jet lag, we took a
taxi to Bahji and arrived at the Collins Gate. We then walked the long path reverently, to
the Harami-Aqdas. Dear Mrs. Zabih, was at the gate of the Shrine. She had a look at me
and said; dear girl, you seem exhausted! Generally, the 3-day pilgrims do not come to the
reception area of the Mansion, but I believe you could do with some respite. So, after your
pilgrimage come to the Mansion's courtyard for some refreshments. We were grateful for
this invitation.

When I entered the Shrine, I beseeched the Blessed Beauty for success in our pioneering
post, then for the health of my Baby, and lastly, to be granted the privilege of having an
audience with Amatu'l-Baha!

While praying for my baby, I remembered this Hidden Word of Bahá'u'lláh in Persian, and
deep in my heart, I knew that "Anisa," would be the baby's name. I later talked it over with
Terry, who was happy to have a Bahá'í name for our child.

'O MY FRIENDS!

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed
surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of
life (tree of Anisa in Persian), which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awe-
struck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends!
Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and
approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings.
Would ye but sanctify your souls, ye would at this present hour recall that place and
those surroundings, and the truth of My utterance should be made evident unto all
of you.'

~ The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, P 28
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/HW/hw-92.html

Collins Gate and the path leading to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh

http://pinterest.com/pin/409616528578094357/

After the visitation, Mrs. Zabih ushered us into the reception room of the Master. A room that Beloved Abdu'l-Baha used to rest and receive faithful believers when visiting the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, as the Mansion was occupied by Covenant Breakers. Terry and I were overcome by the heat and exhausted from jet lag. So, as soon as we sat in that cool and delightful haven, we fell asleep. I woke up a while later and found a tray of refreshments on the table. I woke Terry up and stepped out into the courtyard. I noticed Mr. Zabih was on the phone. When he finished with his call, he came to the room, joining his wife. I apologized profusely for falling asleep in that sacred room. Mrs. Zabih told me when she came back with refreshments and found us asleep, she wanted to wake us up and let us know of our inappropriate behavior. However, knowing about my condition, she knew that the Master would have forgiven us. So, she allowed us to sleep for a while. Then, Mr. Zabih asked if I knew who was on the phone. I surely didn't. He said it was Amatu'l-Baha, asking about the couple who would be pioneering to Kenya. She had heard from the Nakhjavani' s that we were there and wanted to invite us to the House of the Master for lunch. She first wanted to know if we had any children, as it was not appropriate for children to come to the House of the Master. Mr. Zabih responded, just half a child, in her belly. She laughed and said that would be okay! I was in tears from this joyous news, explaining how my humble prayer was answered by this call! They were amazed and said, if we had not

had our "improper siesta," we would have left before the call from Amatu'l-Baha was made. Therefore, missing the opportunity of having lunch with her! It showed that God works in mysterious ways!

The next morning, we made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Báb and then proceeded to the House of the Master. We were ushered into the reception room, where Mr. and Mr. Nakhjavani were expecting us. We told them how grateful we were for this wondrous visit. Violette responded that African Bahá'ís were close to the heart of Ruhiyyih Khanum, and she wanted to have time with pioneers going to Kenya. Amatu'l-Baha joined us shortly. She was dressed informally, and her countenance reminded me of the Spring breeze; light and invigorating. She told us that when she left for her long trip, everything was packed in boxes and placed in storage. Now, she was in the middle of unpacking and putting things back in their place. As she really wanted to meet us, she had freed her lunchtime for this visit. She took us to the breakfast nook adjacent to the kitchen. We sat around a small table, where Amatu'l-Baha told us, that Shoghi Effendi after his work at the Bahá'í Gardens, used to join her for meals. The faithful maid of Amatu'l- Baha, served us lunch, while Amatu'l- Baha shared with us her fond memories of Kenya and the Nairobi coffee shops. In the future, anytime I went to a coffee shop in Nairobi, I remembered Ruhiyyih Khanum. She assured me that I was going to a city with modern medical facilities for delivering my Baby. She mentioned that African culture is very much family oriented, and we needed to let our child intermingle with Kenyan children and should teach the Faith as a family unit. We took to heart her valuable advice in our teaching endeavor in Africa.

I noticed a screeching noise coming from the back garden and wondered what it was. Ruhiyyih Khanum explained that there were peacocks, the last from the ones kept by the Master. Later, we had the pleasure of seeing these magnificent birds. During dessert, Amatu'l-Baha left us to take care of some business. Upon her return, she told us that she intended to give us a gift from the Holy household to bless our home in Kenya. However, everything was still in boxes. She could only find a metal template of the

Greatest Name,
probably used by Shoghi Effendi for the granite carvings at the Bahá'í Gardens. She
handed us that precious gift and told us to keep it as an heirloom for our family. I was in
tears and offered my sincerer thanks for her gracious gift and this intimate visit. I later
covered the metal with a layer of gold and mounted the Greatest Name on a mirror. In the
years to come, we have lost most of the pictures, books and precious decorations, while
traveling, but miraculously, have not lost this precious gift.

The Greatest Names Template, a gift from Amatu'l-Baha,
to bless our home in Kenya

'O YE coworkers who are supported by armies from the realm of the All-Glorious!
Blessed are ye, for ye have come together in the sheltering shade of the Word of
God, and have found a refuge in the cave of His Covenant; ye have brought peace
to your hearts by making your home in the Abhá Paradise, and are lulled by the
gentle winds that blow from their source in His loving-kindness; ye have arisen to
serve the Cause of God and to spread His religion far and wide, to promote His
Word and to raise high the banners of holiness throughout all those regions.'
~ Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, P 320
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-43.html

CHAPTER 5
KENYA
1974 -1978

'O ye homeless and wanderers in the Path of God! Prosperity, contentment, and
freedom, however much desired and conducive to the gladness of the human
heart, can in no wise compare with the trials of homelessness and adversity in the
pathway of God; for such exile and banishment are blessed by the divine favour,
and are surely followed by the mercy of Providence. The joy of tranquillity in one's
home, and the sweetness of freedom from all cares shall pass away, whilst the
blessing of homelessness shall endure forever, and its far-reaching results shall be
made manifest.'

Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-223.html

We arrived at the Nairobi airport, spiritually charged and determined to serve
the Beloved

in our new pioneering post. We were welcomed by a young Kenyan Bahá'í who took us to
a quaint hotel to stay, until we meet with Hassan Sabri, from the Continental Pioneering
Committee. We met another pioneer family, Vi Gilbert, and her two teenage children, from
Alaska, staying at the same hotel. Together, we explored Nairobi and learned about its
geography and people.

A Glimpse at Kenya. Past and present

The Country: The Equatorial Belt is the cause of a tropical and humid climate in vast
territories of Kenya. It extends from the coastal regions of Indian Ocean in the south to the
Lake Victoria region in the west. However, the high elevation in the Central and western
Kenya, home to the snowcapped Mt. Kenya and forested ranges, has created a moderate
climate in Nairobi and the Highlands. Once driving on a mountainous road, it was amazing
to see hail falling on the sign marking the "Tropical Equator."

The East African Rift Valley, ranging from Lake Victoria to Lake Turkana, is active and
gradually breaking the crust of the earth apart. The terrain has created a fertile land for tea
and coffee plantations, one of the primary sources of revenue for Kenya economy.

The People: Kenya is the homeland to a number of major tribes: Bantu's, living across the
country; Kikuyu's, in Nairobi and the central highlands; Luhya's, in the western region;
Swahili's, in coastal area; Maasai's and Samburu's, in the plains; and Lou's who live along
the greater Lake Victoria and Lake Turkana. Each having their own distinctive culture,
language, and tribal identity.

From the early modern period, Europeans and Arabs dominated the coastal area of the
Indian Ocean, including Mombasa and Malindi. The Bantu slave trade run by the Omani
Arabs was expanded from Zanzibar and Oman to Portugal and the British empire. The
common language of Kiswahili, a mixture of Bantu, Persian, and Arabic, became their

language of trade. Now, it is the official language of Kenya. From 1888, the Imperial British East Africa Company gradually took possession of the Kenya territories, which was once dominated by the rulers of Germany and Zanzibar.

The British, brought skilled Indian workers to Kenya, to help with the construction of Kenya - Uganda railways. Their families migrated to East Africa and formed a distinctive Asian community. Their descendants thrive in business, educational field and a variety of other professions. In the mid 70's, because of their wealth and status, they were targeted by some East African rulers for persecution. As their safety was at risk, many Asians migrated to Canada, Australia, US, and Britain.

The Government: From early 20th Century, the British colonials settled in the Central Highlands of Kenya and occupied the land which was initially belonged to Kikuyus. The white farmers established vast coffee and tea plantations and started a lucrative trade with England. Their economic power made them a powerful voice in the political system of the colony. They took away the right of the Kikuyu's to farm on their tribal land and made them serve as laborers in the European plantations.

At the same time, the British East Africa authorities established its Colonial Government Headquarter in Nairobi. It was a centrally located train depot, which connected Uganda and Kenya railway system. The authorities gradually expanded the city into the Maasai land. They transformed Nairobi into a tourist attraction for the European game hunters. The wealthy farmers built spacious houses in Nairobi and enjoyed the convenience of first-class hotels, clubs, and restaurants in the city.

At the end of WWII, the "Mau" rebellion started by the Kikuyus and the Maasai, who were angered at losing the right to their land in the south of Nairobi. The uprising was quite violent, and there were stories of the entire families of white farmers indiscriminately killed by Mau Mau. From 1952 to nearly a decade, Kenya was placed under a state of

emergency
by the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. It was supported by the British and African
Armed Forces counter-insurgency operation. During this period, more than 4,600 Mau Mau
rebels were killed. The Nairobi Africans suspected of involvement in Mau Mau uprising
were sent to the detention camps. This included Jomo Kenyatta, the future president and
national hero of Kenya, although there was no proof of his involvement in the Mau Mau
uprising.

The famous book of “Out of Africa,” depicts the colonial culture of that period. For example,
the book describes the elegance of the Norfolk Hotel and restaurant, as an idyllic place to
have an afternoon tea with friends. However, during this period if an African, without a valid
permit, were walking in front of the hotel, he or she would have been shot on sight.

The Mau Mau offensive ended in 1956, followed by a series of land policy changes by the
colonial government. In 1957, the Kenyans elected their first democratic legislative council,
and by 1963, Kenya was granted independence. In1964, Kenya became a Republic and
elected Jomo Kenyatta as its first president.

We moved to Kenya, just a decade after her independence from Britain, and during the
final years of Jomo Kenyatta’s presidency. At that time, Kenya was unique for being the
only stable country, and thus a refuge, for the distressed people of her neighboring nations
of Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, and Ethiopia. All these countries were undergoing political
changes which impacted drastically, their social and economic stability.

Kenya and the Bahá’í Faith:

The Bahá’í Faith in Kenya started with two British Bahá’ís. The following is an excerpt of
their service as depicted in the passages of “Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the
British Bahá’í Community”:

‘R. St. Barbe Baker: “On his return from Kenya in 1924 where he had served as

Assistant Conservator of Forests since 1920, R. St. Barbe Baker was asked to speak on the faiths of the Kikuyu under the title: "Some African Beliefs" at the 'Conference of Living Religions within the Empire', and was approached afterwards by Claudia Stewart-Coles who exclaimed "You are a Bahá'í". He subsequently accepted the Faith and has introduced it to many thousands of people in all walks of life in many lands, for more than half a century. The Guardian became the first Life Member of the Men of the Trees in Palestine in 1929. Later, for twelve consecutive years, he sent an official message to St. Barbe's World Forestry Charter Gatherings attended by Ambassadors from up to sixty-two countries each year. St. Barbe took an active part in the Committee celebrating the Centenary of the Declaration of the Báb in 1944. After his first Sahara University Expedition carrying out an ecological survey of 9,000 miles in 1953, and in response to the Guardian's desire, St. Barbe attended the First African Conference in Kampala. In 1975 St. Barbe was called upon to advise on tree planting of the site of the Tihran House of Worship in consultation with Quinlan Terry, the architect. Afterward, in collaboration with architect Hossein Amanat, he recorded his observations for the Universal House of Justice for the landscaping of their site on Mt. Carmel and for tree-scaping at Bahji. St. Barbe attended the Intercontinental Conference Nairobi, in October 1976 and still (1979) at almost 90 is introducing or teaching the Faith in many lands and would be content to "lay down his bones in service to the Faith" in his beloved Africa.”

Mrs. Margurite Peterson: “Became a Bahá'í in 1936, was a member of the National Assembly for three and a half years during the period 1939 to 1945. She married Terence Preston, a Kenya tea grower, in August 1945 and settled in Kenya where she was the only Bahá'í until the pioneers began to settle under the Two-Year Plan. Her husband died unexpectedly in July 1951 leaving her with three young children, and she and her eldest child were killed in an aeroplane crash when she was returning to Kenya after a short holiday in England, in February 1952.’

http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/UD/ud-660.html

Mass teaching in Kenya

Excerpts from the “Custodians, Ministry of the Custodians”:
‘Among the many outstanding advances in Africa may be cited the extraordinary number of enrolments February 11, 1960

Dearly Beloved Friends:

The Hands of the Faith in the Holy Land have received many requests for news direct from the World Centre, and it has been our hope for some time to share with
the believer's selections from the glad-tidings which reach us here.

The two years which have elapsed since the passing of our dearly beloved Guardian
have imposed such heavy burdens that it has been impossible hitherto for us to undertake this informal newsletter to the friends, which we hope to be able to send
out from time to time in the future in Uganda and Kenya, which are now on such a
scale as to present a serious problem to the administrative bodies responsible. There are just not enough Bahá'ís to keep up with the work of checking the declaration cards that come in! The mass conversion desired and foretold by the beloved Guardian is now taking place in this area, as well as in the Malayan Archipelago and other areas of the Pacific. It presents a great challenge and a wonderful hope for the future. Schools run by Bahá'ís for the Africans are perforce
increasing throughout the continent as the Faith spreads and the Bahá'í membership increases so rapidly.”

“In the African continent, the onward march of the Faith bears eloquent testimony to
the spiritual receptivity of its inhabitants, so strongly emphasized by our beloved
Guardian, and reflected, even before his passing, in the beginnings of that mass
conversion confidently predicted by him. As a result of the intensive teaching campaigns launched by the four African Regional Assemblies, the number of declared believers throughout this vast continent has risen to well over fifteen
thousand, seven thousand having been added since last Ridvan. In Central and East
Africa, the number of enrolled believers has more than doubled in the short space
of a year. Over four thousand new declarations have been recorded in Uganda alone
since April 1959, nearly twelve hundred in Kenya, and well over two hundred in Tanganyika. In the Belgian Congo, also, the beginnings of mass conversion are becoming evident. In the far-flung territories under the jurisdiction of the

Regional
Assembly of South and West Africa, a gain of over sixty percent has occurred during
the past twelve months in the total number of adherents of the Faith. The zeal of the
now believers in this area is well illustrated, by the recent settlement of the Island of
Sesse in Lake Victoria, an accomplishment of nature ever dear to Shoghi Effendi's
heart. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the whole of Africa has reached
a total of three hundred and seventy-six, an increase of well over two hundred since
the passing of the beloved Guardian. Representatives of two hundred and seventy-
three different African tribes are now included in the membership of the Bahá'í
Community. Noteworthy among the many new instances of official recognition

accorded the Faith during the past year are: The establishment and registration of
the first Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Africa, in Kampala, Uganda; the inclusion of
"Bahá'í' on the official census sheet as one of the religions of Swaziland; and the
registration of the Haziratu'l-Quds of Port Victoria, Seychelles as a religious
property, thereby exempting it from all taxation."

"After the completion of the local one year plan in 1973 -- 1974, the Five-Year Plan
was launched in Kenya by the beloved Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga when he
read the messages from the Universal House of Justice at the 1974 national
convention.'

Ministry of the Custodians: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the
Cause 1957-1963, by Universal House of Justice
http://bahai-library.com/uhj_ministry_custodians&chapter=4

Noted Pioneers in Kenya:

According to the Bahá'í World:

'The Mau Mau rebellion had begun two years before the first Bahá'í pioneer set foot in
Kenya, and the country was torn with bitter strife, ruled by stringent emergency
regulations, and race relations were at the lowest ebb. The churches which used to
overflow with enthusiastic Christians were half empty as the attendance dwindled

Sunday after Sunday. Many of those in authority looked at the Bahá'í Faith with dislike,
and most of the rebel Christians were very skeptical about anything to do with religion
because they had identified Christianity with the decadent Colonial rule, but they gave
a very sympathetic hearing to the wonderful message of the Bahá'í Faith."

- "The Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga, the only native African to have been
appointed a Hand of the Cause, traveled in many countries in both East and West
Africa during the years 1963 to 1968, transferring his residence to Kenya in 1963.
Admired and loved as he is by his fellow African believers, he was spectacularly
successful on other continents."

- Mr. Aziz Yazdi was one the early pioneers in Kenya. His name was always
mentioned by the Bahá'ís with love and respect. He served in the National Assembly
of East Africa, and later, the National Spiritual Assembly of Kenya. In 1954, he was
appointed as an Auxiliary Board, and 1968, as the Counselor for East and Central
Africa. When he left Kenya to serve in Holy Land, his house, which was also the
Continental Board of Counselor's Headquarter, became the residence of Isobel
Sabri, the newly appointed Counselor, and her husband Hassan Sabri, the
Secretary of the Continental Pioneering Committee for Africa.

- Dr. Jamsheed Samandari was the cousin of Dr. Mihdi Samandari, the Counselor
and the son of Hand of the Cause, Mr. Tarazu'llah Samandari. In 1961, Jamsheed
and his wife, Parivash, were pioneers in Somalia, but due to the political unrest,
moved to Tanzania and then Nairobi.

(BW - Baha'i World Volumes, Volume 14, p. 272)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Starting a New Life

We learned from our meeting with the Sabri's that our most important task as pioneers was
consolidation; helping with the deepening of African Bahá'ís and developing their
administrative skills. This also entailed my involvement in developing activities for women
and children and Terry's national coordination of the correspondence courses.

I was soon introduced to Dr. Samandari, who offered his services free of charge as my Gynecologist. Jamsheed and his wife Parivash took us under their wings and helped us to settle in a furnished one-bedroom apartment close to their home in Westlands. Cecily Trent, a pioneer who lived in their guest house, took the role of my surrogate mother.

As we settled in our home, we realized that there were no electric home appliances, and we had to hire a maid or houseboy to manually do the chores. That was an added expenditure to our limited budget. With the help of new Bahá'í friends, including Giti Rouhani, another Persian pioneer, we managed to shop for the Baby and get ready for the delivery. Meanwhile, Terry applied at the Nairobi City Education Department for a job and started teaching at the Nairobi Primary School, which was conveniently located in Westlands. As Terry was hired in Kenya, he did not have the privileges given to expatriates. Therefore, he received a local salary with no housing, health or other fringe benefits.

Most of the Bahá'í activities took place at the Nairobi Bahá'í Center. There was a well-attended devotional and deepening program every Sunday. An opportunity to meet the Kenyan Bahá'ís and pioneers. Hassan Sabri was the coordinator of the program. It was also where visitors, including Hands of the Cause and Counselors, would talk and consult with the Bahá'ís. The National Office was located at the Center, and Mr. Wafula, the Secretary of the Kenya National Spiritual Assembly, and his family lived on the property. A dormitory accommodated Kenyan Bahá'ís who were attending meetings or conferences at Nairobi. I was appointed as a member of the National Teaching Committee and helped to organize the National Teaching Conference in Nairobi.

Excerpts from: BW - Baha'i World Volumes, Volume 16, p. 144:

'In 1974 a National Teaching Conference was held to discuss the goals of the Five Year Plan, following which seventeen regional conferences were held with a total

attendance of approximately 1,000. Teaching work aimed at winning the goals of the plan was carried out through such means as the inspiration of national and local

teaching and consolidation conferences; the attempted strengthening of the work of
the Regional Teaching Committees; the extension teaching undertaken by several Bahá'í communities, particularly Nairobi; and the work of local Bahá'í travelling
teachers in many parts of the country, as well as of travelling teachers from other
countries, notably Iran. As a result, more than 4,000 new believers were added to
those on record, but the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies dropped considerably
before beginning to rise again. In 1976, it was reported that the first member of the
Turkana tribe to become a Bahá'í had declared his belief. The goal of opening two
or more islands in Lake Victoria, in cooperation with the National Spiritual Assembly
of Kenya.'

'The Hand of the Cause Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhajir played a key role in inspiring the
Bahá'ís of Kenya to greater teaching efforts. Mrs. Florence Mayberry of the International Teaching Centre addressed a well-attended meeting in Nairobi in September 1974. Among those attending were several new blind believers. As a result of the teaching activity of a pioneer who settled in Kenya, approximately fifteen
blind individuals from a school near the pioneer's home embraced the Faith.'

https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

I delivered my baby after the conference. It was a difficult childbirth and, after 14 hours of
labor, I had to have a Cesarean Section. It took me a while to come out of the general
anesthetic. I remember having a near death experience; going through a tunnel of intense
lights, while entering the world of consciousness. My doctors were relieved to see me back,
as complications from general anesthetic were one of the leading causes of death in Kenya.
Since then, I have had premonitions while dreaming, of significant events that will happen
to me or those close to me.

Some Light-Hearted Anecdotes

1) When our beautiful daughter Anisa was born, due to the complication of my surgery, we spent a week in the hospital and a month at home to recuperate. I tried to be a good mother. However, since my own mother and family were not around, I used Dr. Spock's book "Baby and Child Care," to be my guide for taking care of my newborn. Thankfully I had my new Bahá'í friends to help in the process. Among them Dr. Radha Rost, the daughter of Dr. Munji, a distinguished Bahá'í that I had met in New Delhi. Radha, a medical doctor, was married to Dr. Tim Rost, a College Professor in Thika. She had small children and was one of my best friends. When she was visiting me, I had just finished breastfeeding Anisa and was overwhelmed by her restlessness and continuous crying. I asked Radha for help. She made a quick examination and said; "Dear Shahla, you are not producing enough milk which makes Anisa frustrated and hungry. You must start bottle feeding the Baby to supplement your milk." It was the best advice that I ever heard as a new mother.

2) I also had a crash course in becoming a real Persian cook. In the past, I used to make a Persian dish with whatever ingredients were available in the market. One day, Mrs. Samandari, invited me to her home, to have lunch with Counselor Mihdi Samandari and other Bahá'í friends. I offered to make a traditional Persian herb dish. When lunch was being served, Parivash acknowledged that I cooked the Ghomeh Sabzi (the herb dish.) Dr. Mihdi complemented me and asked how I prepared it. I described the ingredients that I used, such as Cilantro. A Persian lady smiled and said that Cilantro was not the right herb for that dish. I was surprised and a bit embarrassed. Dr. Mihdi intervened and said; maybe that is why this food is so delicious! Since then, I always checked with my Persian friends about Persian customs and traditions.

3) We became close friends with Parviz Sultani, a young Persian pioneer who was taking

his master's Degree in Kisumu, western Kenya. As he was our age, we spent a great
deal of time together when he visited Nairobi. Parviz told us when he first arrived,
Hassan Sabri took him on a sightseeing tour of the residential estates of Nairobi. Parviz
noticed that most of the spacious houses had a chain linked fence with a sign written in
red: "MBWA KALI." Parviz commented that this Mbwa Kali should be a wealthy man to
own all these mansions! Hassan laughed and said the Swahili sign means: "FIERCE
DOG." It was warning the intruder: "Enter at your own risk."

Life in Nairobi

Nairobi in 1974, was a modern and beautiful city. The commercial center housed many
international companies in East Africa. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)
headquarters and the United Nations Office for Africa was in Nairobi. They provided funding
for many of the United Nations projects in Africa.

The climate was always moderate, we never needed air-conditioning or heating systems
in our home. The Nairobi National Park and Animal Orphanage were located just outside
the city, and tours to other National Parks were organized in Nairobi.

As newcomers, we noticed a stark difference in the standard of living between upper-class
residential areas, where wealthy Kenyans and expatriates were residing, and the slum
areas, where 50% of Nairobi population lived. There were recent apartment housing
developments for middle-income professional Kenyans, such as Jamhuri Estate.

Most of the pioneers in Nairobi had to live in upmarket neighborhoods, either in the
expensive houses, which had fences and sometimes private guards or in the apartment
buildings nearby. As the slum areas such as Kibera were not safe for the foreigners, and
the government-sponsored Housing Estates were for the Kenyans only.

Safety was an issue for the residents. Public transportation was not available for most of
the neighborhoods, and it was not safe to walk in the evenings. Therefore, we needed to

buy a car, which was quite expensive in Kenya. We could only afford to pay for a used car,

which consumed most of our savings. The rental for our small apartment was equivalent to Terry's monthly income. As our six-month deputization was up, we were facing financial crisis. So, Terry went to the Nairobi City Education Department, asking for help with housing allocation. The Department agreed to give us the only free housing available at that time. It was the headmaster's house of Jamhuri Primary School. There was a gas explosion in the house, and the Asian Headmaster was sure that there had been an attempt on his life. Therefore, he refused to go back to the house after repair. Terry, although still teaching in Nairobi Primary School, accepted the offer. We immediately packed our belongings and moved to our new home.

Jamhuri Estate Home

Our first home in Nairobi was a small 3-bedroom bungalow, located across the street of the Jamhuri Estate, an apartment housing development for Kenyan professionals. The house was the only building in an African savannah, extending to the Jamhuri Showground, and Ngong Forest Sanctuary. There was no backyard fence to safeguard the house from the intruders or wildlife. At night, the sound of nature, including crickets, played a full orchestra at our doorstep. The house had slanted cathedral ceiling in the living room which was cracked after the explosion. The crack was left open for months, exposing the tiled floor to the elements of nature. When they filled the gap, they did not paint it over or clean the floor.
When I entered the room, I had an eerie feeling that I stepped into a war zone after an enemy attack. We soon realized that the explosion damaged the water and gas pipes in the house, and no repair had been done to restore water or gas connection. As the kitchen stove ran on gas, we could not use it for cooking. We were lucky to have electricity and an outdoor water faucet. It was a weekend, and the offices were closed. We had no

choice
but to go into a survival mode to take care of Baby Anisa and our necessities. Fortunately,
Anisa had a Baby basket carriage with mosquito net. We found a large blackboard and a
few concrete blocks, which we converted to a base for our bed. We went to the African
market and bought a couple of 2-inch foam mattresses to place on the blackboards and
made a makeshift bed. We had an electric frying pan from Tehran to use for cooking. As
our house was not far from the Sabri's, they graciously allowed us to use their facilities to
shower. We filled up jars with clean water, and brought them home, placed them outside
to warm up, to use for Anisa's bath. It took a few weeks before we had our utilities restored.
Isobel Sabri once told me; "You have gone from the sublime to the ridiculous!" She did not
know how true this comment was, not having visited our house.

For our living room, I used our only valuable possession, a small Persian rug that my
mother had insisted on bringing with us. It was large enough for me to sit and feed my
Baby. A Chinese lacquered lantern that we had bought in Hong Kong gave out subdued
lighting. One evening, when sitting on the rug, in that bare and unfinished room, feeding
my innocent Baby, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of self-pity and abjection. However, it
soon turned into enlightenment, as I remembered the words of Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of
Ahmad. Just then, Terry returned from work. I noticed as he entered the room and observed
our condition, tears welled in his eyes. So, I comforted him by reciting the verse:

'O, Ahmad! Forget not My bounties while I am absent. Remember My days during
thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison. And be thou so
steadfast in My love that thy heart shall not waver, even if the swords of the enemies
rain blows upon thee and all the heavens and the earth arise against thee.

Be thou as a flame of fire to My enemies and a river of life eternal to My loved
ones, and be not of those who doubt.
And if thou art overtaken by affliction in My path, or degradation for My sake,

be
not thou troubled thereby.
Rely upon God, thy God and the Lord of thy fathers…….’

(Compilations, Baha'i Prayers, p. 206)
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Little by little, we were able to buy some furniture from expatriates who were leaving the country. We also furnished extra bedroom and offered hospitality to a stream of pioneers from Iran, on their way to other African countries. They had to stop over in Nairobi to consult with the Pioneering Committee. Our guests were mainly single ladies with limited finances and language skills. We offered them a safe environment, in addition to emotional support in coping with challenges of their life as a pioneer.

We developed a close relationship with the Bahá’í residents of Jamhuri Estate. One of them was dear Jan, an American Bahá’í, who was married to a Kenyan. Her husband, a corporate manager, was not a Bahá’í. He was not interested in having his family participate in Bahá’í activities, but Jan took her children to the Bahá’í Center every Sunday.

We also became friends with another American Bahá’í who was also married to a Kenyan. This lady was quite unhappy with her married life and wanted to leave her husband and take her children back home with her. However, legally, her children were Kenya citizens and could not leave the country without their father’s consent. So, she contacted the US Embassy for help. They issued a US passport for the family and arranged for their transport to the States. No one knew about their departure until she called Jan from her parents’ home in the States.

In contrast, Jan was a patient wife and loving mother. We visited her often and helped her with transportation, to go to her appointments and Bahá’í activities. Years later, when we were in the States, we heard the sad news that Jan had passed away after surgery, due to the complications from the anesthetic. She left behind her young children, who

were not
allowed to have any contact with the Bahá'ís.

A Poignant Memory

In 1991, I was on a Pilgrimage with my daughter, Anisa. While sitting in the Pilgrim House,
conversing with Jila, my old friend from the Philippines, a young lady approached us and
asked if I was in Kenya when her mother Jan was alive. She introduced herself as Esther

and told us her story. She relayed that after her mother had passed away, her father
remarried and removed all the pictures and memorabilia of Jan. The children were not
allowed to talk about their mother or contact any Bahá'í who knew her. When she was a
teenager, her American grandparents convinced her father to send Esther to the States.
There, she learned about the Bahá'í Faith and her mother's life in the States. After
graduation, she joined the staff at the World Center. She always prayed at the Shrines to
meet people who knew about her mother. The night before our meeting, Jan came to her
dream and told her that she would be meeting a friend the next day. I embraced her crying
and shared all my precious memories of Jan. We both felt her presence and said a prayer
for her soul at the Shrine.

From the left, Esther, Shahla, Anisa

Lavington Estate home

At the beginning of the new school year, Terry was called to the Nairobi Education
Department and was told that we had to vacate the house so the new Headmaster of
Jamhuri School could move in. However, the Headmaster's house of the Lavington school
was available, and they were promoting Terry to be the Deputy Headmaster of that school.
Lavington was an upper-income residential estate in the suburb of Nairobi.

The house was on the elevated site of the school property. Down the slope, was the
Lavington Primary School campus. We moved into a spacious 3-bedroom stone house,

with wood flooring, a small vegetable garden on the side, adjacent to the servants' quarters.
A full veranda on the back of the house was overlooking to 13 acres of green, speckled with African native trees. Among them an iconic Baobab tree, also known as an upside-down tree; because its leafless branches looked like roots spreading in the air. As the tree stores water in its branches, and rains down droplets of clear water, it was also called the "Rain Tree." In the distance, we could see a tree grove and a brook flowing through it. The idyllic environment was like a scene from the movies, which depicted Africa.

This welcome change reminded me of this quote from the Báb: "Say, this earthly life shall come to an end, and everyone shall expire and return unto my Lord God Who will reward with the choicest gifts the deeds of those who endure with patience." I was not sure that I deserved the reward in this world, but it motivated me to plan the next stage of my life and my career. Anisa was six months old and could stay home with a nanny. So, we hired a live-in nanny (Aya), a gentle natured woman from Uganda. Since everything was done manually - laundry, house cleaning, cutting grass with a machete, we also needed a male servant (houseboy). I followed the advice of Ruhiyyih Khanum, in her Manual to Pioneers, to be the source of employment for domestic help.

In Search of Employment

I soon learned that Social Work courses were not offered at the Nairobi University or any other colleges. Hassan Sabri suggested that I explore possibilities with Kenya Institute of Administration. KIA was a government institution, which was established for the development of public servants in the East African region. Therefore, I had to go to the Government Ministry to apply for a faculty position. I was painfully aware that I had no one in the Ministry to vouch for me. That morning, I ardently prayed for Divine assistance and drove to the Government Center. When I parked my car and started walking, I noticed an elegant African lady passing by. I politely asked her for directions. She

responded that I
might walk with her, as she was going the same way. I thanked her, and sincerely told her:
“you are so beautiful”! She chuckled in surprise and returned my compliment. This started
a conversation with her, asking me what my business was, at the Ministry. I told her who I
was and my hope to have a job interview with the Head of the Division, in charge of KIA. I
continued by saying that I did not know the person, nor did I have an appointment. When
we arrived at the entrance of the building, she asked security to take me to the office of the
Director. Then, she handed me her card to give to the Director and instructed me to ask
him to call Mrs. G. She wished me luck and walked in a different direction. I never saw
Mrs. G. again!

The security guard accompanied me to the Director’s office. There, I handed the card to a
surprised secretary and conveyed the message from Mrs. G. The secretary immediately
informed the Director and asked me to wait for him to finish his call to Mrs. G. Then, I was
ushered into his office for a short interview. He informed me that based on the
recommendation of the Minister, I would be hired as a lecturer at KIA. He asked me to go
to the HR for the hiring process, then report to the Director of KIA. I later learned that Mrs.
G. was the wife of the Minister. She was also the Deputy Minister, in charge of innovative
social development projects. I left the Ministry a while later, with my employment papers,

and directions to KIA. While driving home, I could not contain tears of joy rolling down my
face…I was singing His praises and thanking God for bestowing His ocean of Mercy upon
this humble maidservant!

‘O thou candle of the Love of God!
I ask God to grant thee by His favor and grace that which is thy utmost desire; that
the closed doors become opened, the uneven roads become even, thy face shine
by the love of God, thy sight become brighter by witnessing the signs of God; that
thou mayest attain spiritual joy, eternal happiness and heavenly life.’

- Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-157.html

Kenya Institute of Administration - KIA

KIA campus was in Kabete, 10 miles out of Nairobi. Next day I drove on a country road, passing through a beautiful rural area. The new and modern Administration Building was an addition to the older structures which housed students’ dormitories and classrooms. I did not see the Director, but the Head of Faculty for Social Development, Mr. J. interviewed me. Going through my documents, he informed me that there was no position open in his department, and no office space available in the building. However, he found an empty office out on the campus. He wanted me to read papers relating to the courses offered in the department until he met with the Director and decided on my job description. Then, he took me to an old, stone building, quite a distance from the Administration Building. I learned later that my colleagues jokingly called that building, Bangladesh, as it was far from the modern campus of KIA. My office furniture was composed of an old chair and a desk. My office supplies were a pad of paper and a few pens. I had an old telephone, which was connected to the operator for outside calls. The only other office was occupied by a young Kenyan from the Accounting department. Both of us were new and waiting for future instructions from the Director. For more than 2 weeks, I dutifully came to work and left at the end of the day. On the third week, Mr. J. called me to his office to reprimand me for not having attended the general staff meeting when the director called my name to welcome me to KIA. I responded that I had been in my office and had not received any communications about such a meeting. He realized that he had neglected to give me a

proper orientation and informed the Director. The directive was to move me right away to the new Office Building and schedule a weekly supervisory meeting with Mr. J. Since there was no office available yet, my only option was to share one with the same

young man who
was with me in Bangladesh. I accepted the offer, and we both moved to our new, modern,
second-floor office. The other offices were occupied by two Lecturers from Kenya, who
were teaching a two-year course in Social Services. I gradually met the other East African
colleagues in the same office complex. They were lecturing General Administration,
Accounting, and Management Courses. They came from Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Uganda.
The European expatriates had their offices in different buildings.

In the late 1970's Kenya still had ties with England as a Member of the British
Commonwealth. The citizens of the British Commonwealth countries had the right to live,
own properties and work in Kenya. I obtained my New Zealand citizenship in Iran, through
the British Embassy, which gave me the right to enter and work in Kenya. There was an
underlying tension and mistrust among the Kenyans, Africans, and the European
"expatriates." The expatriates who were hired by the Kenya government, had the
advantage of receiving much higher salaries, in addition to free housing, travel expenses,
and other fringe benefits. These privileges were not extended to their Kenyan and other
African counterparts. Therefore, this systemic discrimination added to the element of
resentment in the interaction between Kenyans, other Africans, and Europeans. I was in a
peculiar position, as I was considered European, but not an expatriate. It gave me a rare
opportunity to be with my African colleagues and gain their trust and friendship.

My first test was handling the situation in the Break Room, where the staff gathered during
break and lunch to mingle. When I first entered, I noticed two separate seating
arrangements, one section on the far right, and one on the far left. At the middle, there
were serving tables for tea, coffee, and refreshments. All the British expatriates were sitting
on the right section, and all the Africans were sitting on the left. This was an unwritten
norm that everyone observed. I handled my predicament by alternating each break; sitting

once on the African side, and the second time on the expatriate side. I offered friendship to each group and tried my best to teach the Faith based on my conduct as a Bahá'í. I continued getting closer to my African colleagues, and they trusted me more. Finally, they told me with amusement: "You are a strange animal, your name is English, but you act like one of us!" It was the warmest compliments that I had ever received from my African

colleagues! After six months or so, I noticed that my intervention started to work. As some African staff deliberately crossed over the invisible line and sat in the European section.

The mistrust was also showing among my trainees. Once, when I was teaching the unity of mankind in my Human Growth and Development class. I was explaining how human species, which was originally from East Africa, through migration and adapting to new environments, branched out to become all the different races around the world. I saw quite a few trainees whispering to each other. I asked them to share their thoughts with the rest of the class. One took the floor by saying that I was not totally honest since I really believed that Africans descended from monkeys and Europeans from humans. I was shocked to hear that, and spent the rest of my lecture to expound on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of human evolution:

'To recapitulate: as man in the womb of the mother passes from form to form, from shape to shape, changes and develops, and is still the human species from the beginning of the embryonic period—in the same way man, from the beginning of his existence in the matrix of the world, is also a distinct species, that is, man, and has gradually evolved from one form to another. Therefore, this change of appearance, this evolution of members, this development and growth, even though we admit the reality of growth and progress, does not prevent the species from being original. Man, from the beginning was in this perfect form and composition, and possessed capacity and aptitude for acquiring material and spiritual perfections, and was

the
manifestation of these words, “We will make man in Our image and likeness.” He
has only become more pleasing, more beautiful, and more graceful. Civilization has
brought him out of his wild state, just as the wild fruits which are cultivated by a
gardener became finer, sweeter, and acquire more freshness and delicacy.

The gardeners of the world of humanity are the Prophets of God.’

- Bahá’í World Faith—Selected Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and
‘Abdu’l-Bahá (‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s
Section Only)

http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/BWF/bwf-23.html

My Scope of Responsibilities at KIA

As a faculty member, based on my understanding of the Kenyan cultural and social norms,
I developed a course on Human Growth and Development, which is still being offered at
KIA.

I was an advisor and supervisor for student’s field placement. In that capacity, I traveled to
a variety of urban and rural areas, where I was officially received as a government dignitary.
The most memorable trip was to Maasai Mara, where I was welcomed by the Maasai in
their formal regalia, performing their traditional dances.

Infant mortality was quite high, and most of the families had close to 9 children. It was to
ensure that some would survive to take care of their parents. In one instance, I observed
the harsh reality of poverty, when I accompanied a trainee to visit a family in a small town.
I was told that during a recent famine, when the family was on the brink of starvation, the
mother could not produce milk to feed her infant. So, when her Baby died, she cooked his
flesh to feed her starving family.

The high rate of pregnancy caused a short life expectancy for women. I was once in a panel
to evaluate the student’s field placement. One of the trainees was reporting his intervention
in helping an old lady to find placement in a home for the aged. He repeatedly emphasized

that this very old client was not able to take care of herself and was lucky to find a placement in a senior facility. At the end of his report, my colleague asked how old was the client? He responded; “Very old, she was 46 years old!” We both gasped, as my colleague was 45 years old. He was right since statistics showed that the average life expectancy for women was 45 years.

I acted as a National Advisor for Workshops sponsored by IPPF – International Planned Parenthood Federation, and a consultant, for early childhood development centers, sponsored by UNICEF. These international programs were focused on the health and well-being of mothers and their children.

African women shoulder significant responsibilities for raising their family, with little financial means. In addition to their household duties, they care for generations of children and grandchildren, whom their mothers live in a distant location, either to work or finish their education – this included some of the female KIA trainees. They also work in the fields,

grow and harvest crops; and barter their produce and crafts, to provide for their family. The need for economic empowerment was sorely required for these hardworking women. Therefore, a few international women organizations developed cottage industry Co-Ops to train and then employ a group of neighborhood women, to make exquisite African jewelry, tie-dye Batiks, and basketry. Their products were sold in the US and European markets for a considerable profit. A portion was distributed among the Co-Op women, and a percentage was deposited in the Co-Op saving account. All the qualified members took turns in receiving a lump sum for either purchasing the required household item, paying for their family’s education, or starting a business. I supervised field placement of my female social workers assigned to these Co-Ops. They were conducting support groups to enable the members to be socially and financially self-sufficient.

Bahá’í Proclamation

In my contacts with the United Nations organization, I was able to contribute to the
proclamation projects of the Bahá’í community. Terry and I both helped with setting up
booths for the annual Nairobi Show. Following is an excerpt from (BW - Baha'i World
Volumes, Volume 16, p. 144):

‘The Faith was proclaimed and brought to the attention of the public in Kenya in
several ways. Each year at the Nairobi Show, the attractive Bahá'í booth drew
hundreds of enquirers. Bahá’í activity at the Rachuonyo Agricultural Show was quite
fruitful. Nationwide radio and television programmes had Bahá'í participants on
several occasions. Bahá'í efforts in support of United Nations activities in Kenya
were successful, with Bahá'í observances of World Environment Day, United
Nations Day, and Human Rights Day being held in both urban and rural
communities. Ties were strengthened with the United Nations Environment
Programme, which has its headquarters in Nairobi; this strengthening resulted
particularly from Bahá’í activities in connection with UNEP Governing Council
sessions.’
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Bahá’í Correspondence Course

Terry devoted his service as a tutor for the National Bahá’í Correspondence
courses. Following is an excerpt from BW - Bahá’í World Volume 16, page 45:

‘Deepening of the knowledge of the friends was carried out to a considerable
extent through conferences, courses, and seminars organized largely by
national committees, with particular success during the one year plan when
more than 800 friends participated in deepening courses. A series of
conferences designed to aid the friends to form new Local Spiritual

Assemblies and reclaim lost ones was held in 1973 -1976; some of these
were highly successful.
Teaching and deepening activities took place at the three permanent Bahá'í
institutes, with Menu Baha Institute being the most effectively utilized. The
marked expansion and growing effectiveness of the Bahá'í correspondence
courses during this period not only led to the deepening of many believers
but helped to attract enquirers to the Cause. Courses were given in English
and Swahili.’

https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

Travel Teaching Activities

Terry and I, fulfilled the consolidation goal, by traveling to several

Bahá'í communities in
Kenya. The regular weekend visits were to Machakos, and Thika, both within a day's driving
distance from Nairobi. During school holidays, we traveled to Kisumu, in western Kenya,
met with the Auxiliary Board member and visited the surrounding Bahá'í communities. In
Mombasa, a coastal city by the Indian Ocean, Dr. Rouhani, a member of the Auxiliary
Board, facilitated our meeting with the Bahá'ís in the area.

Visiting Bahá'í Dignitaries

In addition to the visits from Hands of the Cause, Enoch Olinga, John Robarts, and Dr.
Muhajir, we also had the blessing of regular visits by the members of Continental Board of
Counselors. Mr. Hushang Ahdieh, from Ethiopia, and Mr. Peter Vuyiya, from Kenya.

Dr. Ayman, my beloved mentor, and Dr. Rasekh, my professor from Tehran University,
both Counselors for Asia, had talks at the Bahá'í Center. The concept of deepening Bahá'ís
on principles and importance of Bahá'í Administration was the focal points of talks by Hands
of the Cause and the Counselors. I always remember Dr. Rakesh's analogy on the Sea of
Covenant. He asked us to visualize a school of fish, swimming and receiving life-giving
sustenance from the sea. He then asked us to think of the individual Bahá'í, living in the
ocean of God's mercy, receiving spiritual nourishment from the Bahá'í community and its
institutions. As the fish would not survive out of the water, an individual Bahá'í would not
sustain a spiritual life, without the protection of Bahá'í institutions and care of the Bahá'í
community.

Dr. Muhajir emphasized the role of the pioneers in teaching the Faith and deepening
Bahá'ís on Bahá'í Administration. He likened the connection of the individual Bahá'ís to
Bahá'í Administration as leaves attached to the stems of the Tree of the Covenant. If a leaf
falls from the tree, it will eventually wither and die.

The Circumstances of Bahá'ís in some Neighboring Counties

Uganda: In 1951, Mr. and Mrs. Musa Banani, their daughter Violette, and her husband, Mr. Ali Nakhjavani pioneered to Kampala. Later that year Enoch Olinga declared his Faith. In

1953, Mr. Olinga went to Cameroon, and became a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, to open the Faith in a new territory. He was appointed by the Guardian, as a Hand of the Cause, in 1957.

The Faith spread in Uganda, and the Beloved Guardian called the Ugandan Bahá'í Community, the spiritual heart of Africa. The first Bahá'í House of Worship for Africa was dedicated in 1961 in Kampala. The same year several permanent Bahá'í Schools were established in the country.

In 1970, when Idi Amin became the President of Uganda, the members of the newly formed Uganda National Spiritual Assembly, attended a meeting with the President. They presented a statement, which included the core tenants of the Faith, and their obedience to the government. In 1971, Idi Amin attended the celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and made positive statements about the Faith. Subsequently Mr. Olinga and the Bahá'í community continued to be active in a variety of social development endeavors. However, in 1972, when the Ugandan exiles attempted to invade the country, Idi Amin took retaliatory actions against the tribes which he considered his enemies. He gradually broadened his persecution to the members of ethnic groups, and political dissidents, including the professionals, students, and non-Muslim religious leaders. The number of deaths according to Amnesty International, were estimated at 500,000.

The action of Idi Amin recruits, which comprised of South Sudanese soldiers, mercenaries, and a small group of Ugandan Muslims, created terror in a once peaceful and progressive Uganda. Although we had a regular visit of Ugandan friends in Nairobi, it was not safe for us to travel to Uganda. Therefore, we missed the valuable opportunity of visiting the first African Bahá'í Temple in Kampala. Eventually, in 1977, Idi Amin banned the Bahá'í Faith in Uganda.

Ethiopia: After the overthrow of Haile Selassie, the country was entangled in political upheaval and civil war. Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, where Counselor Ahdieh lived, had one of the largest Bahá'í communities in the nation. However, Eritreans were on the brink of starvation due to famine and food shortage. Although the international relief organizations were sending planeloads of food to Addis Ababa, they never left the airport and reached starving Eritreans. The Counselor's office in Nairobi appealed to the UN Relief Organization to resolve this crisis.

The Ethiopian Bahá'ís were not able to attend Bahá'í conferences out of their country.

Tanzania: We made a trip to Tanzania, visiting some Bahá'ís and pioneers in the country. Tanzania, under President Nyerere's regime, was going through an African Socialism experiment. The social unrest erupted when in 1970, Nyerere forced small farmers to transfer their farms to collective farms. Because the government was not providing resources, the collective farms produced acres after acres of corn and nothing else. It created a nationwide food shortage. Store shelves were mostly empty and carried only a few old cans of tomato sauce and other inconsequential commodities. In 1976, we witnessed the widespread poverty in places we visited. American pioneers who were

primary school teachers used to come periodically to Nairobi, to stock up on food and personal items, and take them back to their home in Tanzania.

Among visitors from Uganda, were George Olinga, the son of Hand of the Cause, his Iranian wife, Forough, and their little girl Nasim, who was the same age our daughter. We became close friends and had the pleasure of having them at our house, with the two new pioneers from Iran, Miss Gouran, and Mrs. Gandomi. Miss Gouran used to be a member of the Pioneering Committee in Iran, supporting me when I was first trying to go pioneering to the Philippines. Mrs. Gandomi was also an acquaintance from Tehran. We worked

together in the Women's Committee in Kenya.

The picture was taken at Lavington Estate house
L- George and Forough Olinga, Mrs. Gandomi,
Third from right, Miss Gouran, and Terry, on the right.

Bahá'í International Teaching Conference:

In the midpoint of the Five-Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice called for a series of International Teaching Conferences, to be held in eight locations around the world. The Nairobi Conference was planned to take place in October 1976. The indigenous African Bahá'ís were encouraged to attend as the guests of the Conference. All the pioneers and active Bahá'ís in Nairobi were eager to participate in the preparation efforts to make the conference a success. I was one of the members of the organizing committee.

Close to sixteen thousand Bahá'ís, from 61 countries, gathered in an atmosphere of love and unity, at the Nairobi Conference Center. Mr. Olinga, representing the Universal House of Justice, officially opened the conference. He introduced the other three Hands of the Cause, who were present: William Sears, John Robarts who were both pioneers to Africa, and Dr. Muhajir, who extensively traveled in the continent.

Mr. Sears took the stage to deliver the Message from the Universal House of Justice. He informed us that the Conference was now being linked to the Members of the Supreme Body at the World Center. At the culmination of the message, The Universal House of Justice members would be praying on our behalf at the Holy Shrines. He then read the followings:

Message to the International Teaching Conference, Nairobi, Kenya -- September 1976
'To the friends gathered at the International Conference in Nairobi

Beloved friends, The flames of enthusiasm which ignited the hearts of the followers and lovers of the Most Great Name in Helsinki, in Anchorage and in Paris are now being kindled in a city which occupies a central and envied position at the very

crossroads of the vast African mainland and are destined to illumine its horizons.

This Conference marking the imminent approach of the midway point of the Five-Year Plan which coincides with the anniversary of the birth of the Blessed Báb, will no doubt go down in Bahá'í history as a further landmark in the irresistible march of events which have characterized the impact of the Faith of God upon that continent.

We recall that in addition to Quddus the only other companion of the Báb on His pilgrimage to Mecca was an Ethiopian and that he and his wife were intimately associated with Him and His household in Shiraz. During the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh a few of His stalwart disciples reached the north-eastern shores of Africa, and under His direct guidance, announced the glad tidings of the New Day to the people of the Nile, thus opening to the Faith two countries of the African mainland. Soon afterward, His blessed person approached those shores in the course of His exile to the Holy Land. Still, later He voiced His significant utterance in which He compared the coloured people to "the black pupil of the eye," through which "the light of the spirit shineth forth." Just over six years after His ascension, the first member of the black race to embrace His Cause in the West, who was destined to become a disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a herald of the Kingdom, and the door through which numberless members of his race were to enter that Kingdom, came on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the first group of Western friends who arrived in 'Akká to visit the Centre of the Covenant. This was followed by a steady extension of the teaching work among the black people of North America, and the opening to the Faith, by the end of the Heroic Age, of two more countries in Africa, under the watchful care of the Master, Whose three visits to Egypt have blessed the soil of that Continent. Prior to the conclusion of the first Bahá'í century the number of countries opened to the Faith had been raised to seven, and the teaching work among the black race in North America had entered a new phase of development through the continuous guidance flowing from the pen of Shoghi Effendi, who himself traversed the African continent twice from south to north, and who, in

the
course of his ministry, elevated two members of the black race to the rank of Hand
of the Cause, appointed three more believers residing in Africa to that high office,
and there raised up four National Spiritual Assemblies.

By 1944, the seven African countries opened to the Faith were Abyssinia (Ethiopia),
Belgian Congo, Egypt, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Sudan, and Tunisia.
Shoghi Effendi traveled in Africa circa September -- October 1929 and in 1940. The
two black Hands of the Cause of God were Louis Gregory of the United States,
appointed posthumously in August 1951, and Enoch Olinga of Uganda, appointed
in October 1957. The additional three Hands appointed while living in Africa were
Musa Banani (29 February 1952, Kampala, Uganda), and William Sears and John
Robarts (October 1957, South Africa). The four National Spiritual Assemblies
Shoghi Effendi raised up are those of Central and East Africa, North East Africa,
North West Africa, and South and West Africa.]

At the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade, the number of countries opened to the
Faith had reached twenty-four, including those opened under the aegis of the Two
Year African Campaign coordinated by the British National Spiritual Assembly. The
Ten Year Plan opened the rest of Africa to the light of God's Faith, and today we
see with joy and pride in that vast continent and its neighbouring islands the
establishment of four Boards of Counsellors, thirty-four National Spiritual
Assemblies -- firm pillars of God's Administrative Order -- and over 2800 Local
Spiritual Assemblies, nuclei of a growing Bahá'í society.

Africa, a privileged continent with a past rich in cherished associations, has reached
its present stage of growth through countless feats of heroism and dedication.
Before us unfolds the vision of the future. "Africa," the beloved Guardian assures us
in one of the letters written on his behalf, "is truly awakening and finding herself, and
she undoubtedly has a great message to give, and a great contribution to make to
the advancement of world civilization. To the degree to which her peoples accept
Bahá'u'lláh will they be blessed, strengthened and protected."

The realization of this glorious destiny requires that the immediate tasks be
worthily discharged, and the pressing challenges and urgent requirements of the

Five Year Plan be wholeheartedly and effectively met and satisfied. As the forces of darkness in that part of the world wax fiercer, and the problems facing its

peoples and tribes become more critical, the believers in that continent must evince greater cohesion, scale loftier heights of heroism and self-sacrifice and demonstrate higher standards of concerted effort and harmonious development.

During the brief thirty months separating us from the end of the Plan, Africa must once again distinguish itself among its sister continents through a vast increase in the number of its believers, its Local Spiritual Assemblies and its localities opened to the Faith, and by accelerating the process of entry by troops throughout its length and breadth. The deepening of the faith, of the understanding and of the spiritual life of its individual believers must gather greater momentum; the foundations of its existing Local Spiritual Assemblies must be more speedily consolidated; the number of local Haziratu'l- Quds and of local endowments called for in the Plan must be soon acquired; the Bahá'í activities of women and of youth must be systematically stimulated; the Bahá'í education of the children of the believers must continuously be encouraged; the basis of the recognition that the institutions of the Faith have succeeded in obtaining from the authorities must steadily be broadened; mass communication facilities must be used far more frequently to teach and proclaim the Faith; and the publication and dissemination of the essential literature of the Faith must be given much greater importance. Above all it is imperative that in ever greater measure each individual believer should realize the vital need to subordinate his personal advantages to the overall welfare of the Cause, to awaken and reinforce his sense of responsibility before God to promote and protect its vital interests at all costs, and to renew his total consecration and dedication to His glorious Faith, so that, himself enkindled with the flames of its holy fire, he may, in concert with his

fellow-believers, ignite the light of faith and certitude in the hearts of his family, his tribe, his countrymen and all the peoples of that mighty continent, in preparation for the day when Africa's major contribution to world civilization will become fully consummated.

We fervently pray at the Holy Shrines that these hopes and aspirations may soon come true, and that the "pure-hearted" and 'spiritually receptive" people of Africa may draw ever nearer to the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh, and may become shining examples of self- abnegation, of courage and of love to the supporters of the Most Great Name in every land.'

The Universal House of Justice

(The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 340)

bahai-library.com/uhj_messages_1963_1986

The program continued with inspirational talks by the Hands of the Cause, followed by a series of panel discussions, facilitated by the Counselors and Auxiliary Board Members. All deliberated and consulted on the vital points of the message of the Universal House of Justice.

Mr. Aziz Yazdi represented the International Teaching Center, and St. Barbe Baker, "Man of the Trees," and one of the first Bahá'í teachers in Kenya, offered a historical perspective of the Faith and the early Bahá'ís in Africa.

Beloved African Bahá'ís in their colorful tribal customs, lifted the spirit, by their traditional dances and music. It was especially moving when after the welcome address by the Kenya Cabinet Minister, Mr. John Osogo, the African friends filled the auditorium with their melodious voice, chanting Alláh-u-Abhá, to bless the occasion.

The Conference held a series of evening programs, starting with a Unity Feast. It was held, the night before the formal opening, at the Jamhuri Show Ground. In attendance, a large number of indigenous African Bahá'ís who were accommodated in the Show Ground facilities. The rest of the participants from Nairobi Hotels took buses which

were rented full
time for the duration of the Conference. Just before the start of the program, we lost our
electricity, and the entire park went dark. However, the mishap did not diminish the
electrifying atmosphere of the gathering. The Conference busses turned on their headlights
and brightened the open-air meeting area and stage. Beloved Dr. Muhajir, used his
wonderful sense of humor to lighten the atmosphere. He talked about successful teaching
projects in other Bahá'í communities and urged us to consult and develop our own teaching
plans to fulfill the remaining goals of the Five Year Plan.

I was the coordinator of a public meeting, held in one of the Nairobi hotels. It was filled with
creative performances by youth from different nationalities around the world. A joyful
occasion for the Bahá'ís and a large number of guests who were not Bahá'ís.

My delight was seeing once again, my friends from Iran, including Behin, who was then
married to John Newport and were pioneering in Zaire.

My Son, Faran

During my trip to Tanzania, I was in early stage of pregnancy. One day, when I was
resting to recover from morning sickness, I had a vision and remembered this Hidden
Word of Bahá'u'lláh:

'O, My Friends! Call ye to mind that covenant ye have entered with Me upon Mount
Párán (in Persian, Faran), situate within the hallowed precincts of Zamán. I have
taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers in the city of eternity, yet
now none do I find faithful unto the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have
effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing
this, I waited and disclosed it not.'

~~ The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/HW/hw-144.html

I knew in my heart that I would be having a son and would be calling him

“Faran.” I shared
that with Terry, and he liked the Bahá’í name, which sounded like western
names. In the
Bahá’í writings, I found that:

- “Anisa” is referred to the Greater Covenant, the of God’s promise
of the new
manifestations, and

- Faran, to the Lesser Covenant, the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh,
appointing Abdu’l-Baha,
as his successor.

During the Nairobi Conference, I was in the last trimester of pregnancy.
However, it did not
prevent me from doing my best in helping with the smooth running of the
conference and
facilitating different activities. When Dr. Muhajir saw me busy with my
numerous
responsibilities, he lovingly whispered; “Dear, you need to be careful in
your condition!” I
assured him that I would be okay. However, I had a complicated pregnancy, with
a
prolonged sickness that drained our savings. My natural delivery had
complications and
put Báby Faran and me at risk, but with the grace of God, we both survived.

1977 National Teaching Conference

As a follow-up to the International Teaching Conference, Kenya held a National
Teaching
Conference, to implement a comprehensive plan of action. We had the bounty of
the loving
guidance of beloved Dr. Muhajir. He particularly emphasized the following
points:

- Training the Kenyan Bahá’ís to become teachers in their community.
- Deepening both men and women, on the Bahá’í principles and
Administration.
- Facilitating involvement of women in teaching the Faith, and
Administrative
functions of their Bahá’í communities.
- Education of children and youth, especially young girls to teach their
peers.

Women Workshops

In response to the call of Dr. Muhajir, I offered to hold two Women Institutes
in Western
Kenya. Mrs. Gandomi accompanied me and held art and craft classes for women and
children. We journeyed to Kisumu and stayed with a wonderful Kenyan family. The

mother
was a public-school teacher, who took care of her 9 children. It was my first experience to
live with a Kenyan family and have a heart to heart talk with the mother. I learned first hand
about the strengths of women in overcoming their challenges. We traveled each day to the
Institute location, where participants attended classes, cooked, and prepared delicious
local dishes. A truly enriching experience. I still remember with delight, a song that children
sang to welcome us. It goes like this:

‘We are happy, we are happy,
like the monkeys on the branches,
we are happy, we are ….!’

When I returned home, I sang it to Anisa and later, she learned to sing it along with me.

The second location was in the rural areas, where the living conditions were harsher.
However, it did not hinder the enthusiasm of the women participants. After our return, we

heard wonderful feedback about the impact of our seminars on the women participants.
They felt being respected and recognized by the Bahá’í community. A few went on to serve
on the Administrative institutions.

Last Year in Kenya
In one of his trips, Dr. Muhajir, hearing from the Sabri’s about our difficulties, offered to
come to our home, for a heart to heart consultation. We truly appreciated his guidance to
navigate our last year of pioneering in Kenya. He enjoyed playing with our young children
and offered to have a picture taken with them. I treasure this picture and the wonderful
memory of my beloved spiritual mentor.

Dr. Muhajir with Faran and Anisa. Terry Gillbanks on right

Before the start of the new school year, in 1978, Terry, who has been the acting
headmaster, learned that Nairobi Education Department will be appointing a Kenyan lady
as the Headmistress of Lavington School. Therefore, we would need to vacate the house

for her to move in.

My job was also in jeopardy for a different reason. My only mean of transportation, the second-hand car that we bought, was having mechanical problems. I was stranded quite a few times on the country road and had to hitchhike to get home. I was lucky each time, to find a safe driver. However, all my colleagues warned me of the dangers of being harmed or killed. We were not able to repair the car, as the spare parts were no longer available, and we could not afford to buy a new car. Another breakdown would have cost me my job.

As the acting Headmaster of the school, Terry was invited with his spouse, to attend the Jamhuri Day Celebration at the Kenyatta's Palace grounds. When the President passed

by, we noticed that he was braced by his aides, looking frail and out of sorts. We then realized that rumors were true about him not being in control. Riots were breaking out across the country and in Nairobi. Once, when we were coming back from the kid's doctor's appointment, shooting and a pandemonium happened around us. Terry, holding Faran, and me with Anisa, ran towards the alcove of a building and took cover. That was the final warning that convinced us to leave Kenya and move to Iran. Since it was the culmination of the Five Year Plan, we were comforted that we had fulfilled our pioneering pledge. It was a sad decision to leave our wonderful life behind and uproot our family, but we had no other choice. Alas, we did not know that as the saying goes: we were jumping from the frying pan into the fire!

A Tribute to Kenya

After the passing of Jomo Kenyatta, despite the dire prediction of unrest, Kenyans kept the integrity of their Democratic Government and unity of their Nation.

Kenya was one of the first African countries that banned game hunting. The only shooting which was allowed was through camera lenses. The government banned exporting and

trading ivory, to discourage poaching elephants and rhinos. The Animal Orphanage in Nairobi National Park rescued the wildlife orphans and gave them a second chance to live.

There were vast National Parks, throughout Kenya. We used to drive through the Tsavo National Park for days, enjoying majestic elephants, herds of wildebeest, zebra, rhino, lion, cheetah, deer, and other magnificent wildlife in their natural habitat. We learned about them and respected their natural order of life. Once, when we parked at the Mzima Springs to view its famed hippos, I noticed a family of giraffes nearby. I was so excited to show Anisa the Baby giraffe, that I held her in my arm and cautiously approached the wild animals, standing at a close distance. I instantly remembered that the mother giraffes were protective of their calves and would attack the intruder. At that point, I saw the mother giraffe, was observing me with my Baby and showing no aggression. I sensed an affinity between the two mothers from different species. We stayed for a while, unhurried and calm. Then, slowly moved away. These experiences instilled the love of animals in my children, which in turn, colored their perception of the world.

As my children were born in Kenya, they had become naturalized Kenyan. In years to come, they proudly called Kenya as their birthplace. They had the gentle care and undivided attention of their Aya, who dressed them and took them in their stroller, to Lavington Green, a park where all the nannies brought their charges for an afternoon of play and fun. They learned Swahili words like Baba, for Daddy, which is originally from the Persian language. They still call their father Baba, as adults.

The nostalgic memory of Kenya, her people, her wildlife, her natural beauty, and above all her Bahá’í community, always have a special place in our hearts.

CHAPTER 6
DARK TIMES IN TEHRAN
1978-1979

‘O God, my God! Thou seest Thy loved ones turning their hearts to Thee, and holding fast unto the cord of Thy ordinances and laws. I beseech Thee by the waves of the sea of Thine utterance, and by Him through whom Thou didst adorn the heavens of Thy might, to graciously protect them by the aid of Thy hosts.

O God! Thou beholdest Thy lovers in Iran in the clutches of hate and enmity. I beg of Thee, by Thy mercy which hath preceded the contingent world, to raise up from the earth those who will be moved to aid and protect them, and to preserve their rights and the restitution due to them by those who broke Thy Covenant and Testament, and perpetrated such acts as made the inmates of the cities of Thy justice and equity to lament. Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.’
- Bahá’u’lláh
https://www.bahaiprayers.org/triumph8.htm

Arriving in Tehran

In June 1978, we left Nairobi for Mehrabad International Airport, in Tehran. We rented the first floor of my mother’s apartment building. It took us a month or so to settle, furnish the house and find employment. It was the first time that we had to take care of the kids without the help of a nanny. An adjustment for the kids and us as parents. We managed to find a daycare a few miles from the house. Terry was able to get a teaching job at his old school, Iranzamin. I found employment as a Selection Tester with GTE, Iran, a subsidiary of American GTE, providing a telecommunication system for the Iranian government. The Training Department of GTE was contracted to train Iranian engineers and technicians for the new system. Our job was to develop and administer a battery of aptitude tests for the applicants. The job was not exciting or rewarding. However, I was paid the Stateside salary in US dollars, which was much higher than any job with Iranian companies. I found friendship and support from my Iranian colleagues during the difficult times ahead.

A GLIMPSE AT HISTORY
Excerpts from Britanica.com/ Iranian Revolution of 1978-79

Prelude to revolution

‘Mounting social discontent in the 1970s in Iran, which culminated in revolution at the end of the decade, had several crucial dimensions. Although petroleum revenues continued to be a major source of income for Iran in the 1970s, world monetary instability and fluctuations in Western oil consumption seriously threatened the country’s economy, which had been rapidly expanding since the early 1950s and was still directed in large part toward high-cost projects and programs. A decade of extraordinary economic growth, heavy government

spending, and a boom in oil prices led to high rates of inflation and the stagnation of Iranians’ buying power and standard of living.

In addition to mounting economic difficulties, sociopolitical repression by the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi likewise increased in the 1970s. Outlets for political participation were minimal, and opposition parties such as the National Front (a loose coalition of nationalists, clerics, and noncommunist left-wing parties) and the pro-Soviet Tudeh (“Masses”) Party were marginalized or outlawed. Social and political protest was often met with censorship, surveillance, or harassment, and illegal detention and torture were common.

Many argued that since Iran’s brief experiment with parliamentary democracy and communist politics had failed, the country had to go back to its indigenous culture. The 1953 coup, backed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, an outspoken advocate of nationalism who almost succeeded in deposing the Shah, particularly incensed Iran’s intellectuals. For the first time in more than half a century, the secular intellectuals—many of whom were fascinated by the populist appeal of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a former professor of philosophy in Qom who had been exiled in 1964 after speaking out harshly against the shah’s recent reform program—abandoned their aim of reducing the authority and power of the Shi?ite ulama (religious scholars) and argued that, with the help of the ulama, the Shah could be overthrown.

In this environment, members of the National Front, the Tudeh Party, and their various splinter groups now joined the ulama in a broad opposition to the

shah’s
regime. Khomeini continued to preach in exile about the evils of the Pahlavi regime,
accusing the shah of irreligion and subservience to foreign powers. Thousands of
tapes and print copies of Khomeini’s speeches were smuggled back into Iran during
the 1970s as an increasing number of unemployed and working-poor Iranians—
mostly new immigrants from the countryside, who were disenchanted by the cultural
vacuum of modern urban Iran—turned to the ulama for guidance. The shah’s
dependence on the United States, his close ties with Israel—then engaged in
extended hostilities with the overwhelmingly Muslim Arab states—and his regime’s
ill-considered economic policies served to fuel the potency of dissident rhetoric with
the masses.
Outwardly, with a swiftly expanding economy and a rapidly modernizing
infrastructure, everything was going well in Iran. But in little more than a generation,
Iran had changed from a traditional, conservative, and rural society to one that was
industrial, modern, and urban. The sense that in both agriculture and industry too
much had been attempted too soon and that the government, either through
corruption or incompetence, had failed to deliver all that was promised was
manifested in demonstrations against the regime in 1978.’

Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 | Timeline, Causes, Effects, & Facts | Britannica.com
https://www. britannica.com/.../Iranian-...
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We witnessed the situation in Tehran getting tense and worsening every month. Eventually,
social unrest and demonstrations led to the tragedy of Black September. An event that took
place in the (Shah) Statue Square, close to the Tehran University Campus. It happened
when a large group of student demonstrators was attacked, injured and killed by the Iranian
Army. This brought on the outrage of the public and shocked the core of the intellectuals in
Tehran.

In a visit to Dr. Ghahdimi’s clinic, I found him pensive and concerned. He cautioned me not
to stay in Tehran. Then shared the content of a letter from the Universal House
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of Justice,
urging the friends to leave for pioneering, while the gates to exit, were still open. He
mentioned that he was responding to this call and was leaving the country soon.

When we went to the Bahai' National Office, to process our transfer from Kenya, we were
told that there was a burglary the night before. Law enforcement and the National Office
security team were inspecting the scene of the crime and making a list of what was stolen.
Later, we found out that one of the Bahá'í caretakers of the Office building was a
"Tablighate-Islami" infiltrator. He opened the doors to the thieves to steal the Bahá'í
membership files, containing the names and addresses of all the Bahá'ís in Iran. The
consequence of this theft was catastrophic. Since based on that list, the Islamic Republic
arrested the Bahá'ís and anyone who was related to them. They interrogated them,
persecuted those who did not renounce their Faith, confiscated their properties, imprisoned
and executed the members of the Bahá'í institutions. The immediate impact of that theft
was felt in the prerevolutionary months of my time in Tehran. They spot marked the Bahá'í
houses in red, for the mob to attack innocent Bahá'ís, including women and children. The
following is a message from the Supreme Body:

'The Grave Peril Facing Bahá'ís and Holy Places in Iran
15 December 1978
To National Spiritual Assemblies
FRIENDS IRAN AND MOST HOLY PLACES IN SHIRAZ AND TIHRAN IN GRAVE PERIL. BAHÁ'ÍS HAVE BEEN THREATENED OVER SEVERAL WEEKS MOST PARTS IRAN WITH IMMINENT DANGERS. THIS THREAT IS NOW MATERIALIZING IN FORMS OF LOOTING, BURNING BAHÁ'Í HOUSES AND FURTHER THREATS OF ASSASSINATION. IN NAYRIZ 25 BAHÁ'Í HOMES BURNED, IN SHIRAZ 60 HOMES LOOTED. SIMILAR ATTACKS REPORTED IN OTHER PROVINCES. IN SARVISTAN BAHÁ'ÍS TAKEN TO MOSQUES AND FORCIBLY REQUIRED TO RECANT THEIR FAITH. ... URGE FRIENDS JOIN US PRAYERS PROTECTION FRIENDS HOLY PLACES CRADLE FAITH.'
~~ UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE'

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19781215_001/1#087552932

The gentleman who took care of our transfer at the Bahá'í National Office

informed us that,
due to the critical situation, we could not visit any Bahá'í Holy places.
It was sad that we

were not able to do so. However, later we received an unexpected blessing, while visiting
the father of a Bahá'í friend from Kenya. He told us that the high rise building of his office
was adjacent to the Siyáh-Chál (the Black Dungeon) where Bahá'u'lláh was held for four
months and received the Hidden Revelation from God (See Part Two, for further
information.) We went down to the landing of the second floor and looked down from the
window. We saw the hallowed ground, which was the roof of the Dungeon. We silently
prayed, filled with poignant feelings, remembering the suffering of the Blessed Beauty and
his companions who shed their blood for their Beloved.

The entrance to Siyáh-Chál

http://bahaihistoricalfacts.blogspot.com/2013/02/blog-post.html

The infiltration of the Bahá'í gatherings by "Tablighate-Islami's,"
was quite disruptive. Once,
I attended a meeting that my beloved Professor, Dr. Davoudi was the speaker. His talk was
disrupted by a few hecklers from this group. Dr. Davoudi finished his talk and went to an
adjoining room. I followed him to say hello and noticed a few Bahá'í youths were guarding
him until he left the building. He was looking out from a window, observing a group of
Tablighate-Islam's, waiting for him in the street. The situation was so tense that I decided
to leave. When walking with Terry towards our house, a few of these agitators started
harassing us in English. I turned around and ordered them to stop. They dispersed and let
us take a taxi and leave the area. That was the last time that I saw my dear Professor.
Soon after, he was abducted from his home and disappeared. His precious body was never
found.

A Tribute to My Father

We went to visit my father, who had remarried and lived in a city by the Caspian Sea. He
was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly, a Homefront pioneer and active in

the
Bahá'í community. Not long after the revolution, he was diagnosed with cancer and had to
return to Tehran for treatment. While he was undergoing chemotherapy, he was arrested,

imprisoned and interrogated extensively. As I was his only Bahá'í child, they placed me on
their wanted list. Eventually, they confiscated his savings and properties and released him
on bail to complete his treatment. When his cancer was in remission, he received a warrant
for his arrest. He fled to Pakistan and eventually lived as a refugee in France. Throughout
his ordeal, to protect his family, he was incommunicado, and we had no news from him
until his death. The Bahá'í community in France contacted my brother and let him know of
his passing, who in turn, informed me of the sad news.

One night, when I was in despair for not being able to say farewell to my father, I had a
dream. I dreamed that I was with him in my favorite spot as a child; the Galandoak garden
in the suburb of Tehran. In my early childhood, my father was stationed, as the Head of the
Galandoak Medical Clinic, while the family lived apart in Tehran. As kids, we looked forward
to visiting him in that garden during weekends and summer holidays. Back in my dream in
the garden, the two of us were waiting for the rest of the family to arrive. We sat by a stream,
and my father put my head on his chest and started chanting a lullaby. When he was alive,
he did not have a good singing voice, but this time his chant was so melodious. I
complimented him on his chant and told him that I have never heard this lullaby before. He
replied: I used to sing it to you when you were little. Then, he rested his head on my lap
and quietly said; Shahla dear, I am leaving you now!

I was sobbing in my sleep when Terry woke me up. I told him that my father was saying
goodbye to me in my dream. Six months later, when I was attending a conference in
Arizona, I purchased a tape of a Persian singer. One of her songs was the lullaby that my

father chanted. The lyrics were by Naeem, a beloved Bahá'í poet. The lullaby was dedicated to Shoghi Effendi when he was still an infant. Although no one knew that the child would be the future Guardian, Naeem sensed it from his communications with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I felt in my heart that my father communicated with me from the beyond, that he was granted mercy and forgiveness in the Holy Precincts! Decades later, returning from the Holy Land, I visited the lonesome grave of my father in Lyon. I blessed it with the rosewater that I brought from the Holy Shrines and prayed for the progress of his soul.

The Peak of Social Unrest in Iran

As the discontent of the nation was faced with the oppression of the mighty army of the Shah, the revolutionary strategy resolved to public strikes and regular blackouts. Shops opened for a limited time, and people had to wait in line for hours to purchase bread and groceries. As the cold months approached, and widespread regular blackouts continued, we were forced to use kerosene lamps and heaters at home. The dispensing centers were only open in the evenings, rationing the distribution to two canisters of kerosene per family. So, everyone had to stay in line for hours to get their ration. The daily routine for us was to get home and have an early dinner. Then, Terry went out in the dark of night to line up for kerosene, while I took care of the kids at home in semi-darkness. As there was strong animosity against Americans and British, Terry was cautioned not to speak English or start a conversation with anyone. However, the Iranians who were next to him in the line always protected him from hostile elements. They put his canisters next to theirs,

running a string through the handles to mark their place. Then, they took turn with one person guarding the canisters, and the rest going home to warm up and have a cup of tea. Sometimes they took Terry to their homes when it was close by. In turn, Terry invited a couple of this kind people to our home to meet his Iranian wife. When we were

introduced, I recognized their last name and asked the mother if she was the principal of the private school that I attended in my third grade. She acknowledged that she was, and we had a wonderful time reminiscing the good old times.

All the shopkeepers in our street knew that Terry was married to an Iranian. He always told them in Farsi that he was a New Zealander - clarifying that he was not British or American. They were amused by Terry's greeting in Farsi, saying: "Salam Agha, Hali shoma chetorh?" (Hello sir, how are you?) Since the norm was for the shopkeepers to greet their customers first. One fond memory was when I asked Terry to buy some chicken feet from our neighborhood butcher. Since there was no cat food in Tehran, I used to cook chicken feet for our cat. So, I asked Terry to buy it on his way home. Terry practiced in Farsi all day long to say: "I want to buy chicken feet for my cat." However, he mixed his words and said: "I want cat's feet for my chicken." As he saw the confused expression of the shopkeeper and his laughter, he felt embarrassed and left the shop. Later, I went back with him to complete the transaction. The butcher chuckled and said, your husband asked me if I had cat's feet for his chickens! In normal circumstances, the butcher would have been offended to be accused of selling dead cats, but knowing Terry, he understood. In the months to come, this kindness of Iranians helped to save our lives.

On Thanksgiving Day, GTE management invited us to its HQ building for the traditional Thanksgiving Dinner. That office was in one of the main business streets in Tehran. After lunch, we were told that there was a riot in the Statue (Shah) Square, and we needed to return to our office. My two colleagues and I, could not find a taxi or any other public transport. So, we started walking back to the office. On our way, we realized that the mob had been looting the banks and destroying properties along the main street. They were a few blocks ahead of us, so we experienced the destruction with every step which we took.

The streets were covered with broken glass and debris. We could see the smoke from a
fire in the Statue (Shah) Square. It was a frightening experience. When we arrived at our
office, were told that due to the imminent danger, the building was shut down and we had
to go home.

Terry generally had the car to commute to school which was a long distance from home.
As my office was close by, I used to take a taxi. Usually, Terry transported our children to
the daycare. However, that day, I decided to pick up the kids. When I arrived at the daycare,
I found the provider in panic. All the children were in a storage room on the top floor, utterly
terrified. She told me that a group of men, who were clad in funeral shrouds and carried
swords, attacked the daycare center. The manager took all the children to the storage room
and bolted the door. She was holding a copy of Quran in both hands and repeating the
verse of Allah'u'Akbar (God is most Great), begging the mob to spare her and the children.
The mob was objecting to the center for being open and not observing the strike. They
finally left. The manager told me that she could only take care of the few babies and not
the older children like Anisa. Faran was too young to understand, but the impact on Anisa

was long-lasting. Years later, anytime she heard a loud chanting, like Christmas Carols,
she used to scream "they are coming." And run to hide. Later that week, Terry, enrolled
Anisa in the Kindergarten of his school.

The mass chanting of Allah'u'Akbar occurred every evening, coinciding with the
widespread power outage in the city. An effective plan to instill fear in the hearts of the
residents, hearing the chants booming from loudspeakers in their street. In total darkness,
no one knew where the mob was and when they would be attacking their neighborhood.

One day, when I arrived home from work, I had a call from Jila, my old friend from the
Philippines. She was a member of the Youth Committee and was usually apprising

me of
the events happening in the Bahá'í community. She told me that there would be an attack
on the Bahá'í houses that night. She asked me to check the wall by the entry door of our
house. If it had a red mark with coded letters, it meant our building would be targeted for
an attack. Therefore, it would be advisable to leave the house. I checked the wall and
noticed a red mark. I came back and informed Terry. Both of us went to a separate room
and prayed for guidance. Later, we got back together to consult and decided we would not
run away. If we were attacked, we would face the mob resolutely. We stayed together in
the dark, listening to the chant from the loudspeaker and prayed for the protection of our
family. Later, we learned that there were numerous attacks, but we were spared.

A GLIMPSE AT HISTORY
IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Excerpts from: Britannica.com/ Iranian Revolution of 1978-79
'In January 1978, incensed by what they considered to be slanderous remarks
made against Khomeini in Ettela?at, a Tehran newspaper, thousands of young
madrassa (religious school) students took to the streets. They were followed by
thousands more Iranian youth—mostly unemployed recent immigrants from the
countryside—who began protesting the regime's excesses. The shah, weakened by
cancer and stunned by the sudden outpouring of hostility against him, vacillated
between concession and repression, assuming the protests to be part of an
international conspiracy against him. Many people were killed by government forces
in anti-regime protests, serving only to fuel the violence in a Shi'ite country where
martyrdom played a fundamental role in religious expression. Fatalities were
followed by demonstrations to commemorate the customary 40-day milestone of
mourning in Shi?ite tradition, and further casualties occurred at those protests,
mortality, and protest propelling one another forward. Thus, in spite of all
government efforts, a cycle of violence began in which each death fueled further
protest, and all protest—from the secular left and religious right—was subsumed
under the cloak of Shi'ite Islam and crowned by the revolutionary rallying cry Allahu

Akbar (“God is great”), which could be heard at protests and which issued from the rooftops in the evenings.

During his exile, Khomeini coordinated this upsurge of opposition—first from Iraq and after 1978 from France—demanding the shah’s abdication. In January 1979, in what was officially described as a “vacation,” the shah and his family fled Iran. The Regency Council established to run the country during the shah’s absence proved unable to function, and Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar, hastily appointed by the Shah before his departure, was incapable of effecting compromise with either his former National Front colleagues or Khomeini. Crowds in excess of one million demonstrated in Tehran, proving the wide appeal of Khomeini, who arrived in Iran amid wild rejoicing on February 1. Ten days later Bakhtiar went into hiding, eventually to find exile in France.’

Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 | Timeline, Causes, Effects, & Facts | Britannica.com
https://www.britannica.com/.../Iranian-...

EXCERPTS FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE MESSAGE
Announcement of Decision to Launch a Seven Year Plan

26 December 1978
To all National Spiritual Assemblies
‘AS THE TURMOIL OF AN AGITATED WORLD SURGES ABOUT THEM THE SUPPORTERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MAJESTICALLY RISING FAITH MUST, AS THE BELOVED GUARDIAN SO CLEARLY INDICATED, SCALE NOBLER HEIGHTS OF HEROISM, SERENELY CONFIDENT THAT THE HOUR OF THEIR MIGHTIEST EXERTIONS MUST COINCIDE WITH THE LOWEST EBB OF MANKIND'S FAST DECLINING FORTUNES.’
‘FERVENTLY SUPPLICATING BAHÁ'U'LLÁH BOUNTIFULLY BLESS STRENUOUS EFFORTS HIS DEVOTED SERVANTS EVERY LAND WIN GOAL FIVE YEAR PLAN ENSURE FIRM FOUNDATION NEXT STAGE WORLD-WIDE DEVELOPMENT GOD'S HOLY CAUSE.’

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/

LAST MONTHS IN TEHRAN

The period of civil war encompassed imminent danger for foreigners in Iran. GTE informed us that they were accelerating the process of turning over their system to the

Iranian
government and closing their company in Iran. Therefore, my employment was terminated.
Terry, as a foreigner, was not safe to stay in the country. The New Zealand Consul called
us to let us know that a civil war was erupting, and they were closing the Consulate. The
Consul told Terry that he should safeguard his family by leaving for New Zealand. At that
time, no commercial flights were operating in Iran, and we were offered to fly on a military
carrier from Iran to New Zealand. A 15-hour flight with no proper heating, in the cold of the
winter. It coincided with Faran having a severe case of pneumonia, and in consulting with

the doctor, she advised us not to risk the life of our baby. The other option was flying aboard
a Canadian military Hercules plane, from Tehran to the US Military Base in Ankara. Then
taking a commercial flight to the US. As my brothers were living in the States, we chose
that alternative route. The Consul made an appointment for us with the US Embassy to
obtain our US visa. We arrived at the Embassy, passing the long line of desperate
applicants who were waiting days and nights for weeks, to get a visa. We were issued a
conditional visa, subject to obtaining a permanent refugee visa in the States.

Our house was a few blocks from the Statue Square, the center of riots and
demonstrations. It was also a few miles away from Jamsheed Abad Military Base, where
soldiers were deployed to suppress the riots. The Philippines Consul building was on the
same street, across from our house. There was a large group of Filipinos living close by,
who were working for the Iranian Telecommunication Agency.

When the news of Shah’s departure reached the public, violence broke out in the city. On
that day, when we were driving home, we saw people running in streets, banging on the
cars and demanding the passengers to shout, “Death to Shah.” I told Terry not to say a
word and just show an agreeable expression. Our street was covered with burning tires,
and there were military tanks in every corner, with the barrel of their guns

facing the crowd.
We barely made it to our doorstep, when the street vendor who knew us from buying our
daily fruit from him, called me and whispered; Ma'am, you need to save your husband and
kids. They are killing all the foreigners. They just attacked the Philippines Consul and killed
a bunch of Filipinos in the street.

We rushed home and called my sister, who lived on the outskirts of the City. She told me
to pack up and go to her house. We left the house in a hurry and tried to get out of the
center of the civil war in our neighborhood. The situation was so hazardous that we took
the risk of taking the exit, rather than the entrance to the freeway. We finally arrived at my
sister's house. They had central heating, and my brother in law who was a doctor could
treat our very sick child. We stayed there, until our departure from the military airport. We
left Iran two days after Khomeini's arrival in Tehran. As we could only take the bare
necessities with us, we sent all our valuable belongings, including family photos,
documents, and memorabilia with a friend who worked for Bell Helicopter. Unfortunately,
all were lost on the way to the States. On the day of departure, we rode a bus provided by
the Embassy, directly to the plane and boarded the Hercules troop carrier. Although our
kids had no seats, we were charged the price of four tickets for the commercial flight from
Tehran to Ankara. When we arrived, we took a bus to a hotel in the city. Faran was so
traumatized that he could not stop crying all the way to the hotel.

The ordeal continued when we traveled to New York for a connecting flight to Indianapolis.
A blizzard grounded all the flights in New York, and we had to stay in a hotel overnight,
with little baby supplies for Faran.

A GLIMPSE AT HISTORY
IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Excerpts from: Britannica.com/ Iranian Revolution of 1978-79

'On April 1, following overwhelming support in a national referendum,

Khomeini
declared Iran an Islamic republic. Elements within the clergy promptly moved to exclude their former left-wing, nationalist, and intellectual allies from any positions
of power in the new regime, and a return to conservative social values was enforced.
The Family Protection Act (1967; significantly amended in 1975), which provided further guarantees and rights to women in marriage, was declared void, and mosque-based revolutionary bands known as komitehs (Persian: “committees”) patrolled the streets enforcing Islamic codes of dress and behaviour and dispatching
impromptu justice to perceived enemies of the revolution. Throughout most of 1979
the Revolutionary Guards—then an informal religious militia formed by Khomeini to
forestall another CIA-backed coup as in the days of Mosaddeq—engaged in similar
activity, aimed at intimidating and repressing political groups not under control of the
ruling Revolutionary Council and its sister Islamic Republican Party, both clerical
organizations loyal to Khomeini. The violence and brutality often exceeded that which had taken place under the shah.
The militias and the clerics they supported made every effort to suppress Western
cultural influence, and, facing persecution and violence, many of the Western-educated elite fled the country. This anti-Western sentiment eventually manifested
itself in the November 1979 seizure of 66 hostages at the U.S. embassy by a group
of Iranian protesters demanding the extradition of the shah, who at that time was
undergoing medical treatment in the United States (see Iran hostage crisis).
Through the embassy takeover, Khomeini’s supporters could claim to be as “anti-
imperialist” as the political left. This ultimately gave them the ability to suppress most
of the regime’s left-wing and moderate opponents. The Assembly of Experts (Majles-e Khobregan), overwhelmingly dominated by clergy, ratified a new constitution the following month. The new constitution created a religious government based on Khomeini’s vision of velayat-e faqih (Persian: “governance of
the jurist”) and gave sweeping powers to the rahbar, or leader; the first rahbar was
Khomeini himself. Moderates, such as provisional Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and the republic’s first president, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, who opposed holding the

hostages, were steadily forced from power by conservatives within the government
who questioned their revolutionary zeal…’

Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 | Timeline, Causes, Effects, & Facts | Britannica.com
https://www. britannica.com/.../Iranian-...

A PERSPECTIVE OF THE BAHÁ’ÍS PERSECUTION IN IRAN
Excerpts from the Yale News:
https://news.yale.edu/2017/05/23/memoriam-firuz-kazemzadeh-scholar-russian-history-
former-davenport-head

‘Firuz Kazemzadeh, professor emeritus of history at Yale and former head of Davenport College, died on May 17, in California. He was 92 years old. Kazemzadeh was a leading member of the American Bahá’í community and an ardent champion of international religious freedom.

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, a wave of violent, state-sponsored
persecution was unleashed on the Bahá’ís of that country. Kazemzadeh spearheaded the American Bahá’í community’s strategy to defend its suffering sister
community. Due primarily to his tireless outreach to government officials — many of
whom were his former students — he successfully gained official U.S. and international support for the plight of the Bahá’ís of Iran. By the mid-1980s, this
support resulted in a dramatic reduction in the worst abuses, particularly executions
of Bahá’ís, carried out by the Iranian regime.

As a result of this work, in 1998 the former Yale professor was appointed by President Clinton as a commissioner to the newly-established U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, on which he served until 2003. In this capacity, he
was able to extend his advocacy for religious freedom beyond the Bahá’ís of Iran
to many other faith groups facing persecution based on their beliefs.’

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Author’s Notes from an interview of Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, by Shahpour Daneshmand:

The persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran was rooted in that the clergies were threatened
by the Bahá’í beliefs of independent investigation of truth, without reliance on the
dictates of the clergies. There was only one universal truth emanating from all
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

the
religions of God, including those nonSemitic religions which were not mentioned in
Quran, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrians. Also, by believing in two
manifestations of God; Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, who came after Prophet
Muhammad.

Shah's of Qajar were so dependent on the clergies that they gave in to them in
attacking and persecuting Bábis and the Bahá'ís.

Reza Shah curtailed the power of mullah and did not let them persecute the Bahá'ís.
The reason was creating a stable society, free of violence, in order to carry on with
his social reform.

Historically, the majority of early Bábis were educated. 14, out of 18 Letters of Living,
the first disciples of the Báb, were clergies. The Bahá'ís believe in an independent

investigation of truth. Therefore, they need to get an education to find the truth.
Education is a part of the fabric of the Bahá'í beliefs, with special emphasis on the
education of women and children. Therefore, a large proportion of the Iranian
Bahá'ís is are educated.

Reza Shah did not like the Bahá'ís, but allowed them to exist, because they were a
large proportion of educated and professional Iranians. The shah needed them for
carrying his progressive mandates.

The persecution of the Bahá'ís in 20th Century, under Qajar and Reza Shah, was
unsystematic. They were not universal and were directed against certain groups of
Bahá'ís. Reza Shah fired Bahá'ís from public service positions, and closed Tarbiyát
school because they were not observing the Bahá'í Holy Days – see Chapter One
of this book.

After the fall of Reza Shah, clergies regain their power, and the State gave in.
Mullah's were threatened by the modern and western ideologies. Therefore, they
took advantage of the nationalistic movement of Iranians and branded the

Bahá'ís
as unpatriotic and the invention of enemies of Iran. First, they created documents to
show that the Bahá'í Faith was invented by the Russians. Later, they changed their
version and branded the Bahá'ís as British agents and changed it again to be an
element of Zionism and the CIA.

It should be noted that for the Bahá'ís, Iran is a sacred country, as the birthplace of
the Bábi and the Bahai Faith. As Jerusalem is for the Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

As it is documented that Dr. Mossadegh did not condone persecution of the Bahá'ís,
the clergies changed side to bring Mohammad Reza Shah back to power. After
Shah's return, he gave in to the clergies, allowed the Hojjatieh to operate during his
reign. His Secret Service, Savak, was also in contact with the Hojjatieh. – See
Chapter One for more information.

In 1979 – 80, the same group that was against the Shah, was against the Bahá'ís.
Although the Bahá'ís were not involved in either anti or pro Shah movement. This
caused the Bahá'í community to be concerned about the wellbeing of the Bahá'ís of
Iran. Before Khomeini's return and taking power, during the revolutionary struggle,
certain groups of revolutionaries, started attacking the Bahá'ís in Shiraz. They were
beating the Bahá'ís and attacking their homes.

Once the regime was established, all 9 members of the National Spiritual Assembly
of Iran disappeared, no one heard from them again. The Bahá'ís elected the second
National Spiritual Assembly. All the members but one was disappeared. Once again,
the Bahá'ís elected the third National Spiritual Assembly. This time, several
members were arrested, and 4 or 5 were executed.

The National Spiritual Assembly oversees the affairs of the Bahá'í community, this
includes registering birth, death, and marriage of the members. As there is no church

in Bahá'í Faith, the NSA is the elected administrative body to perform these
significant functions. However, at this point, the Chief Prosecutor of Iran, issued a
statement, officially prohibiting Bahá'í institutions. Bahá'ís obeyed this law, even
when was unjustly executed. Subsequently the Bahá'ís suffered tremendously
without institutions. They formed an appointed group of Yaran, who were also
arrested and sentenced to prison.

Two hundred and fifteen members of various national and local Bahá'í institutions
have been executed under the present regime. The elimination of the Bahá'í
institutions however, did not suppress the strength and steadfastness of the
Bahá'ís.

In 1992, a document was signed by the authorities which prohibits the Bahá'ís to be
educated and prosperous, so that they do not influence the Iranian society. The
persecution of the Bahá'ís, both physical and psychological, aims at the complete
destruction of the Baha'is. The regime also wants to undermine the Bahá'í Faith
outside Iran.

The Bahá'ís secretly started the underground BIHE – the Baha'i Institute of Higher
Education. (An "informal arrangements through which they could have access to
university-level studies." - From the Bahá'í World News Service, p. 338)

The steadfastness and strength of the Bahá'ís, the international public opinion, and
the heart of some mullahs are factors which forestalled the mass execution of the
Bahá'ís. There is a change in a large group of Iranians who are equitable to Bahá'ís
and other minority groups. There is a hope that Iranians will be initiating a social
revolution, to have freedom and different social structure, to ensure the prosperity
of all the Iranians.

EXCERPTS FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE MESSAGES REGARDING THE PERSECUTION OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN
https://bahai-library.com/uhj_messages_1963_1986

20 September 1979
To National Spiritual Assemblies
'FRAMERS NEW CONSTITUTION IRAN APPROVED CLAUSE RECOGNIZING MINORITY RELIGIONS SPECIFYING JEWS CHRISTIANS ZOROASTRIANS

BUT OMITTING MENTION BAHÁ'ÍS. ...'

'Refutation of Accusations against Iranian Bahá'ís
17 October 1979
IRANIAN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES OUTSIDE IRAN HAVE APPARENTLY ADOPTED A UNIFORM STAND IN THEIR REPLIES TO APPEALS BEING MADE ON BEHALF OF THE IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS. THEY SAY THAT BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN, UNLIKE BAHÁ'ÍS ELSEWHERE, HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN POLITICS, CONSPIRED WITH AND WERE FAVOURED AND SUPPORTED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME, AND WERE PROMINENT MEMBERS OF SAVAK. IN SUPPORT OF THESE STATEMENTS THESE OFFICIALS NAME AS BAHÁ'ÍS: FORMER PRIME MINISTER ABBAS AMIR HOVEIDA, A FORMER MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE MANSOUR ROUHANI, A SAVAK SENIOR OFFICER PARVIZ SABETI, AND THE PHYSICIAN TO THE SHAH DR AYADI
THE FACTS ARE THAT HOVEIDA'S GRANDFATHER WAS A BAHÁ'Í, HIS FATHER WAS EXPELLED FROM THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY BECAUSE HE BECAME INVOLVED IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND HOVEIDA HIMSELF WAS NEVER A BAHÁ'Í. ROUHANI'S FATHER WAS A BAHÁ'Í, HIS MOTHER A DEVOUT MUSLIM, BUT ROUHANI WAS NEVER A BAHÁ'Í. SABETI'S PARENTS WERE BAHÁ'ÍS, AND THEY REGISTERED HIM IN THE COMMUNITY AS A BAHÁ'Í CHILD. HOWEVER, WHEN HE CAME OF AGE HE DID NOT HIMSELF REGISTER AS A BAHÁ'Í AND NEVER BECAME A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY. UNLIKE CHILDREN OF OTHER RELIGIONS, BAHÁ'Í CHILDREN DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY INHERIT THE FAITH OF THEIR PARENTS. WHEN THEY COME OF AGE THEY MUST OF THEIR OWN VOLITION EXPRESS THEIR BELIEF IN BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND HIS TEACHINGS. DR AYADI, HOWEVER, IS A BAHÁ'Í HE HELD TWO POSITIONS: ONE AS DIRECTOR OF THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICE; THE OTHER AS PRIVATE PHYSICIAN OF THE COURT. NEITHER OF THESE TWO POSITIONS WAS REGARDED BY THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AS POLITICAL IN NATURE.

ALTHOUGH SOME BAHÁ'ÍS WITH UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS WERE PLACED IN POSITIONS OF TRUST BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY AND INTEGRITY, IT IS NOT TRUE TO SAY THAT BAHÁ'ÍS WERE FAVOURED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY WERE DENIED CIVIL RIGHTS, SUCH AS PERMISSION TO REGISTER THEIR BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGES, PRIVILEGE TO HOLD BAHÁ'Í RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENTS IN NAME OF BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY, AND FREEDOM TO PUBLISH BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE OR ESTABLISH BAHÁ'Í

SCHOOLS (INDEED DURING THE REIGN OF MUHAMMAD REZA SHAH'S FATHER, OVER THIRTY BAHÁ'Í SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WERE PERMANENTLY CLOSED). MANY OF RANK AND FILE OF BAHÁ'ÍS WERE DENIED JOBS AND SOMETIMES EVEN THEIR RIGHTS TO PENSIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR REFUSAL TO DENY THEIR FAITH.
AS TO THE ALLEGED ROLE OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN SAVAK, THIS IS LIKEWISE UNTRUE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN JANUARY 1979, THROUGH THE MACHINATIONS OF SAVAK, AN ORDER WAS GIVEN TO SYSTEMATICALLY LOOT AND BURN OR OTHERWISE DESTROY HUNDREDS OF HOMES OF BAHÁ'ÍS. THIS IS A

FACT ATTESTED TO BY MUSLIM CLERICS BELONGING TO THE PRESENT REGIME WHO, DURING THAT PERIOD OF TERROR AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS, WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO TRY TO DISSUADE THE MOBS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THE SAVAK PLAN, SINCE THE CLERGY KNEW THAT THE AIM OF THIS PLAN WAS TO GIVE EXCUSE TO SAVAK TO DISCREDIT AND SUPPRESS THEM.
SUMMARIZING THE FOREGOING -- IT IS FEARED THAT THE PRESENT REGIME, AS INDICATED BY THE SIMILARITY OF THE STATEMENTS BEING GIVEN OUT BY IRANIAN DIPLOMATIC AGENCIES, IS ATTEMPTING TO JUSTIFY ACTIONS BEING TAKEN AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS BY ASSERTING THAT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IS NOT A RELIGION BUT A POLITICAL PARTY, AND THAT THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY SUPPORTED THE PREVIOUS REGIME AND THEREBY BECAME POWERFUL AND WEALTHY. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER CAN BE FOUND IN THE BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF COMPLETE ABSTENTION FROM PARTICIPATION IN PARTISAN POLITICS WHICH WAS DEMONSTRATED IN IRAN IN 1975 WHEN BAHÁ'ÍS EVEN IN THE FACE OF THREATS REFUSED TO BECOME MEMBERS OF THE RASTAKHIZ PARTY PROMOTED BY THE PREVIOUS REGIME. IN ONE CASE WHEN A BAHÁ'Í ACCEPTED A CABINET POST UNDER DURESS HE WAS DEPRIVED OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY. AS TO THE ALLEGATION THAT THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY REAPED FINANCIAL REWARD BECAUSE OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME THE FACT IS THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS ARE OF THE POORER CLASSES LIVING IN VILLAGES. FEW ARE WEALTHY, AND AMONG THEM A NUMBER WERE BUSINESSMEN WHO PROVIDED FACILITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS. THE FEW WHO RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY ARE BEING ACCUSED OF CORRUPTION AND OTHER OFFENCES SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. IT IS AN INJUSTICE TO HOLD ANY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ILL-DOINGS OF ANY ONE OF ITS MEMBERS WHO FAILS TO REFLECT THE PRINCIPLES PROMULGATED BY THAT RELIGION.
AS THE NEW CONSTITUTION MAKES NO REFERENCE TO THE BAHÁ'ÍS, WAYS AND MEANS SHOULD BE SOUGHT TO EXTEND TO THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF ITS INTERESTS, AND TO ENSURE FOR ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS BASIC CIVIL RIGHTS THUS AVOIDING FRICTION AND FRUSTRATION IN SUCH OFT-RECURRING PERSONAL PROBLEMS RELATED

TO REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGES AND BIRTHS, EMPLOYMENT, TRAVELLING DOCUMENTS, ETC.

UNLESS THESE DISABILITIES CURRENTLY AFFLICTING IRAN'S LARGEST RELIGIOUS MINORITY ARE REMEDIED, FANATICAL ELEMENTS WILL BE GIVEN FREE REIN TO REPEATEDLY RESORT TO MOB VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BAHÁ'ÍS, EMBARRASSING THE GOVERNMENT AND PREVENTING HOPED-FOR PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY IN THAT COUNTRY. ...
ONE OF THE OFT-REPEATED ACCUSATIONS AGAINST BAHÁ'ÍS IS THAT THEY ARE ENEMIES OF ISLAM. THIS CHARGE ASSUMES NOW NEW PROPORTIONS AS MANY RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES IN NEW CONSTITUTION

APPLY ONLY IF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES CONCERNED ARE NOT REGARDED AS ANTI-ISLAMIC. HENCE OFFICIAL BRANDING BAHÁ'Í FAITH AS ANTI-ISLAMIC MAY BE CONVENIENT DEVICE TO DENY BAHÁ'ÍS ESSENTIAL HUMAN RIGHTS. FURTHERMORE, SOMETIMES DISTINCTION IS MADE BETWEEN BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND OTHER RELIGIONS BY STATING THAT OUR FAITH APPEARED AFTER ISLAM AND THEREFORE IS NOT CONSIDERED BY MUSLIMS AS A RELIGION ENTITLED TO RIGHTS OF OTHER RELIGIONS. SUCH THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES SHOULD NOT BE CAUSE DENIAL CIVIL RIGHTS. SAME SITUATION APPLIES TO MUSLIMS WHO RESIDE IN CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES AND ENJOY FULL RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS.'

CHAPTER 7

THE CARIBBEAN - THE BRITISH WEST INDIES

1979-1982

'O LORD! Thou art the Remover of every anguish and the Dispeller of every affliction. Thou art He Who banisheth every sorrow and setteth free every slave,
the Redeemer of every soul. O, Lord! Grant deliverance through Thy mercy and reckon me among such servants of Thine as have gained salvation.'

~ The Báb
https://www.bahaiprayers.io/prayer?id=228080

Indianapolis

When we left Iran for the State of Indiana, we hoped to find a safe harbor for our young family
to settle and once again live in a stable environment. However, God had a different plan for us.
My brother and his wife took us into their home and helped us to recover from the arduous
journey. As we were not allowed to take more than a few hundred dollars out of Iran, the New
Zealand Consul offered to take our money in Tehran and send it to the States upon our arrival.
However, the Consulate closed shortly after, and it took almost six months for the New Zealand
Foreign Ministry locate our fund and forward it to us. Therefore, we were left with very little
financial support in the US. My family and the Bahá'ís of Indianapolis were extremely helpful
and kind. When we rented a small apartment, a Bahá'í doctor who was retiring and leaving the
city, gave us what we needed to furnish our home. Each of us was dealing with post-traumatic
side effects of the civil war in Iran, especially our little girl Anisa, who was old enough to

remember, but too young to cope with the symptoms. Fortunately, we found resources through
my brother, to seek professional help.

As soon as we arrived, we contacted the US Immigration Office to receive a landed immigrant
visa as refugees. However, the Immigration Officer for reasons unknown to us refused to grant
us the visa. His excuse was that since we were New Zealand Citizens, we could go back to
New Zealand. He showed no empathy toward our extraneous circumstances and demanded
that we needed to be self-supporting and not a burden to the government. I found out that my
Thesis Advisor from the University of the Philippines was a manager at the State Department
of Health. She wrote a letter to Immigration Department, offering me employment in her
Division. The Officer rejected her offer and demanded that I leave the country and apply for
work visa outside the United States. Meanwhile, I was in contact with the National Bahá'í Office
in Wilmette, asking for their help to resolve this situation. They informed me that they had
contacted the main Immigration Office, which was then in Hammond, Indiana, to consider my
family's application. I received a call from the Director who was sympathetic to our cause. He
offered to grant us visa, but since his office was far from us, he would be asking the Indianapolis

office to process it. However, when I went to the office, the same officer treated us with hostility
and resentment for going above his head. He refused to grant us the visa and ordered us to
leave the country when our conditional visa expired.

When I received the final answer, I consulted with the staff of the Bahá'í National Office. They
offered to send us to Barbados, as the US special pioneers for children's education. We gladly
accepted this privilege and the invitation to go to Wilmette to attend the Pioneer Training
Institute.

Once again, we folded our little household and left with a few suitcases for Wilmette. We
learned that all the Institute participants had hotel accommodation except us, who were the

National Assembly's guests at the Amelia Collins home. The Hand of the Cause had endowed her home to the House of Worship. This blessed house was located across the street from the Temple, and we had a panoramic view of the House of Worship from every window. Our host was dear Magdalene Carney, who later became the counselor for America. While we were having afternoon tea, little Faran found a stuffed toy in the room, laid down on the floor, and used it as a pillow to rest his head and fell asleep. It was quite endearing for our host who told us that till then no small child was allowed to stay in that house. We were truly blessed. During the next few days, the children were taken care of, by loving volunteers who took them to the park and offered them a much-needed respite.

We participated, in the pioneer training institute, enriching experience with informative talks from members of the Institutions, including Mr. Glenford Mitchell, who was then the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly. He was later elected as a member of the Universal House of Justice. It was the only time that I had the bounty to meet and listen to the loving guidance of Hand of the Cause, Mr. Jalal Khazeh. We learned about the latest troubling news from Iran, which reaffirmed our commitment to serve our Beloved Faith. We took the following commandment to heart and made it a beacon of hope for the uncertain times to come:

'I say unto you that anyone who will rise up in the Cause of God at this time shall be filled with the spirit of God, and that He will send His hosts from heaven to help you, and that nothing shall be impossible to you if you have faith. And now I give you a commandment which shall be for a Covenant between you and me: that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endures through all things even to the end; even should ye hear that your Lord has been crucified, be not shaken in your faith; for I am with you always, whether living or dead; I am with you to the end. As ye have

faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the standard -- this is the
standard -- this is the standard.’
(Dated Collection, 1898, Maxwell - Early Pilgrimage)

https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

We were originally deputized for six months by the US National Assembly, for pioneering
to Barbados. However, with the confirmation of “hosts from heaven,” I was able to travel to
a number of Caribbean islands of the British West Indies. Then, with the approval of the
US National Assembly, pioneer to the Cayman Islands with my family.

The British West Indies
Excerpts from: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
http://www.thefullwiki.org/British_West_Indies

‘The term British West Indies refers to the former English and British colonies and
the present-day Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom in the Caribbean.
In the history of the British West Indies, there have been several attempts at
political unions. These attempts have occurred over a period of more than 300
years, from 1627 to 1958, and were carried out, or sometimes imposed, first by the
English and then the British government. During this time, some of the attempted
unions were true federations of colonies and others involved attaching various
colonies to a major, nearby colony for cheaper, efficient government or because the
attached colonies were too small to justify a governor and administration of their
own.
The initial federal attempts never went so far as to try to encompass all the British
West Indies (BWI) but were more regional in scope. The historical regional
groupings were the British Leeward Islands, the British Windward Islands, and
Jamaica with other nearby English/British colonies such as the Cayman Islands,
British Honduras and the Turks and Caicos Islands.”

BAHÁ’Í FAITH IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES
Excerpt from the BW - Bahá’í World Volume 15
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

‘The Windward Islands and Barbados visited as early as 1927 by the Hand of the
Cause Keith Ransom-Kehler, are part of the Lesser Antilles to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá
directed attention in His Tablets of the Divine Plan. In the early years, the

development of the Faith in the Lesser Antilles was under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. At Ridvan, 1967, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands was established under whose jurisdiction the Windward Islands remained until Ridvan, 1972, when an independent National Spiritual Assembly was formed in the Windward Islands with its seat in St. Lawrence, Barbados.

The geographic location of these islands in the southern Caribbean, together comprising an area of one thousand square miles, including four large and ten smaller islands, presented many challenges to traveling teachers and pioneers alike.
"That the Faith grew from two believers in 1953 to more than 2,500 believers with a

National Spiritual Assembly and twenty-seven Local Assemblies by the end of the Nine-Year Plan is testimony to the Divine Grace of Bahá'u'lláh and the persistent
efforts of stalwart pioneers, travelling teachers and new friends," the National
Assembly reported.

In this period the first indigenous believers arose as pioneers to establish the Faith
in other islands; mass teaching projects were inaugurated; the first Teaching Institute was held; the enrolment of the first Carib Indian indigenous to St. Vincent
was recorded; widespread newspaper, radio, and television publicity was achieved;
and The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh was presented to the Governor-General, His
Excellency Sir Winston Scott, who accorded cordial audiences to the Hands of the
Cause Amatu’i-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum (who represented the Universal House of Justice when the National Spiritual Assembly was formed at the inaugural Convention in 1972) and Enoch Olinga.’

THE AMERICAS
Excerpt from the BW - Bahá’í World Volume 15
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

“The progress of the Faith in the territories within the jurisdictions of the thirty
National Assemblies which existed there at RIDVAN 1976 is described below, the national communities being set out under the three zones established as the spheres of service of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, namely:

BARBADOS AND THE WINDWARD ISLANDS

'The year 1973 was highlighted by the visits of the Hand of the Cause Dr. Alí-Muhammad Varqa, and Mrs. Carmen de Burafato, Mr. Rowland Estall and Mr.

Artemus Lamb of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Central America. Mr. Estall
also visited Grenada and St. Vincent where he met the friends. While in St. Vincent
he presented Bahá'í books to Premier Mitchell.
'Significant activities in 1973 include the satellite conference in August and a nine-
day teacher training course in December, both held at Martin's Bay, St. John, Barbados.

'The National Spiritual Assembly acquired its national Haziratu'l-Quds in Bridgetown,
Barbados in April 1974 with the assistance of the National Spiritual Assembly of
Canada. The first resident, Auxiliary Board member, was appointed -- Miss Shirley
Ann Yarbrough -- and Dominica was added to the territory of the National Spiritual
Assembly. In the summer of 1974, the friends of Barbados welcomed the Hand of
the Cause Jalal Khazeh on his first visit to the area. The first Bahá'í wedding in the
national area took place in St. Vincent in the month of June when Allister Phillips
and Evelyn McFay were married. A Bahá'í correspondence course was initiated in
July 1974, and in September another "first" was registered when the Bahá'í youth
organized and conducted a Baha youth meeting at the National Centre.

The Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhajir and Counsellor Estall visited Barbados in
November 1974. The following month a National Teaching Conference was held in
St. Vincent, attended by Mr. Artemus Lamb of the Continental Board of
Counsellors in Central America:

TEMPLE SITE IN BARBADOS: 'One of the goals of the Five-Year Plan for this area
was achieved in 1975 through the purchase of ten acres of land for use as a Temple
site in St. Lucy, Barbados. Other significant events which occurred in 1975 include
the visit of the Hand of the Cause John Robarts who conducted a two-day deepening
institute in Barbados; the appointment in February of the first two assistants to the
Auxiliary Board member; the formation of a Bahá'í Youth Club in St. Vincent in
February and in Barbados in April; the arrival of Mrs. Hazel Lovelace, an Indian
believer from Alaska, who launched a two-month teaching project in Newbury, St.

George, which attracted a number of young people to the Faith, before continuing
her travelling teaching in St. Vincent and Union Island; the holding of a National
Teaching Conference at the national Centre in Barbados in July; the attendance of
Bahá'ís from Barbados at the teaching conference called by the Continental Board
of Counsellors and held in Antigua in August; the presentation by Bahá'ís of
Barbados of a copy of Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era to Mas Clam, the Carib Indian
Chief of Dominica thus fulfilling another Five Year Plan goal; the passing in
November 1975 of Mrs. Elsie Snyder, the first pioneer to die at her post in Barbados;
the first visit to Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent and Dominica of Mr. Paul Lucas of
the Continental Board of Counsellors in Central America; and the incorporation of
the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of St. Michael, Barbados, the first Local
Assembly to achieve incorporation in this national area.'

'In a cablegram dated 15 April 1975 the INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF BAHÁ'Í
ACTIVITIES Universal House of Justice approved the recommendation of the
National Assembly that its name be changed from the National Spiritual Assembly
of the Windward Islands to the National Spiritual Assembly of Barbados and the
Windward Islands to facilitate the National Assembly's efforts to secure recognition
by Act of Parliament.'
'In April 1976 Cora Oliver visited Barbados and Grenada as a traveling teacher.

The national convention in 1976 was held in St. Vincent. It was the first time that this
event took place outside Barbados since the formation of the National Spiritual
Assembly. In attendance was Mr. Alfred Osborne of the Continental Board of
Counsellors in Central America and friends from Grenada, Barbados, and
Dominica.'

'At Ridvan 1981, three new National Assemblies came into being: Bermuda with its
seat in Hamilton, the Leeward Islands with its seat in St. John's Antigua and the
Windward Islands with its seat in Kingstown, St. Vincent. Ridvan 1983 saw the
establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly of Dominica with its seat in
Roseau and of St. Lucia with its seat in Castries.'

Additional Note from Pat Paccassi, Manager of "Bahá'í History of Caribbean website."
'In 1981 Barbados formed its first own National Spiritual Assembly. The

reason for
the NSA name change was that Barbados did not consider itself as part of the Windward Islands, but an entity by itself. So, as we had to put through the incorporation of the NSA in Barbados, the official change of the NSA had to be made.'

Pioneering to Barbados

We left for Barbados after completion of the Wilmette Pioneer Training Institute. I had little
knowledge of Barbados or any other Caribbean islands. A group of Bahá'ís, including
Shirley Yarbrough, the Auxiliary Board member, welcomed us to the Island and took us to
a small wooden cottage, owned by a Barbadian Bahá'í. It was in Christ Church, in the
southern part of the Island and not far from the airport. We could see the Caribbean Sea
across the road, its beaches popular with local bathers. They usually carried a piece of
Aloe Vera plant, to use it as a natural sunscreen and moisturizer. Our first exposure to
Island life was when a few of them entered our backyard to cut leaves of the Aloe plants or
pick all the ripe fruits from our mango tree. There was no air-conditioning or any fans in
the cottage. So, we had to open the windows to allow the sea breeze to cool the house. As
there were no screens on the windows, we had hosts of tropical insects visiting us day and
night. We used the small bed in the bedroom for us, and the living room for the kids to
sleep. Because of the heat, little Faran was wearing a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. Soon
most of his body was covered with insect bites that got infected and turned into Impetigo -
a highly contagious skin condition common among children in Barbados. To stop the red
sores from spreading, I had to cover the infected areas with gauze. Soon most of his body
was covered with bandages; my heart ached to see him in that condition. To lighten his
spirit, I adoringly called him my wounded soldier. Despite that, he remained resilient and
happy, showing no sign of distress.

We lived in that cottage for a few months and became acquainted with the new environment. It took us a while to meet with the National Assembly, which met

once a
month, as some members had to travel from other Islands. However, the Barbadian National Assembly members and Shirley Yarbrough were great in helping us to settle in
our new home. Shirly was an American pioneer who participated in the first mass teaching
project in the Caribbean. We developed a close friendship. She was a uniting force for the
Bahá'ís who were scattered across the Island.

Most of the Bahá'ís were in other Parishes, which were not close to Christ Church.
Therefore, we developed a plan to visit different communities regularly, accompanied by
Shirley and the National Assembly members. Meanwhile, we focused our efforts on looking
for a job and finding a place to live. Terry soon found a teaching position with St. Winfreds
school in Bridgetown. We enrolled Anisa in kindergarten, going with her father to the same
school. She was amazingly adaptable to her new environment and soon started speaking
in a true Bajan (Barbadian) accent. Bridgetown is the capital city of Barbados; where the
main government departments are located. I started calling different offices, inquiring about
the Social Welfare Agencies. I was told that there was no such Division in Barbados, and

the university was not offering any Social Work courses. They all suggested that I seek a
job with the United Nations Agency in Bridgetown. I called them as my last resort and was
transferred to Mrs. K, who was an Advisor for PAHO - the Pan American World Health
Organization, stationed in Barbados. Mrs. K. was a health educator from India. She knew
about the Bahá'í Faith and was sympathetic towards the plight of the Iranian Bahá'ís. She
reviewed my resume and conducted an in-depth interview, focusing on my training skills.
Then, she informed me that there was no permanent job for me in PAHO, but there is a
need for a UN short-term consultant to train government professionals in the British West
Indies. As a UN Consultant for the Caribbean Region, I would be stationed in Barbados to
plan and develop workshops on communication and counseling techniques. Then,

travel
to St. Vincent, St. Kitts, and Antigua, to conduct training sessions for government officials.
When returning to Barbados, I would create Summary Evaluation Reports on each island
for the WHO, UN. Each assignment was for three weeks, and I received my salary in the
US dollar. She then gave me a book on facilitating experiential workshops for professionals
and asked me to develop a course outline by next the week. I got out of the office excited
and overwhelmed. While waiting for the bus, a car pulled over and the driver, who was in
a pilot uniform, told me that there was no bus at that time of the day, and since he was
going to the airport, he could give me a ride. I got into the car and told him that I was going
to conduct training on the islands that I had never heard their names before. He laughed
and told me that since he had been flying to all these islands, he could give me general
information about them. As a pilot, he added useful information which helped me with my
travel planning: Such as always book my flights for the mornings, since there was no
lighting at the airports and if the flights were delayed, the planes would not land or take off
in the dark. This happened a few times to Mrs. K. and other colleagues but not to me, as I
took his advice to heart.

As Terry's school and the PAHO office both were in Bridgetown, we had no choice but find
a house in Christ Church. Eve Johnson, a National Assembly member, and a Real Estate
Agent suggested a rental home, not far from the cottage that we were staying. It was a
spacious house with the American classic style furniture. Anisa and Faran both had their
own bedrooms. We had a front porch with ornamental iron bars which allowed for the kids
to play safely, and a large backyard. There was no air-conditioning, but with keeping the
windows open, we had a windward breeze circulating and cooling the house. Once again,
the Divine confirmation was upon us, and Abdu'l-Baha's promise;

'…. for I am with you always, whether living or dead; I am with you to the

end. As ye
have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the standard -- this is the
standard -- this is the standard.’

(Abdul Baha) Star of the West, Vol. 12, No. 16, December 31, 1921, page 250.

We were delighted to learn that our next-door neighbor was a Bahá’í couple. Roger Gibbs
was a Barbadian musician who was married to Reissa, a Canadian. Their child was in the
same age group as our kids. Together, we formed a team to strengthen the community
spirit of the Bahá’ís in our area. Our network was gradually extended to other friends such
as Keith and Stephanie Bloodworth and their child, a young pioneer family. Eve Johnson,

Frank Fernandes, Frank Farnum and Yvette Clark, were other friends who joined us and
helped in the teaching endeavors.

We were blessed to host Bahá’í gatherings on a regular basis, some for visiting Bahá’ís ,
such as Paul Lucas, the Counselor for America, Ruth Pringle, who was later appointed as
a Counselor, and Beverly March, the Auxiliary Board Member from St. Lucia.

I consulted with the National Office, about my UN mission and offered to travel teach in
those Islands. Laurie Sealy, the National Assembly’s Secretary, was helpful in contacting
the Institutions in each respective community to facilitate my visits.

The First Tour with PAHO, WHO, UN

I started my work as a UN Consultant in September. The preliminary work of organizing
the workshops was an interagency coordination between PAHO and the Ministry of Health
on each Island. As the guest of the respective governments, I was welcomed and received
hospitality from their officials. Most of the times there were press coverage and radio
interviews. The UN provided hotel accommodation, per diem and transport for each tour.

I planned, developed and facilitated workshops on counseling techniques for teachers,
counselors, health educators, nurses, community development workers, social workers,

and other government officials.

The objective of workshops: To introduce and enhance the worker's role and responsibilities as members of a professional team which acted as "agents of change" for their community.

The specific focus was on interpersonal relationships between the team members and communities, families and individuals.

The areas to cover: Maternal and childcare, youth empowerment, family life education, health education, and care for the environment.

St. Vincent Assignment

I held my first workshop in September, in Kingstown, St. Vincent. There were 28 participants from various helping professionals. The heterogeneous nature of the participants and their varied age, sex, educational background and back-home experience helped the dynamics of the workshop to be a success.

St. Vincent is a lush and forested volcanic island. The largest active volcano is La Soufrière, which erupted in 1979. In October of that year St. Vincent became an independent country. Don Providence, a member of the National Assembly of Barbados and Windward Islands, coordinated my visit with the Bahá'ís of St. Vincent. I was welcomed by the warm hospitality of his family and the Bahá'í community. While having gatherings after work, I also had a

chance to visit a community in the rural area, on the weekend. I remember the beautiful faces of the Bahá'ís, including youth and children, who gathered on a porch by the river, overlooking a lush forest.

One day, when I was on my break during the workshop, I received a call from Don, sharing the sad news of the murder of beloved Hand of the Cause Mr. Olinga and his family. My heart ached as I recalled Mr. Furutan saying that the aging Hands of the Cause would be departing from this earth soon, but the two youngest of them, Mr. Olinga and Dr. Muhajir, would be living on, to inspire future Bahá'í generations. I later heard that the news sorely

affected Dr. Muhajir who loved Mr. Olinga. That evening we had a memorial with the
Bahá'ís, and I shared with them my memories of meeting that precious soul in Nairobi. That
was the beginning of a series of sorrowful events that occurred in 1979.

Excerpt from an article by Richard Francis on Olinga, Enoch
- Bahá'í Library online:
'In September 1977, the Bahá'í Faith was banned in Uganda by the new dictatorial
government headed by Idi Amin. All administrative institutions had to be closed. In
March of the same year, Enoch was in a terrible automobile accident when his car
was rammed and knocked down the side of a hill by a troop transport; he was
subsequently robbed by the soldiers and left for dead. He commented that if it
weren't for Bahá'u'lláh, he would have died in that accident. ….
Kampala was heavily bombarded, and Enoch was persuaded to seek refuge on the
Temple property. He made his way there on foot, under extreme pain, struggling
against the crowds of people trying to flee the city. That night, a fierce artillery battle
raged around the Temple where he spent the night in prayer. The next day, the
temple still stood, undamaged. He soon returned to his house, finding it being
looted. He was accused of being one of Idi Amin's men but somehow was able to
convince the mob otherwise. He returned to the Temple and assisted in its protection.
Gradually, the conditions improved, and the Universal House of Justice was able to
appoint an interim administrative body to reorganize the Bahá'í activities and
properties. Enoch spent his days working at the Bahá'í Temple and assisting the
Administrative Committee. He refurbished his home in Kampala, and his family
joined him there.
It was on Sunday, September 16, 1979, five soldiers in unmarked uniforms knocked
on the door.
The houseboy recalled: "At about 8:30, I heard someone shaking the gate to the
compound and, looking through the window, saw five armed men walking towards
the back door leading to the kitchen. They shouted `open' and banged on the
door. Lennie opened the door, and there was a sound of shots. I fled over the fence
to hide in the neighbor's bushes and remained there in terror all night. I wasn't able
to see anything but heard shooting and other sounds going on for about two
hours. At dawn, I ventured out of hiding and went to the house, seeing the body of

Enoch lying in the courtyard and inside, all in an inner bedroom, the bodies of Elizabeth, Tahirih, Lennie and Badí, heaped on the floor where they had fallen when
shot to death."

On September 24, 1979, Enoch Olinga was laid to rest in a burial plot near the Temple, next to that of Musa Banani, his fellow Hand of the Cause of God; one was designated the `Spiritual Conqueror of Africa' now joined by the `Father of Victories'.

http://bahai-library.com/francis_olinga_biography

Return to Barbados

Iranian Pioneers: When I returned to Barbados, I was told that four young ladies had
arrived from Iran, to consult with the National Assembly about pioneering in the West
Indies. As none of them could understand English, they asked Anisa, my 4-year-old
daughter to translate. However, my little girl did not know how to translate the consultation.
When they asked her whether she could understand what they were saying, she responded
yes and repeated what they said in Farsi. However, she did not know the dynamics of
converting the conversation into English. They finally gave up and decided to wait for me
to return.

The result of the consultation with the National Assembly was that since they were single
girls with little knowledge of English, they would need to go to a country where they could
live with a Bahá'í, to take care of them and act as their mentor. So, they stayed in Barbados
till they found a reasonable accommodation. On my trip to Antigua, one of them
accompanied me and stayed with a dear pioneer, Hope Hubbert. Hope offered to share
her home with the other three, who were in Barbados. The arrangement worked well, and
they initiated successful teaching projects. I was told later, that due to the political situation,
Hope and the other western pioneers had to leave the country. However, the three Iranians
were allowed to stay, and one remained at her post till 1986.

News from Iran: On October that year, we heard the devastating news of the destruction
of the House of the Báb in Shiraz, and the ongoing persecution and martyrdom

of the
Bahá'ís in Iran. My mother joined me in Barbados and tried to get a US visa to go to my
brother in the States. However, the US Consulate refused to give her a visa. Since I was
with her, I decided to talk to the Consul about reactivating my family's application for the
Green Card. They reviewed my records and by taking into consideration that I was a UN
Consultant, processed my application. My mother stayed with us for a few months then
returned to Iran.

St. Kitts Assignment

My second UN assignment was for St. Kitts, a country in the Leeward Islands. The Island
was still coping with the aftermath of Hurricane David. So, there were issues with electricity
and water in the city. Therefore, we had only 15 participants at the workshop.

One evening, the St. Kitts Bahá'ís held a meeting out on the veranda of a friend's house.
There was no electricity, and the lighting from the kerosene lamp made the gathering

intimate. It reminded me of my visits to the Philippine's villages. Since there was no pioneer
on the Island, I was their only outside visitor. It was a blessing for me to have the opportunity
of meeting the Bahá'ís.

On the last day of my visit, the Minister of Health invited me to have lunch with her in a
hotel, overlooking the ocean. Due to the Hurricane, the establishment was closed. They
opened the restaurant only for the Minister and her guest. However, they could only serve
sandwiches. I ordered a chicken sandwich and had a pleasant conversation with the
Minister. I got back to my hotel and did my packing for my trip the next day. Unfortunately,
that night I developed a severe case of food poisoning. I was up the whole night, feeling
miserable. In the morning, Mrs. K. came to see me and insisted on going to Barbados for
treatment by the UN medical team. I made it back home and was treated for the next few
weeks. However, the bacteria impacted my internal organs, including my

gallbladder. I
started having intermittent relapses, off and on for the next 20 years.

Antigua Assignment

Antigua is a rich and beautiful country on the Leeward Islands. Due to my sickness, Mrs.
K. booked me in a first-class hotel. I enjoyed having my breakfast on an open-air deck,
overlooking the harbor. One morning, I noticed a group of professionals in formal business
attire, having a company breakfast. When Mrs. K., joined me, she whispered that they were
members of a gambling cartel, attending a conference at the hotel.

One night, when I was asleep in my hotel room, I went through my first shock, due to the
gallbladder enzyme imbalance. I felt I had an out of body experience, looking down at
myself from the ceiling. These shocks persisted for years to come, quite frightening and
out of my control. I was finally diagnosed 20 years later as having a lazy gallbladder. I was
cured after removing it and taking the required medication to balance my enzymes.

Antigua had a vibrant and active Bahá'í community. The pioneers and local Bahá'ís worked
hand in hand to teach the Faith through social development projects. Among them a
flourishing youth empowerment program which was initiated by John Rushford, an
American pioneer. Alan and Magda Smith, Hope Holbert, Julie Armbruster, and Doris
Francis, all welcomed me and introduced me to different Bahá'í communities. I also met
Vivian Estall, the wife of Counselor Rowland Estall, who was living in Antigua. The
community held a well-publicized meeting which showed slides of the House of the Báb
and its recent destruction. I could not hold my tears back while witnessing the atrocities
which were committed to one of the Holiest Places of the Faith.

Shahla with the Bahá'ís of Antigua
Back row, from left: John Rushford, John Yates, Hope Holbert, --, Cedric Nathan
Second on the front: Shahla Gillbanks, last on the right: Vivian Estall

Barbados Pioneering Highlights
October 79 – June 1980

Dr. Muhajir's last meeting

Upon my return from Antigua, in October, I had a phone call from Shirley Yarbrough, informing me that Dr. Muhajir was visiting Barbados. When Shirley told him about a Shahla Gillbanks, who is on assignment with the United Nations, Dr. Muhajir wanted to come to my home for a visit. I was delighted and invited them to dinner the next day.

My family was overjoyed for this blessing, including my mother, who's attitude, and demeanor was quite different from the first time Dr. Muhajir came to our house in Tehran. I prepared a Filipino dish and salad for dinner. When Dr. Muhajir arrived, he humored me by saying that; he wanted to see this UN Consultant, who is "casting a long shadow" - which in Farsi, was more of a tease than a compliment. He then continued; joking aside, he was happy for me to find an opportunity to serve at that level. He wanted to know about my findings which could be implemented in the Bahá'í community. I mentioned about "the buddy system," a team approach when a mentor and a new Bahá'í would work together in implementing a service project. He expressed that hopefully in the future it would be used as a community building tool by the Bahá'ís. He then discussed his teaching campaign in Boston, a systematic approach to holding 19 firesides in 19 days, and the success of the program.

My little Faran woke up and insisted on being with us. Dr. Muhajir put him on his lap and held him for an hour. When we were having dinner, Dr. Muhajir complimented me on my cooking and mentioned that he was watching his diet because of diabetes but was enjoying the food. He asked my mother if she was happy now with my pioneering. My mother responded: "Yes, Dr., I am grateful for your advice."

When the visit was ending, and Dr. Muhajir was saying goodbye, he held my hands and said: "Shahla, we have come a long way together; serving the Faith from the Philippines to New Zealand, and Kenya to the Caribbean. Presently we are serving one generation

together. When I pass on, I hope you serve two more generations. Pray for me as I pray
for you!”

The next evening, we attended a public meeting with beloved Dr. Muhajir as the speaker.
On the last day, Shirley told me that when she was taking him to the airport, Dr. Muhajir
asked her to repeatedly play the song “Prisoner” by Seals and Crofts, while pensively
whispering the lyrics along the way.

One day in December, Shirley called and told me that she had bad news and insisted that
I sit down. Then she informed me that Dr. Muhajir had passed away! A tremendous grief
came over me, as I had lost my spiritual mentor and a dear friend. I was grateful for our
last meeting, destined to be his last farewell; sad, that he would not be among us to inspire
the present generation of Bahá’ís. I followed his advice in my life, to always serve the
generations of Bahá’ís. In the years to come, anytime I felt lost and despondent, Dr. Muhajir

would come to my dream and guide me to the right path. I have always been praying for
his soul and asking for his prayers, and taking solace in the following quotation:

‘A friend asked: “How should one look forward to death?
`Abdu’l-Bahá answered: How does one look forward to the end of any journey,
with hope and expectation. It is even so with the end of this earthly journey.
In the next world, man will find himself freed from many disabilities under which he
now suffers. Those who passed on through death, have the sphere of their own. It
is not removed from ours: Their work of the kingdom is ours, but it is sanctified
from what we call time and place.
Time with us is measured by the sun. When there is no more sunset that kind of
time does not exist for man.
Those who have ascended have different attributes (conditions) from those who
are still on earth, yet there is no real separation.
In the prayer, there is a mingling of stations, a mingling of the condition. Pray for
them as they pray for you.’

http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/ABL/abl-52.html

A Day with Mr. and Mrs. Robarts

Shirley called me one day to let me know that Hand of the Cause John Robarts and his wife were in Barbados. Mr. Robarts had completed his visits in the Caribbean and had decided to have a respite in a secluded hotel in Barbados. As it was their private time, they did not plan to have any visitors. However, when Shirley told them about my family, who had pioneered in Kenya, they invited us to have lunch with them on the weekend. We were delighted to accept this great privilege.

When we were in Kenya, we were friends with their son Patrick and his wife, Geraldine Robarts. We attended meetings at their home when Mr. and Mrs. Robarts were visiting Nairobi.

The Robarts were staying at the Villa Nova hotel, which in 1965 was the winter residence of the former British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden. He called this tropical refuge his Garden of Eden. We traveled to the east coast of the Island, passing through tropical jungle to reach this peaceful paradise, far from the tourist crowds of the west coast. Mr. and Mrs. Robarts were gracious hosts who treated us with care and acted as loving grandparents for our kids. There was no formal conversation or meetings. We had lunch, strolled through the garden and talked about their travels to Cuba and other Caribbean Islands. We were rewarded a day of respite and fulfillment by these two precious souls.

Building Community Spirit

Terry and I found the most effective way to serve the Cause was traveling to different Parishes, holding meetings and visiting the Bahá'ís. We encouraged friends to connect with each other as one community. We visited St. Andrews Parish, where Pat and Frank Paccassi were pioneering, and St. Lucy Parish, where the Carlton family were residing. Cynthia Carlton later moved to Riverside California, where we found each other again

and continued our friendship.

Meeting with the Barbadian Bahá'ís in St. Andrew
L- Shahla, Shirley Yarbrough, Laurie Seely
Front right - Pat Paccassi, far right – Kenneth Bloodworth.
Second on R -Terry Gillbanks

As the team of the Bahá'ís, with the help of Shirley Yarbrough, unified the Bahá'í community, we launched a few Island-wide events. To celebrate Naw Ruz, we suggested the Barbadian community gather at the Temple site in St Lucy for a devotional, and to plant a tree, as a symbolic replacement of the orange tree which was planted by the Báb at his home and had been uprooted during the destruction of the House of the Báb, a year before.
It was one of the largest gathering of the Bahá'ís from all the Parishes of Barbados. The resilient spirit of the Bahá'ís was manifested when the tree was planted.
It brought tears of joy to the faces of participants.

Above pictures: Planting a tree, symbolic of the Orange Tree destroyed at the House of the Báb at Temple site in St. Lucy, Barbados.

The picture below: Ridvan Celebration

The momentum of community spirit continued with a Ridvan celebration. We planned a family-oriented activity at a Beach in Christ Church Parish. Children and their families gathered from the larger community, for a devotional, fellowship and a Ridvan chocolate egg hunt. It was wonderful to observe children working together to find their treasure and share them with each other.

Dominica Assignment

Due to the success of my first assignments, Mrs. K. planned additional tours to be held in the spring of 1980. The first one was a part of the curriculum of the 14 weeks training program for the Community Health Workers of the Ministry of Health in Dominica.

It was the largest group of participants for my workshops. 30 participants attended the workshop at the Princess Margaret Hospital of Roseau. I left for Dominica on

April 28 th,
after the Ridvan Celebration.

In August 1979, Hurricane David, one of the strongest and deadliest hurricanes hit the Atlantic coasts. We experienced the brunt of David in Barbados, but the eye of the hurricane was at sea and did not do great damage inland. However, it continued to strike Dominica as a category 5 hurricane. A major road, connecting one side of the island to another, fell into the sea and cut off transportation. The utility plants were destroyed, and there was no running water or electricity in the homes.

When I arrived at the end of April, I witnessed the destruction and how the resilient population was coping with the devastation. Only major hotels like the one that I was staying, provided electricity and water. I found Dominica had a unique natural beauty. The lush rainforests and waterfalls were breathtaking. One of the officials who acted as my host gave me a tour of the Island. We had a picnic in the forest, and I was amazed to see African Violets growing wild under the trees. Colorful tropical birds were flying around us, and the trees made a cool canopy. We sat by the river and had a Caribbean dish of rice and beans cooked in coconut juice. It was so delicious that I asked for the recipe and made it at home for my family.

The Bahá'ís were warm and wonderful. I was able to meet Albert Segen, an American pioneer, working at the same hospital, where I was conducting my training. However, due to the aftermath of Hurricane David, it was not feasible to have a meeting in the city. So, a group of young Bahai's arranged a gathering at the Island's hot spring. They asked me to join them at their weekly bathing, as there was no hot water in their homes. It was an enjoyable and refreshing experience which I never forget.

St. Lucia

I did not have a UN assignment for St. Lucia but was invited by the Bahá'ís to visit. Since it was on my way to Dominica, I arranged for my return ticket to travel to that country for a few days of travel teaching. There was a dynamic community in St. Lucia. Beverley March the Auxiliary Board member and Keith and Stephanie Bloodworth, the pioneers whom I knew from Barbados, arranged for a number of firesides and Bahá'í gatherings. I was also interviewed by the press, regarding my visit to the Caribbean Islands. I had the pleasure of meeting Ester Evans, the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for the Windward Islands. From L to R: Stephanie Bloodworth, Ester Evans, Shahla Gillbanks, with a group of Bahá'ís of St. Lucia, standing third on the right: Beverly March

The Cayman Islands
1980-1982

As my contract with the United Nations was ending, so was my source of income. Terry's salary was not enough to support our family, and there was no other job opportunity for me on the Island. I shared my dilemma with Mrs. K, who offered to help in finding suitable positions for us when visiting government officials in the Caribbean countries.

Sometimes in April 1980, Mrs. K, informed me of my new assignment in the Cayman Islands, a multidisciplinary training for the prevention of genetic disease in the country. She told me while consulting about this joint PAHO, WHO project with the government of the Cayman, she discussed the possibility of hiring Terry and me after the workshop. The Ministry of Education offered a two-year contract to Terry, to be the deputy headmaster of a primary school. I was hired as a non-contracted spouse, to run the Education Counseling Department of the Ministry. Although my new job was not on par with my United Nations position, we would be receiving expatriate salaries and fringe benefits, in the prosperous Cayman Island. I consulted with Terry, and both agreed that it was an excellent

opportunity
to bring stability to our life. The US Pioneering committee was pleased that we could extend
our pioneering for another two years in the Caribbean. We accepted the offer, and I set out
to prepare for my new UN assignment, to facilitate workshops in Genetic Counseling.

The Cayman Islands at a Glance
Taken from: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands

‘The Cayman Islands is a British Overseas Territory in the western Caribbean Sea.
The territory comprises the three islands of Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little
Cayman located south of Cuba, northeast of Costa Rica, north of Panama, east of
Mexico and northwest of Jamaica. Its population is approximately 60,000, and its
capital is George Town.’
‘The Cayman Islands remained largely uninhabited until the 17th century. While
there is no archaeological evidence for an indigenous people on the islands, a
variety of settlers from various backgrounds made their home on the islands,
including pirates, shipwrecked sailors, and deserters from Oliver Cromwell's army in
Jamaica.
The first recorded permanent inhabitant of the Cayman Islands, Isaac Bodden, was
born on Grand Cayman around 1661. He was the grandson of the original settler
named Bodden who was probably one of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers at the taking of
Jamaica in 1655.’
‘England took formal control of the Cayman Islands, along with Jamaica, as a result
of the Treaty of Madrid of 1670. Following several unsuccessful attempts at
settlement, a permanent English-speaking population in the islands dates from the

1730s. With the settlement, after the first royal land grant by the Governor of
Jamaica in 1734, came the perceived need for slaves. Many were brought to the
islands from Africa; this is evident today with the majority of native Caymanians
being of African and English descent.’
‘The islands continued to be governed as part of the Colony of Jamaica until 1962
when they became a separate Crown colony while Jamaica became an independent
Commonwealth realm.’

‘The Cayman Islands historically have been a tax-exempt destination. … The government of the Cayman Islands has always relied on indirect and not direct taxes. The islands have never levied an income tax, capital gains tax, or any wealth
tax, making them a popular tax haven.’
‘The Cayman Islands have more registered businesses than people. In mid-2011 the Cayman Islands had an estimated population of about 56,000, representing a mix of more than 100 nationalities. Out of that number, about half are of Caymanian
descent. About 60% of the population is of mixed race (mostly mixed African-Caucasian).”
‘With an average income of around KYD$47,000, Caymanians have the highest standard of living in the Caribbean. According to the CIA World Factbook, the Cayman Islands GDP per capita is the 14th highest in the world. The islands print
their currency, the Cayman Islands dollar (KYD), which is pegged to the US dollar
1.227 USD to 1 KYD.”

‘In 2010, the country ranked fifth internationally regarding the value of liabilities
booked and sixth regarding assets booked. It has branches of 40 of the world's 50
largest banks.’

Bahá’ís of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands
Taken from: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia/the “Bahá’ís of Jamaica.”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27í_Faith_in_Jamaica

‘In 1942 Dr. Malcolm King, a dentist of Jamaican background who had been living
in the United States for some time, and who had embraced the Bahá’í Faith there,
came to Jamaica with the express purpose of teaching the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh to
his fellow Jamaicans.

Dr. King held meetings at 190 Orange Street in Kingston. By 1943, five people had
embraced the Faith after having been taught by him. After he had left the island, the
nucleus of Bahá’ís taught the Faith and by April 1943 were able to form a Local
Spiritual Assembly in Kingston. The Jamaican community was by 1961 sufficiently strong to elect its National Spiritual Assembly.

In 1965 partly through the efforts of a Jamaican Bahá’í teacher who moved to there,
ten persons in the Cayman Islands became Bahá’ís and later a Local

Spiritual
Assembly was formed.’

JAMAICA
Excerpts from: THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD, Volume 15
https://bahai-library.com/jones_ocean

‘In 1961 the National Spiritual Assembly of Jamaica was established with its seat in
Kingston. The visits of the Hands of the Cause Ugo Giachery and Rahmatu'llah Muhajir in 1969, the National Spiritual Assembly commented, resulted in an awakening of the Baha community to the challenges of the Nine-Year Plan and a fresh infusion of inspiration and determination. A constant flow of pioneers, traveling
teachers, members of the Board of Counsellors and its Auxiliary Board, youthful singing groups -- these assisted in turning the tide. The National Assembly achieved
its goal of incorporation at Ridvan, 1970, and in a jubilant mood received a welcome
visit from the Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga in August of that year. Early in 1971,
a mass teaching project in which visiting Bahá'ís from the deep south of the United
States worked closely with local native teachers resulted in the enrolment of approximately one thousand new believers.’

Cayman Islands UN Assignment
May 28 – June 19, 1980

A joint multidisciplinary project was developed for the prevention of “Genetic disease” in
the Cayman Islands. One of the components was the training of the professionals involved,
in dealing with the problems arising from Genetic diseases in the community and developing strategies in Genetic Counseling based on a Caymanian Social and Cultural
Context.

A multidisciplinary committee of professional expertise of medical, educational and social
welfare disciplines, worked with Mrs. K, the PAHO WHO advisor for implementation of this
project. They organized a series of workshops for professionals and their portfolios. A
number of professional experts were involved in conducting panel sessions, delivering
lectures and helping with the organization and evaluation of the workshops. Mrs. K. helped
with the organization of the workshops and coordinating the panel sessions. I

was
contracted to facilitate the Genetic Counseling workshops. Twenty-seven participants from
Cayman and the University of West Indies, Jamaica, participated.

During my stay in Georgetown, I contacted JoAnn Gilman; a Caymanian, married to Bud,
an American. A wonderful Bahá'í couple, living with their family in Bodden Town. JoAnn
arranged my meetings with Cathy McCloud, a Canadian nurse working in Georgetown.
Cathy was the only pioneer in the country at that time. The only other active Bahá'í was
Beverly Brandon, who lived with her family near Georgetown. Although the community was
small, their warmth and close relationship were noteworthy.

The last day before the culmination of my workshop, I had a severe attack, caused by the
damage to my gallbladder from food poisoning. I was taken to the hospital ER and treated
for dangerously low blood pressure and blood sugar. As I came back to my hotel room,
Cathy came and took care of me for the evening. Mrs. K. took over my training and

completed the workshop the next day. After she left, the hospital director, ordered a few
days of recuperation for me before traveling back to Barbados. JoAnn and Bud took me to
their home until I recovered. As there was no air-conditioning in the house, I asked if I could
sleep in the Lanai by the swimming pool. That night I had a dream; I was standing on the
roof of my house in Tehran, it was dark, and I could hear the chanting of Allah'u'Akbar –
God is most great, echoing around me. Then, I heard a voice warning: They are coming! I
woke up paralyzed and could hardly breathe. In the morning, I had a dreaded feeling that
something terrible was going to happen to the Bahá'ís in Iran, but felt helpless to do
anything about it.

On my last days of the trip, I met with officials of Ministry of Education and obtained the
required employment documents for myself and Terry.

In the months ahead, my premonition came true; soon I heard the news of the

martyrdom
of my dear friends, mentors, and many Bahá'ís. I mourned the loss of Dr. Davoudi, Mr.
Bakhtavar, Farnoosh, Dr. Sadeghzadeh and many other friends. The loss of loved ones
and close friends usually happens when we are older, but in my case, it had happened
when I was in my thirties. It was also the time that I heard of my father's arrest and
imprisonment. As I lost most of my mentors, I heeded to the last wish of Dr. Muhajir, to
become resolute in serving the present and future Bahá'í generations.
'This handful of days on earth will slip away like shadows and be over. Strive then
that God may shed His grace upon you, that you may leave a favorable
remembrance in the hearts and on the lips of those to come.'

~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'í Reference Library - The Secret of Divine Civilization, Pages 101-116

Pioneering to the Cayman Islands

In the early Summer of 1980, we left Barbados for the Cayman Islands. The flight to
Cayman had a stopover for changing planes in Atlanta. In my previous trips, it was a
pleasant few hour to spend at the airport and do some duty-free shopping for the kids.
However, this time, we were informed that Hurricane Allen had just struck Grand Cayman
and all flights to the Island were canceled. We had to stay overnight and take off the next
day. As it was a natural disaster, the airline did not cover the emergency accommodation.
Since we did not have a US Visa, we had to stay at an airport hotel without leaving the
premises.

Allen was a powerful hurricane which struck the Caribbean, Mexico, and Texas. It was the
first and strongest hurricane of the 1980 Atlantic hurricane season. It reached Category 5
status, with winds of 190 mph. Due to the severity of impact, in 1981, the name Allen was
retired from the list of Atlantic tropical cyclone names for six years.
We felt the impact of Allen when we arrived at Grand Cayman. The calm blue Caribbean
Sea, which normally resembled a lake, was more like the angry and the gray

Atlantic
Ocean. The whole Island was in emergency status. The clearing of debris and structural
repairs were happening everywhere. We were taken to a first-class hotel on the famed
Seven Miles Beach for the first week. After years of hardship, my family enjoyed the luxury
of the hotel and its restaurant, courtesy of the government.

As a blessing in disguise, due to the Hurricane evacuation, the executive secretary of the
Governor of Cayman, had to leave her two-bedroom seaside unit, at a luxury resort. Since
she refused to go back, and it was the only accommodation available, we stayed there for
the first three months. As it coincided with the school holiday, we enjoyed a dream vacation.

Beverly Brandon, my Bahá'í friend, happened to be the manager of the same resort. She
lived with her three sons in a unit not far from us. They offered to supervise our kids at the
Kiddy pool while we went snorkeling amid the magnificent corals and colorful tropical fish.
Once again, undeservedly, God had showered His Grace and Mercy upon us!

We established our contact with the Bahá'ís and started getting to know some, who were
not active in the community. Soon we heard that Dr. Ahamadieh, from Belize, whom I
previously met in Iran, was visiting for a few days. He was recently appointed as a
Counselor for America and was making a tour of the Caribbean Islands. The short visit was
helpful in developing our pioneering plan.

For the new school year, we eventually moved to a 3-bedroom house in George Town. It
was ideal for our pioneering goal to be closer to the Caymanians as our neighbors. My
office was at the Cayman High School. The Principal and vice principal, the department
heads and some teachers were British expatriates. The rest, including school nurses, were
either Caymanians or Jamaicans. I noticed right away, the systemic discrimination that I
had experienced in KIA- Kenya Institute of Administration. The British staff had better office
locations than the rest, including me. When I approached the principal to ask

for an office

in the Administration Building, he bluntly told me that I was not British and could not have
that privilege. It was also a deja vous when I entered the staff break room. Just as at KIA,
all the British were sitting on one side and the rest on the other side of the hall. So, I did
exactly what I practiced in KIA. One day I sat with the British and the other day with the
rest of the staff. I was making a statement to the British that I was equal to them, and to
the Jamaicans and Caymanians that I was the same as them. I gradually developed a
relationship with all of them on equal terms. It made a positive impact on the non-British,
and by the end of the year, the segregated line was crossed, and they started sitting on the
British side. I invited my Caymanian colleagues to the firesides at my home and developed
a close friendship with a few.

In my new position, acting as an advisor for the Ministry, I established Education
Counseling, and a Social Education Program for the school system. In addition to
integrating the subject in the High school curriculum, every year a week-long program was
offered for the entire high school student body. It was a multidisciplinary approach to
educate the high school students in interpersonal relationships, public health, family life
education, fire, and road safety. I coordinated speakers from different agencies to make
presentations to the students. It was well received by the professionals, students, and their
parents. The press covered the event as a progressive approach to educating the young
generation of Caymanians. The Ministry asked me to offer the program on Cayman Brac,
which gave me the opportunity to visit that Island’s Bahá’ís.

My Caymanian colleagues recommended private schools where their children were
attending for Anisa and Faran. The schools were walking distance from the High School.
So, Faran, who was in kindergarten, could walk to my office for lunch. We usually had a
lovely talk about his day, and when I was not around, he would go to the health

clinic and
have a nice visit with the Jamaican nurses.

In a decade of pioneering in foreign lands, the Cayman Islands were pleasantly the most
comfortable experience. Although the country was a British Colony, it was very much
connected to the American way of life. Georgetown resembled an American city with all the
conveniences. Once a week a shipment of fresh groceries from Florida was delivered to
one of the city stores. As the Cayman dollar was worth more than the USD, it was quite
reasonable to do supermarket shopping from this shop. There was no TV station in
Cayman. However, there were VHS copies of all the US, TV programs which we could rent
daily. The kids thrived in school, especially little Faran who started at the age of four and
by the time he was five, he could read any newspaper or book fluently. As a family, we
spent our free time on a rubber dinghy, snorkeling among the corals and colorful tropical
fish. The kids were delighted to see starfish, lobsters, octopus, and other sea creatures
that could only be seen in big city aquariums. It instilled the love of nature and conservation
in our kids at very young age.

During school holidays we frequently visited Jamaica and established contact with the
National Assembly and the Auxiliary Board member, Tony Lewis. Tony was an American
residing in Kingston. In my consultation with him as a pioneer, he expressed the need for
an Assistant ABM, in the Cayman Islands and appointed me as his Assistant. In that

capacity, I initiated locating and nurturing inactive Bahá'ís. In addition to nurturing a new
Bahá'í mother, who had two young children. We developed a close relationship with her
and started a children class for our kids. Her husband, who was not a Bahá'í, took a three-
month course in Panama. She asked if we could take care of her kids so she could surprise
her husband for a weekend visit. That would also give her an opportunity to take her

husband to the Panama Temple. We offered to help, and she took off for Panama without
informing her husband of her surprise visit. When she came back, she did not seem happy.
She said that when she arrived at Panama, she gave her husband's address to the cab
driver who let her know that it did not exist. She called her husband to find out why. The
husband responded that he was in Panama City, Florida, not Panama. Although she was
upset about this mix-up, she decided to visit the Bahá'í Temple before returning to Cayman.
According to her, it was an exhilarating spiritual experience, worth the travel. I heard years
later that her perseverance paid up and her husband became a Bahá'í.

Ruth Pringle, the Counselor for America, visited us in Georgetown to consult about
strengthening the Bahá'í community and Institutions in the Cayman Islands. We developed
an action plan, with JoAnn Gillman, Beverly Bandon, Cathy McCloud, Terry and I, to set
the groundwork for building a united and strong Bahá'í community. The goal was to
establish a Spiritual Assembly in Bodden Town, and a Group in Georgetown. In one of our
Group meetings, we heard the sad news of the passing of Mr. Faizi. The beloved Hand of
the Cause who was a beacon of hope and love for me since my childhood. I was privileged
that he considered me as his daughter and had continued his communication with me until
he departed to the Abha Kingdom.

A loving letter from Mr. Faizi, before my pioneering to the Philippines, offering
encouragement and support in my endeavor to serve.

As the Jamaica Bahá'í community included the Cayman Islands, we participated in most
of their national activities and events. That included the Summer School and the visit of
Ruhiyyih Khanum. It was a blessing to listen to her talk and being inspired by her vision for
the progress of the Faith in our region. We had a chance to participate in an informal picnic.
Dear Violet, Nakhjavani, was happy to see us again in a pioneering post and took us to

Ruhiyyih Khanum, reminding her of the time that we had lunch with her at the House of Abdu'l-Baha. I kept the picture of Khanum at the picnic as a wonderful reminder of that occasion.

Visiting Hand of the Cause Mr. Varqa:

Since Grand Cayman was a small Island, it was easy to have what was called "Rock Fever," a condition of being confined to a small space. Therefore, during the school holidays, we made frequent trips to Florida for vacation. On one of these trips in Broward County, we contacted the Bahá'ís to know if there were any Bahá'í activities in which we could participate. We were told that not much was happening in that period. However, when Dr. Varqa, Hand of the Cause, heard that we were pioneers from the Cayman Islands, he invited us to his house that evening. I was so happy to see the beloved professor of my sister, who we adored. We spent that evening with Mr. and Mrs. Varqa and a few Bahá'í friends. It was a memorable milestone in our blessed life.

As Terry's contract was coming to close, we started planning for our future. When we heard that the US Consul from Jamaica, was visiting Cayman, we made an appointment to follow up on our Green Cards. The meeting was productive, and since we were the employees of Cayman Government, the Consul approved the final process and arranged for an interview at the US Embassy in Jamaica. It was our last trip to that country. The interview was friendly and pleasant. As we had adequate capital that we saved from our present employment, they did not ask for my brother to be our sponsor. They issued our permanent visa that day, and it was activated on our next trip to Miami.

When our employment ended, the government paid for our return trip to New Zealand, as our home country. So, we decided to go to New Zealand for a visit, before taking up residence in California, where my friend and colleague from Tehran lived. She was the one who helped us ship our belongings through Bell Helicopter, but some got lost on

their way
to the US. She kept the rest of the packages at her house in Anaheim and now, suggested
to picking them up and settling in Orange County.

We were feeling sad and a bit guilty to be ending our pioneering life. So, we sent a request
to the World Center, requesting a 3-day pilgrimage, on our way to New Zealand. Mr. Zohuri,
the Secretary of the National Assembly, called us to let us know that the Universal House
of Justice granted us a 9-day pilgrimage. That was the second time that I was granted such
privilege for merely being a humble pioneer.

We left Cayman with heavy hearts. We made a travel plan to send the children first to New
Zealand to stay with Terry's family. We then took a flight to London, on the way to the Holy
Land. After the pilgrimage, we went to New Zealand to visit Terry's family, pick up the
children and fly to California.

In England, we visited and offered prayers at the grave of the Beloved Guardian. I called
Dr. Ghadimi who lived in a city near London. He invited Terry and me to come to his class
one evening. It was a pleasure to see enthusiastic Iranian youth, participating in a similar
course of study that I took when I was young. That was the last time that I saw my dear
teacher. He later moved to Canada and passed away while still serving the Faith by
educating and nurturing the Bahá'í youth.

While on pilgrimage we prayed for the Divine Guidance to put us on the right path. We
received our answer when we consulted with Hooper Dunbar, who was then the Counselor
of International Teaching Center and later, became a member of the Universal House of
Justice. We expressed our concern about residing in the US as there was no longer a path
to pioneering. Mr. Dunbar responded; we did not have to be pioneers to serve the Faith. If
that door had closed, we might find a path of service in any community we reside. We just
needed to have faith and a total commitment to serving our Beloved Cause.

We also had a chance to talk to Mr. and Mrs. Furutan. Dear Mrs. Furutan, told me that I was a survivor as a pioneer and would be able to continue my path of service. Mr. Furutan was touched to hear of my last visit with Dr. Muhajir. He mentioned that he would have never thought to outlive his dear son in law.

At the Holy Shrines, while praying for the Divine guidance, I heeded to the following guidelines from the Master.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá suggested that there were four wonderful qualities that could help us to pray:

? The first is a detached spirit. It is a little like closing a window to the noises of the street, that the strains of the violin within the room may not be lost.

? The second is unconditional surrender of our own wills to the Will of God. This is very subtle and very difficult, for the self is inclined to argue with God and to rationalize its own desires, putting them always first. How few have the singular purity of the child who wanted a horse more than anything else in the world and decided to pray for it. After a time, her father said, "God did not answer your prayer, did He?" "But of course, He did," she said simply, "He said no!"

? Concentrated attention is the third quality, and

? The fourth, true spiritual passion, that ardor and devotion which distinguishes the apostle from the multitude. `
~ The Path to God, By Dorothy Baker, Baha'i World Volumes, Volume 12, p. 898

We left the Holy Land spiritually enriched. With absolute humility, I offered my life to follow His commandments and be at peace with His Will.

CHAPTER 8

Professional Contribution; Teaching People with Capacity
California
1982 – 1992

‘You must live in the utmost happiness. If any trouble or vicissitude comes into your lives, if your heart is depressed on account of health, livelihood or vocation, let not these things affect you. They should not cause unhappiness, for Bahá'u'lláh,

has
brought you divine happiness. He has prepared heavenly food for you; He has destined eternal bounty for you; He has bestowed everlasting glory upon you. Therefore, these glad tidings should cause you to soar in the atmosphere of joy forever and ever. Render continual thanks unto God so that the confirmations of God may encircle you all.'
~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá
The Promulgation of Universal Peace - Bahai
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/pup-67.html

Thanking God for His Confirmation

We arrived in Anaheim, California, during the economic recession which encompassed
many countries worldwide. In Southern California, most of the Counties imposed hiring
freezes for non-essential employees, which included Social Services positions. Therefore,
finding a job for me was next to impossible. Then, my friend informed me that when she
shipped our suitcases from Iran, through Bell Helicopter, they lost a few of cases which
contained my professional documents, all our pictures, my family heirlooms, and valuable
belongings.

The 1979 – 1980 hostage crisis, created a great hostility towards Iranians in the States. As
Iranian Baha'is, we painstakingly had to describe to the public, the plight of the Baha'is in
Iran, and our spiritual belief for peace and harmony with all the nations in the world.

We rented an apartment in Anaheim and enrolled Anisa and Faran in a primary school.
Terry registered at a Technical college to become a Computer Technician. Nine months
passed until I found a temporary position as a Child Protective Service Worker, in the
Department of Social Services - DPSS, Riverside County. This was an entry-level position
like my first job in New Zealand, decades ago.

It was a challenging time for me to adjust to my new job: first adapting to the American
English, it's spelling, and idioms, which was different from British English. Then,
familiarizing myself with the culture, demography, and geography of the County. I

remember once when I was on Emergency Response phone duty, the caller gave her address as Perris, Riverside. I repeated what I was written to her for accuracy, stating Paris as the city. She corrected me, saying; it appeared that I was new and didn't know Riverside

well. I was embarrassed and apologized for my mistake. She laughed and told me that she would have wished to live in Paris, France.

A drawback for the temporary workers like me was that we did not go through an Intensive Induction, which was a six week training for all the newly hired employees. This course was offered by the Staff Development, mandated for the workers to develop knowledge and skills in working with clients, the legal system and court procedures, the Federal and State policies and regulations, DPSS organization, casework process, and recording. Therefore, I had to rely on Mr. T., my supervisor to train me during our weekly supervisory meetings. As he was the one who hired me based on my professional background, he understood my dilemma and struggles to adjust. We gradually developed a good professional relationship, where he treated me as an equal rather than a subordinate. After six months, when my temporary contract was coming to an end, Mr. T. informed me that there was a DPSS internal hiring for the position of Staff Development Officer. He stated that since I was still a DPSS employee, and highly qualified, I should apply. He explained that although it was a sought- after position for the Social Service supervisors, I should be aware of the tension between the two divisions. Mr. T warned me that if I got the job, I would be in an adversarial position with my present co-workers and managers. I decided to seize the opportunity and apply for the job. My application was accepted, and I was scheduled for the selection interview.

The interview panel was composed of the Deputy Director of DPSS, the Staff Development Manager, and the Personnel manager. After reviewing my resume and an in-depth interview, they gave me 5 minutes to review a lesson plan which had already been printed on a flip chart. Then, I had to deliver a 10-minute presentation, based on the

lesson plan
outlined on the flipchart. I later learned that it was from a highly structured "Training for
Trainers" Management Training program. Since I was the only applicant who delivered the
lecture in 10 minutes, I was hired as the Staff Development Officer for the Social Services
Division. From the onset of my hiring, I faced resentment from my previous coworkers and
present colleagues. As quite a few managers and trainers who applied for the position
begrudged me as an outsider and an Iranian, who snatched the job from them.

I was given a heavy workload which included management and administrative training for
the entire Departmental staff. It was in addition to my Social Services workload. I was also
supervising the university student interns and coordinating in-service training for the Social
Services Division. It entailed hiring national consultants who were experts in their field. In
order to offset the cost and generate income, I opened the sessions to other southern
California Agencies. My training program became so popular that many participants from
outside agencies paid the registration fee and traveled a long distance to attend the
sessions.

We bought a house and settled in Riverside. Soon, I was elected as a member of the
Spiritual Assembly, and Terry helped with conducting Children's classes. The highlight of
our activity was participation in the Black History Month parade. I made a connection with
my friends from Iran, Barbados, New Zealand, and the Philippines. We were also

involved with the Baha'i activities in the Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Bernardino
Counties.

Professional Contribution; Teaching People with Capacity

The Ridvan Message of the Universal House of Justice stated:
'Thus far, we have achieved a marvelous diversity in the large numbers of ethnic
groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to fortify it through
larger enrolments from among groups already represented and the attraction of

members from groups not yet reached. However, there is another category of diversity which must be built up and without which the Cause will not be able adequately to meet the challenges being thrust upon it. Its membership, regardless of ethnic variety, needs now to embrace increasing numbers of people of capacity, including persons of accomplishment and prominence in the various fields of human endeavour. Enrolling significant numbers of such persons is an indispensable aspect of teaching the masses, an aspect which cannot any longer be neglected and which must be consciously and deliberately incorporated into our teaching work, so as to broaden its base and accelerate the process of entry by troops. So important and timely is the need for action on this matter that we are impelled to call upon Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies to devote serious attention to it in their consultations and plans.'
Ridván 1990 – To the Bahá'ís of the World | Bahá'í ...
https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal...

Training Program on the Elimination of Prejudice

Professionally, I found a number of platforms to integrate Baha'i teachings to some of my training programs. One opportunity arose when I was given the responsibility for offering Civil Rights and Cultural Awareness training to all DPSS employees. A federal and State mandated training for all the newly hired and present employees, to be taken every few years. It was usually a difficult training, as it stirred up deep-rooted feelings and conflicts among the diverse participants. I took a different approach by including a session on prejudice, using Shoghi Effendi's writings on this challenging subject as the basis of my training. The objective of this course was to learn about the impact of prejudice and discrimination. The course outline included:

- Exploring personal attitudes and beliefs – an experiential activity
- The impact of biases and discrimination - Life lessons and their cumulative effects on people
- The importance of self-awareness in modifying own attitudes and behaviors towards differences
- Steps in Becoming a Diversity Change Agent

I started the session by introducing myself and my cultural background as an Iranian. Then asked participants to share what was their first impression of me. At this point, I was

invariably noticing their uneasy expression of biases toward Iranians. One time, when I was conducting the session in a small town, as soon as I introduced myself, one of the participants slapped her hands on her desk and stormed out of the class. The participants were shocked, but I just continued with my training, with a calm voice, asking for their feedback.

The trainee's responses usually ranged from my being an Iranian woman, but not wearing a veil, to the more extreme of being a terrorist. I then told them that I was a Baha'i and described the Baha'i teachings about equality of men and women, elimination of prejudice, believing in the unity of mankind and universal peace. Then went on to explain the plight of the Iranian Baha'is like most of my friends and family members who had been imprisoned or killed because of their belief.

There was a group exercise to develop self-awareness about one's own prejudices. The participants realized that prejudice is prejudging a group of people based on their race, nationality, gender, religion or disability.

The workshop addressed the causes of prejudice, as a set of values and beliefs that we learn as a child from our parents, teachers, and authority figures. As we grow up, we continually form new biases by what we learn from our family, in-group, peers, mass media and government propaganda.

It described the dynamic of prejudice, which is "us" versus "them"; which makes "us," the majority group, superior to "them," who are the minority group, As the minority is inferior, they don't have the feelings and emotions of the superior human beings. Therefore, as they are less human, we may hurt and kill them without any sense of guilt or shame. We had a discussion on how prejudice may manifest itself, through jokes,

insults and
verbal abuse. It then progresses to violent behavior, attacking, injuring and killing, initiated
either by individuals or a group of people. The next progression would be "Systemic
Discrimination," when the governing policies discriminate against the rights of the minorities
to employment, housing, education, equal pay, freedom of expression, worship, marriage
and raising their children. I encouraged participants to share their life experiences, then
shared mine as an Iranian Baha'i, as described in Chapter One of this Memoir.

Then I stated that the final manifestation of prejudice is Genocide, defined by Amnesty
International as systematic persecution, leading to the eventual elimination of a group of
people by the government, based on their race, ethnic origin, culture, and religion. The
greatest and most horrifying genocide was the Holocaust, the genocide of 6 million Jews
by Nazi Germany. After the war, when the world learned about the atrocity of Nazis, the
outcry of humanity was "never again." However, it has been happening in our time,
including the Genocide of the Baha'is in Iran by the present regime. I cited that based on
the documents gathered from the government authorities, there had been a policy for the
total elimination of the Baha'is in Iran. It started first with the arrest, imprisonment, and
execution of the prominent Baha'is and members of the governing bodies – to eliminate
the leadership of the community. Then, economic sanction, by firing the Bahai's from their
jobs, discontinuing their pensions, closing their business and confiscating their properties.

They destroyed Baha'i cemeteries and Baha'i Holy places, then banned the Baha'i
community from holding administrative and religious meetings – elimination of their right to
worship. Recently, they prevented the Baha'i children and youth from attending school and
colleges – elimination of their right to education. They were now removing some of the
Baha'i children from their homes and placing them with the Muslim families – elimination

of their right to family units.

The focus of the training was on ways to prevent the progression of prejudicial acts. It encouraged the participants to be responsible for stopping the prejudice and becoming a Diversity Change Agent. Sharing a famous quote by-- Martin Niemoeller, a Pastor of the German Evangelical (Lutheran) Church. He was a Holocaust survivor, who advocated personal responsibility. He said:

‘In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I did not speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak up because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak up because I was not a Catholic. Then they came for me... and by that time, there was no one to speak up for anyone.’
First, they came ... - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came

Therefore, as an Agent of Change, we should strive to eliminate prejudice. We would need to go beyond the standard stereotypes, believing that prejudice is caused by ignorance since there are educated people, who are prejudiced. We would need training:

• To develop self-awareness
• To consciously modify the biased beliefs and behaviors
• To develop empathy towards people who are different from us. To believe that they have the same basic human needs and aspirations
• To respect and accept the differences of others.
• To view the diverse people like the flowers of one garden, that their different colors and shapes are beautifying and enriching the world of humanity.

The impact of the training was quite visible. Participants’ feedback indicated that the discussion and interactions helped them to take steps towards becoming a diversity change agent. I had a few trainees who came to me after the class and told me that they were going to find out more about the Baha’i teachings. A Palestinian Social worker invited my family and other Baha’i friends to his house for dinner. We started discussing the Faith,

and he wanted to become a Baha'i. I informed the National Office, as he was from the
Middle East. He eventually became a Baha'i.

I was invited to conduct this training in different organizations including Pomona College,
and the Baha'i Club of the University of Southern California, Riverside.

"CalWORKs: Greater Avenues for Independence" (GAIN)

After I established successful training for Social Services, I was assigned to take over the
training for the GAIN Division. GAIN was a Welfare to Work program, created under the
W.H. Bush administration.

The Riverside County DPSS Website states: 'This division assists applicants and recipients
of CalWORKs temporary assistance to become self-sufficient. Adults who receive
CalWORKs temporary assistance and have the ability to work are registered with GAIN
when their aid is provided.'

In addition to the existing training program, I invited the consultants under the federal grant
to offer in-service training for the entire GAIN staff, its managers, and supervisors. I also
invited outside agencies to participate. The most notable trainers were from the GOALS
Program, which was developed by the Foundation for Self Esteem. Jack Canfield, its
President, was a member of the "California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem," and a
well-known motivational speaker. The GOALS Program was a series of training for GAIN
participants (clients), to make a successful transition from being a welfare recipient to
gainful employment. Through GOALS Program, I was introduced to Jack Canfield and the
Self Development movement in California.

The GAIN Program achieved national recognition and was the winner of the Innovations in
American Government Awards Program. President W. H. Bush came to the GAIN Office in
Riverside for the award ceremony. All the managers and staff were invited to attend except
me. The Director assigned my responsibility of videotaping the ceremony to another
colleague. Many GAIN managers and supervisors were disappointed and unhappy

about
this exclusion. They told me that the decision was based on my being an Iranian, a threat
to the security.

Although I was disappointed, I tried to accept life with Radiant Acquiescence:

‘The afflictions which come to humanity sometimes tend to center the consciousness
upon the limitations. This is a veritable prison. The release comes by making of the
will a door through which the confirmations of the spirit come. They come to a man
or woman who accepts his life with Radiant Acquiescence.’

Reported to have said in: 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy - Baha'i Library - bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_divine_philosophy

Self-Empowerment Program – Teaching People with Capacity

When coordinating a Statewide GAIN conference, I invited Jack Canfield as the keynote
speaker. His talk on the Principles of Success led me to explore the popular self-
development movement in California. I attended the seminars of several motivational
speakers and obtained their self-help audio-visual materials. I realized that there were

thousands of people who were following these leaders to help them overcome their life
challenges and achieve self-empowerment. So, I made it my mission to develop a program
which reflected the Baha’i principles and teachings on self-development. The result was
writing an unpublished book on “Empowering Your True Self.” I also conducted workshops
on that theme in a number of Baha’i communities, for their teaching and proclamation
campaigns. The highlights of the program are as follows:

Self Empowerment Workshop
Course Outline:

- Introducing the principles of Self Empowerment as described by the experts in the field
of Self Development:

? Learning the concept - When we spend time and energy in resenting other people
and responding to anger, the object of our anger and resentment will end up

controlling our behavior and emotions. We get distracted from our goals and process
of growth. We should take back our power by forgiving and letting go…

? Practicing the process of moving from “Being the Victim” to the “Empowered Self,”
by:
? Making the right choices
? Taking control of your life - taking ownership of your feelings
? Changing what needs to be changed, Act,” and move on . . .

- Continue the journey of Self-Discovery, by advancing into the spiritual world, guided by
the Baha’i Teachings, based on the following principles:
‘Man has two powers and his development two aspects, one power is connected with the material world, and by it, he is capable of material advancement. The other power is spiritual, and through its development, his inner potential nature is awakened.’

‘Nobility is the true station of man. Spiritual progress is the advance toward
this.’
~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
The Promulgation of Universal Peace - Bahai reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/pup-24.html

Empowering Your True Self - A Baha’i Perspective

Self Empowerment is treading the path of spiritual discovery. A journey from the lower self
to the higher self.

- Our lower nature has been programmed to reach for the material world, in order to
nurture us, protect us and help us to survive. Attachment to this world may bring us pain
and unhappiness.

- Our higher nature is continuously striving to approach God to attain the everlasting life.
Living in the spiritual world brings us perpetual joy. The divine teachings of Baha’u’llah
reveal the mysteries of the Higher Source. They enlighten us to receive the gift of holy
attributes, such as truthfulness, love, fidelity, compassion, and forgiveness. We receive
the gift of spiritual qualities through God’s mercy.

‘Through volition, man can achieve what God prescribed as a preordained measure in all men by God.’
~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The purpose of our life on earth | The Baha'i Faith
https://bahaifaithbeliefs.wordpress.com/home/the-life-of-the-soul/...

As the spiritual world is perfect, and we are not, we should strive daily to overcome
challenges through our volition and action.

‘Strive, then, that thou mayest forsake the path of illusion and imitation and gain
admittance into the realm of inner vision and the kingdom of spiritual discoveries.’

~ Bahá’u’lláh

Days of Remembrance | Bahá’í Reference Library
https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/days...

We transform the holy attributes by volition, then reflect it through the virtuous acts.
For example, an acorn transforms into a tree by its volition. Then, the tree bears fruit
through its action. The tree achieves perfection when its fruits are ripe. The fruit of our
faith is our action.
‘Regard thou faith as a tree. Its fruits, leaves, boughs and branches are, and have
ever been, trustworthiness, truthfulness, uprightness, and forbearance.”

~ Bahá’u’lláh

Trustworthiness - Baha'i Library

bahai-library.com/compilation_trustworthiness

‘In brief, let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of
the world of humanity. Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity.
Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Bahá’í.”

~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Promulgation of Universal Peace - Baha'i Reference Library

reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/pup-133.html

Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to guide us through our journey

‘I myself was in prison forty years -- one year alone would have been impossible to
bear -- nobody survived that imprisonment more than a year! But thank God, during all those forty years I was supremely happy!

Every day, on waking, it was like hearing good tidings, and every night infinite joy
was mine. Spirituality was my comfort, and turning to God was my greatest joy. If
this had not been so, do you think it possible that I could have lived through those
forty years in prison?'

'Thus, spirituality is the greatest of God's gifts, and "Life Everlasting' means
"Turning to God." May you, one and all, increase daily in spirituality, may you be
strengthened in all goodness, may you be helped more and more by the Divine
consolation, be made free by the Holy Spirit of God, and may the power of the
Heavenly Kingdom live and work among you.'
'The progress and development of the soul, the joy, and sorrow of the soul are
independent from the body. Thus, when the spirit is fed with holy virtues, then is the
body joyous; if the soul falls into sin, the body is in torment.'

'When we find truth, fidelity, and love we are happy; but if we meet with lying,
faithlessness and deceit, we are miserable.'

'Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will come
when it shall rise a glorious tree and branches thereof shall be laden with fruit.
Rejoice and be glad that this day has dawned, try to realize His power, for it is indeed
wonderful! God has crowned you with honor and in your hearts, has he set a radiant
star; verily thereof shall brighten the whole world.'

Bahá'í Reference Library - Paris Talks, Pages 109-112
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PT/pt-35.html

How do we attain this station? What are the means to obtain these merciful gifts?
'Abdu'l-Bahá shows us the steps:

Step 1. Through Knowledge of God

Step 2. Through Love of God

Step 3. Through Faith

Step 5. Through Service

Step 6. Through Self-Sacrifice

Step 7. Through Severance from this material world

Step 8. Through Sanctity and holiness

‘By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence.’

~~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
Soul, Life of the - Baha'i Library
bahai-library.com/warwick_life_soul

Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to guide us:

‘Let us, like candles burn away; as moths, let us scorch our wings; as the field larks, vent our plaintive cries; as the Nightingales, burst forth in lamentations. Even as the clouds let us shed tears, and as the lightning flashes let us laugh out our coursing through east and west. By day, by night, let us think but spreading the sweet savors of God. Let us not keep on forever with our fancies and illusions with our analyzing and interpreting and circulating of complex dubieties. Let us put aside all thoughts of self; let us close our eyes to all on earth, let us neither make known our sufferings nor complain of our wrongs. Rather let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the bounty of all glorious.’

‘Verily the most necessary thing is contentment under all circumstances; by this, one is preserved from morbid conditions and lassitude.

Yield not to grief and sorrow; they cause the greatest misery. Jealousy consumeth
the body and anger doth burn the liver; avoid this as you would avoid a lion’

‘If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and
overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love
for My manifest and resplendent Cause.’

‘Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future!’

Bahá'í Reference Library - Selections From the Writings of ...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-196.html

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Stress Management Training Program – Teaching People with Capacity

As I was given the responsibility of managing all the Federal and State Mandated training,
I recommended to establish an Administrative Training Program, to address the Department’s Human Resources compliance to Safety in the Workplace, Sexual Harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity, Civil Rights and Customer Service. It entailed training of the entire DPSS employees, from the director to the managers,
supervisors, professional, administrative, and clerical staff. I was training close to 1000
trainees per year, and all my training programs were subjected to the external audits by the
State and Federal agencies. Most participants historically resented attending these
mandated training and showed their dislike by not being engaged in the discussions. So, I
tried to use a different approach. I based my training on the nationally known training
packages which were interactive, using video vignettes, small group exercises, and role-
playing. In a non-judgmental environment, the participants were learning by doing, rather
than a lecture.

I developed training on managing stress: To enhance self-awareness and develop skills to
deal with stressful situations. To exert self-control and make the right choices while facing
a crisis. They learned about their own personality traits and temperament in handling
difficult people. I also integrated relaxation techniques, such as deep

breathing and stretch
up exercises. In one of the staff meetings, my manager announced that there was an
external survey about the Staff Development training, and all the employees mentioned

Shahla's training as their favorite. They described the training productive and fun, which
addressed their personal development and empowerment while teaching the policies and
regulations. In another external survey, for the first time in history, DPSS clients, ranked
their interaction with the DPSS frontline staff, as satisfactory and humane.

I offered a Baha'i workshop on stress management, relaxation, and meditation, free to the
public. The following pages are part of its PowerPoint presentation:

O God! Refresh and
gladden my spirit.
Purify my heart. Illumine my
powers. I lay all my affairs
in Thy hand. Thou art my
Guide and my Refuge. I will
no longer be sorrowful and
grieved; I will be a happy and joyful
being. O God! I will no longer be full of
anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass
me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant
things of life.
O God! Thou art more friend to me
than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to
Thee, O Lord.

- Baha'i prayer
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/BP/bp-127.html

Refresh and gladden my spirit.
Purify my heart. Illumine my powers
Thought awareness: Helps to observe our
thinking and spot negative thoughts.
Examples of Negative thoughts:
Worries about how you appear to other people
A preoccupation with the symptoms of stress
Dwelling on the consequences of poor
performance
Self-criticism
Feelings of inadequacy

Positive thinking: helps to counter negative thinking, and build self-

confidence. Counter negative thoughts with positive affirmations.
Examples of affirmations:
All is well! I can make it!
I feel the fear and do it anyway!
I am in control of my life!
I learn from my mistakes. I'll do it better next time.
I am a worthwhile and loveable person.
Our "Supreme honour and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves, and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind." - Baha'i Writings
Bahá'í Reference Library - The Secret of Divine ...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SDC/sdc-1.html

I lay all my affairs in Thy hand.
Thou art my Guide and my Refuge

Notice the gifts and lessons in life,
especially in bad situations.
"Verily the most necessary thing is
contentment under all circumstances; by
this one is preserved from morbid conditions
and from lassitude. Yield not to grief and
sorrow: they cause the greatest misery.
Jealousy consumeth the body and anger
doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you
would a lion." – Baha'I Writings
Bahá'í Reference Library - Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era ...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/je/BNE/bne-89.html

"Peace of mind is gained by the centering of the spiritual consciousness on the Prophet of God; therefore you should study the spiritual Teachings, and receive the Water of Life from the Holy Utterances. Then by translating these high ideals into action, your entire character will be changed, and your mind will not only find peace, but your entire being will find joy and enthusiasm."
– Baha'I Writings
Compilation on Change and Importance of Transformation
https://bahai-library.com/change_transformation_bayat

"The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we will search for God, and to serve our fellow-men, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life."
– Baha'I Writings
Lights of Guidance - Bahá'í Library Online
bahai-library.com/hornby_lights_guidan...

I will no longer be sorrowful and
grieved; I will be a happy and
joyful being

Internally Generated Stress & Anxiety

Internally generated stress is stress that
you cause for yourself. This can come from
anxious worrying about events beyond
your control, from a tense, hurried
approach to life, or from relationship
problems caused by your own behavior.

Avoid blaming external forces for feeling bad and
negative thoughts.

Take a positive approach to life
Find a good side to every situation
Make lemonade out of lemon
Develop a vision
Welcome Change, Get out of your Comfort Zone
The unfailing grace of God and the ceaseless endeavour of
human beings and "an indomitable determination" shall
make a visionary idea easy and practicable.
The Secret of Divine Civilization - Google Books Result

O God! I will no longer be full of
anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass
me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant
things of life.

Being in Control:
When you are in control of your life, you
can control the level of stress you face.

Avoid blaming yourself for not being in
control or not doing it right.
Determine what you want and act on it!

PERSONAL GOAL SETTING:

Set SMART Goals

Develop Action Plans

Act as if: And you will become

Persevere
“Everything of importance in this world demands the
close attention of its seeker. The one in pursuit of
anything must undergo difficulties and hardships until
the object in view is attained and the great success is
obtained." – Baha’i Writings

The Universal House of Justice | Bahá’í Writings for ...
https://sadrat.wordpress.com/tag/the-universal-house-of-justice/page/6

Listen to Feedback

Celebrate Your Success

O God! Thou art more friend to me than I
am to myself.
I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord

Reducing Uncertainty and Fear
"Let not the happenings of the world sadden
you. I swear by God! The sea of joy yearneth to
attain your presence, for every good thing hath
been created for you, and will, according to the
needs of the times, be revealed unto you."
-Baha’I Writings
Ridvan 2002 - Baha'i Library
bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_2002

"O my servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this
earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been
ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of
heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy
and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are
destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their
benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their
sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no
doubt, attain." -Baha’I Writings
Bahá'í Reference Library - Gleanings From the Writings of ...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/GWB/gwb-153.html

"This is the time for growing; the season for joyous gathering!
Take the cup of the Testament in thy hand; leap and dance with
ecstasy in the triumphal procession of the Covenant! Lay your
confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence of the
generous God; ask assistance from the Kingdom of Abhá; seek
confirmation from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the
horizon of eternal wealth; and pray for help from the Source of
Mercy!"
-Baha’I Writings
‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá - Baha'i Reference Library
reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/BWF/bwf-40.html

CHAPTER 9

THE HOLY YEAR - CZECHOSLOVAKIA
1992 - 1993

Excerpts from the Ridvan Message of Universal House of Justice:

‘Ridvan 1992 will mark the inception of a Holy Year, during which the Centenary of
the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh will be observed by commemorations around the world,
and the inauguration of His Covenant will be celebrated, in the City of the Covenant,
by the holding of the second Bahá'í World Congress.’

‘The Plan's end will mark the beginning of the Holy Year, 1992- 1993, a conscious
year-long pause to allow His followers to pay befitting regard to the Centenary of the
Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and of the inauguration of His world-unifying Covenant. As
has already been announced, major observances are being planned to reflect the
distinctive character and world-shaking importance of the two occasions.’

‘A year charged with happenings of such sacred import is bound to yield
consequences of unimaginable potency. The immediate outcome is, however,
impossible to predict, nor can it be fruitfully speculated about. Rather should we
direct our thoughts to the meaning of the solemn occasions which this year is set
apart to memorialize. For the purpose of the Holy Year is not fulfilled by public
memorials alone, befitting as they will be. Essential to its purpose is the opportunity
it offers for inner reflection on the part of every Bahá'í individual.’

‘Our very dear brothers and sisters: Witness how the Beloved One has answered
our entreaties. See how He has enriched our lives with new brethren and new
institutions in lands hitherto closed to His healing Word. Consider with what potency
His divine prescriptions are being affirmed as guidelines for the behaviour of nations
large and small. Surely such abounding benedictions have imbued you with
indomitable courage and with confidence to face a challenging but brilliant future.
Indeed, you have embarked on this auspicious year poised for the ultimate triumph
of the Six Year Plan.

May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from
the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care.’
Six-Year Plan, 1986 - Bahá’í Library
bahai-library.com/uhj_six-year_plan_1986

“Bring Thyself to Account”

I studied the message in depth and was tremendously impacted by its following passages:
‘Indeed, this is a special time for a rendezvous of the soul with the Source of its light
and guidance, a time to turn to Bahá'u'lláh, to seek to obtain a deeper appreciation
of His purpose, to renew allegiance to Him. This is a time of retreat to one's innermost being, to the dwelling-place of the Spirit of Bahá, that interior to which He

summons us when He says: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.”

This is a time for recommitment to the Covenant, for rededication to duty, for revitalizing the energy for teaching, the "most meritorious of all deeds.”…’

One night I had a dream, I dreamed that I was called to attend a meeting with Dr. Muhajir.
I knew that my beloved mentor was not in this world and was surprised to see him entering
the room. He was happy to see me and greeted me with open arms. Then he said: “Shahla,
where have you been? I was looking for you for a long time!” I woke up with bittersweet
feelings, trying to interpret this dream. By bringing my life into account, I realized that in my
struggle to overcome personal and professional challenges, I had lost sight of my true self
and life’s mission. Dr. Muhajir reached me from the beyond to put me on the right path.

‘How laudable it would be if, imbued by this desire to blazon abroad His Name, and
as a demonstration of our special love for the Abhá Beauty, we could each of us
mount a personal campaign of teaching, such that the collective force and results of
it throughout the world would bring to a resounding conclusion the sacred exercises
of this Holy Year and set the stage for the launching of the impending Three Year
Plan at Ridván 1993’
‘through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from the inexhaustible
treasury of His love and tender care.’
~ Ridvan Message 1992
Ridván 1992 – To the Bahá’ís of the World | Bahá’í ...
https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal...

A few days later, I had a chance encounter with Neda Amoui, a young Bahá'í who left our community and was pioneering in Czechoslovakia. She has just come back for a short visit and was talking about the wonderful spirit of the young Bahá'ís in that country. She mentioned about the Call of Universal House of Justice for American Bahá'ís to travel-teach in Eastern Europe.

For the next few months, I studied the major objectives and goals of the Six-Year Plan and its subsidiary Plan for Eastern Europe.

History at a Glance
Taken from the Wikipedia
'Czechoslovakia or Czecho-Slovakia[was a sovereign state in Central Europe that existed from October 1918, when it declared its independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, until its peaceful dissolution into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993.
From 1939 to 1945, following its forced division and partial incorporation into Nazi Germany, the state did not de facto exist, but its government-in-exile continued to operate.

From 1948 to 1990, Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet bloc with a command economy. Its economic status was formalized in the membership of Comecon from 1949, and its defense status in the Warsaw Pact of May 1955. A period of political liberalization in 1968, known as the Prague Spring, was forcibly ended when the Soviet Union, assisted by several other Warsaw Pact countries, invaded. In 1989, as Marxist–Leninist governments and communism were ending all over Europe, Czechoslovaks peacefully deposed their government in the Velvet Revolution; state price controls were removed after a period of preparation. In 1993, Czechoslovakia split into the two sovereign states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.'
Czechoslovakia - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia

Bahá'í History in Czechoslovakia
Taken from the website of the Bahá'í Community of Prague:
‚The history of the Bahá'í Faith in Prague dates back as far as the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

The real blossoming of the Bahá'í Community of Prague occurred during the first
Czechoslovak Republic when famous American Bahá'í teacher, Esperantist, and
journalist, Ms. Martha Root, visited Prague for several times and helped establish
and advance a flourishing Bahá'í Community there. The members of the Prague
Bahá'í Community at that time consisted mainly of young active Esperantists. The
most prominent among these first Czech Bahá'ís from Prague were a noted
Esperantist, translator and linguist, Mr. Vuk Echtner, and another Esperantist and
translator, Mrs. Juliana Bendová. Both of them dedicated the whole of their long
lives to valuable and admirable services to the development of the Bahá'í Faith in
Prague and Czechoslovakia.

Martha Root was granted official audiences with the first Presidents of
Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and Edvard Beneš, at the Prague Castle
in 1928 and 1936 respectively. During the audiences, both Presidents made very
admiring statements on the Bahá'í Faith which appeared in the leading international
Bahá'í magazines in the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1932, Martha Root settled in Prague for 18 months. Because of Martha's
presence in Prague and the 1932 release of the Czech edition of the well-known
Esslemont's book "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era," a number of articles on the
Bahá'í Faith appeared in Czech magazines and newspapers.
During the Nazi occupation between 1939 and 1945, all activities of the Czech
Bahá'í community were ceased.

A renewal and further development of the activities of the Bahá'í community of
Prague started after the Second World War. During the tough Communist regime in
the early 1950s, the Bahá'í community of Prague (approx. 20 to 30 people) was
enlarging. There were held regular meetings of the community, and the Czech

Bahá'ís were visited by several Bahá'í friends from abroad. The public activity of the
Bahá'í community was not then, unlike other religious communities in
Czechoslovakia, officially banned. In the latter part of the 1950s, the teaching activity
of the Prague Bahá'í community started spreading even to other relatively far-off
parts of the Czech lands, namely to the north of Moravia in the Ostrava region.
Juliana Bendová and Vuk Echtner were the chief organizers of these activities.

At
that time, the Prague Bahá'ís even asked the Communist authorities for an official
registration as "The Spiritual Assembly Bahá'í" and for an allocation of a place for
regular meetings.

These active steps towards official recognition excited the oppressive measures of
the Communist authorities and actual cessation of Bahá'í activities in
Czechoslovakia for the long 31 years. The members of the Prague Bahá'í
community were arrested by the Communist Secret Police (9 July 1958). The police
made perquisition in their homes. The Bahá'ís including Vuk Echtner and Juliana
Bendová were tried in a mock trial (25 September 1958) for their participation in "the
banned religious sect Bahá'í" that was connected to "hostile foreign capitalist
countries." Vuk Echtner was sentenced to a three-and-half-year imprisonment. He
was released after two years. Juliana Bendová and other Bahá'ís were not
sentenced to prison but were under constant police surveillance until the end of the
Communist rule in 1989.

At the turn of 1989 and 1990, the first Bahá'í groups from abroad came to
Czechoslovakia to establish and re-establish Bahá'í communities here. It was the
beginning of ordinary work of the Bahá'í community in Czechoslovakia and in
Prague.

In June 1990, the Bahá'ís of Prague elected the first Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly
of Prague which thus became the first Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly to be
established in former Czechoslovakia. Since then, this Local Spiritual Assembly has
been administrating the affairs of the Prague Bahá'í Community.
In April 1991, in Prague was elected the first Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly on
the territory of Czechoslovakia. The seat of the National Assembly was in Prague.
In 1993, after the break-up of Czechoslovakia into two independent states, the
National Spiritual Assembly of Czechoslovakia was renamed The Regional Spiritual
Assembly of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. The seat of the Regional
Assembly was in Prague.'

https://praha.bahai.cz/information-in-english

Mounting My Personal Campaign and Teaching Plan

I contacted the National Pioneering Office and offered to go to Czechoslovakia, for the month of October. I planned my trip based on the following excerpts from the Universal House of Justice Messages:

‘Be alert to opportunities for international collaboration with other Bahá'í communities in the promotion of the Faith through: border teaching projects; the sending of travelling teachers; and the teaching of special groups such as those temporarily abroad for study or work, particularly those from countries which are difficult of access, such as China or countries in Eastern Europe

- Foster association with organizations, prominent persons and those in authority concerning the promotion of peace, world order, and allied objectives, with a view to offering the Bahá'í teachings and insights regarding current problems and thought.’

Six-Year Plan, 1986 - Bahá'í Library Online
bahai-library.com/uhj_six-year_plan_1986

To reach this objective, I informed the management of GAIN Program, that I was invited by the Bahá’í community of Czechoslovakia to visit that country and would like to contact their Ministry to offer my services and learn about their program. They approved my working vacation, and I left for my trip on the last day of September. As there was no direct flight to Prague, I had a stopover in London to have a connecting flight and obtain a tourist visa for Czechoslovakia. I was told by the British authorities that I would be granted a visa upon my arrival at Prague airport. My overnight stay in London gave me the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the resting place of the Guardian and pray for Divine confirmation.

Prague
Taken from Wikipedia/Prague
‘Prague has been a political, cultural, and economic centre of central Europe

with
waxing and waning fortunes during its history. Founded during the Romanesque and
flourishing by the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque eras, Prague was the capital
of the kingdom of Bohemia and the main residence of several Holy Roman
Emperors, most notably of Charles IV (r. 1346–1378). It was an important city to the
Habsburg Monarchy and its Austro-Hungarian Empire. The city played major roles
in the Bohemian and Protestant Reformation, the Thirty Years' War, and in 20th-
century history as the capital of Czechoslovakia, during both World Wars and the
post-war Communist era.
Prague is home to a number of famous cultural attractions, many of which survived
the violence and destruction of 20th-century Europe. Main attractions include the
Prague Castle, the Charles Bridge, Old Town Square with the Prague astronomical
clock, the Jewish Quarter, Petrín hill and Vyšehrad. Since 1992, the extensive
historic centre of Prague has been included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage
Sites.'
Prague – Angloville
https://angloville.com/portfolio.../prague/

I arrived in Prague on October 1st and received a tourist visa at the airport. It was my first
experience in an Eastern European country, which was transitioning from the Communist
block to the Western European society. My first challenge was the language. The majority
of Czechs did not know English, and their Slavic language and alphabet were different from
the Latin-driven languages. As all the signs were written only in Czech, I frequently got lost
in the airports, train stations, and streets.

I was welcomed by Nikan, a dear Iranian pioneer, and her Norwegian husband. They drove
me to their house through the beautiful and historic streets of Prague. Their apartment
building was from the pre-World War II period. They had a one-bedroom apartment and a
small office on the top floor which was given to me. I felt transported in time to the Ann
Frank annex described in her memoir.

I learned that Nika was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Golmohammadi, the caretakers of the
Shrine of Baha'u'llah. She was an opera singer, with the famous Conservatoire of Prague.
As there were not any family who could accommodate me, she was kind to let me stay with
her for one month. As she knew English and Czech, she offered to be my interpreter for
contacting government officials. She arranged quite a few meetings at her house for me to
meet the Bahá'ís in Prague.

I found out that under the Supplemental Teaching Plan of the Universal House of Justice,
a group of youth from Iran and Scandinavian countries pioneered to different cities in
Czechoslovakia, learned the language and started a teaching campaign. As a result, a
large number of youths embraced the Faith. In fact, most of the members of Institutions,
including the Auxiliary Boards and Assembly members were in their 20's. They were eager
to have an in-depth knowledge of the Faith. So, every new believer was encouraged to
study at least two Bahá'í books, including the Book of Certitude. It brought back the memory
of my Bahá'í declaration process in Iran.

I met with the members of National Spiritual Assembly and developed an itinerary for
visiting major Bahá'í communities in the Czech territory. We consulted on a plan to contact
Social Service organizations and authorities to foster recognition of the Faith, "with a view
to offering the Bahá'í teachings and insights regarding current problems and thought."
The National Assembly members provided me with the Bahá'í literature in Czech, for
presentation to the officials. They helped with organizing my hotel booking in the cities that
I visited. They also assigned a volunteer guide and interpreter for each location. The
following report is a summary of my professional visit which was submitted to the
management of the Riverside County GAIN Division:

Journey to Czechoslovakia
'Last October I accepted an invitation from the Bahá'í Community of

Czechoslovakia to be a guest speaker in their country. In my journey to Prague, I
made contacts with the Social Services agencies and professionals; to exchange
ideas and learn more about this nation's emergence into the free world. My first
contact was with the president of the Social Workers Association and a professor of
Social Work at King Charles University. She arranged for my visit to the "Home for

the Aged," where she was recently assigned as the director -- I have made a video
of their program and would be happy to share it with the Adult Services staff.

In our meeting, I learned that Czechoslovakia used to have a sophisticated social
services program before the Communist invasion. But when Socialist regime took
over, they failed to see a need for this profession. Therefore, they decided to abolish
Schools of Social Works altogether. At this time, most of the professional Social
Workers are either from the old school, or just returned from other free countries.
In the past, the Communist regime, for more than forty years, exerted total control
over its citizens; their thoughts, their properties, their income, and their labor. In
return, the government provided all the social resources for people, including;
employment, housing, and education. This approach created a dependency
mentality -- The government as the benevolent father, looking after its subjects, and
releasing them from the toil of handling their own personal affairs.
The transformation of the Capitalist world has created another set of problems.
Because of the present democratic government believes that people are free to
handle their own affairs without intervention from the government. This new
approach is extremely frustrating for a handful of professionals who are trying to
create a new social order. These professionals are constantly juggling between
persuading the government to act more responsibly for the welfare of people in one
hand and in the other, educating people to assume a more active role in determining
their future.
I also worked with the officials of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
In my initial
meeting with the Director of Employment Services, and that of the Vocational
Counseling and Retraining Department, I told them about the success of the
Riverside GAIN and training programs that we offered. Later, I was invited to

visit
the National Center for Retraining (Job Club) -- I have made a video of this visit to
share with our GAIN staff. In my last week in Prague, the Ministry arranged for all
the managers of the nation's regional Job Clubs Counselors, Program Managers,
and Training staff, to attend training that I conducted on "Motivating the Unemployed."
After I was introduced to the participants, I quickly realized that none of the
participants knew English. Also, as they came from different regions and disciplines,
they had little in common. They were also expecting to receive a formal academic
lecture. My interpreter helped to overcome the first barrier. I conducted the session
by first facilitating individual and group exercises that helped participants to accept
the concept of "learning by doing," "relating and sharing," and having lots of fun in
the process.
I also realized that some viewed the unemployed, as lazy, unmotivated and
manipulative individuals. The therapists also believed that most of their clients were
"sick," and in need of therapy. Therefore, they could not look for employment until
they became "whole" again. I took time to share with them the GAIN approach in

working with the clients, considering them as the "participants"; expounding on the
Agency's philosophy of "having a positive opinion of people"; believing that
everyone is "capable and lovable"; and all are "motivated to work." I told them that
our GAIN staff sees their role as the enablers, supporters, and trainers. That They
help the "participants" in believing in themselves, in gathering the courage to set
personal goals, in taking risks, setting objectives and achieving their employment
goals.
In closing remarks, the Director, summed up the reaction of participants by stating
that; they have had quite a few English, Danish, and American trainers, but this was
the first, that they felt they learned some practical tools that they could take back
with them and use it with their clients. This compliment was worth as much to

me,
as the bouquet of Orchids that she presented to me on behalf of the Ministry.'
In my last visit, the Minister asked me how much I would charge for my training. I responded
that it was a service that I offered as a member of the Bahá'í Faith. He insisted that I accept
a gratuity. I suggested a letter of appreciation for my service to the Director of DPSS would
be sufficient. After my return, I received a call from the Office of the Director to let me know
that the Director was quite surprised to receive a letter on letterhead in a foreign language.
It was an official statement of appreciation from the Minister. As the Director had no idea
about this visit, he sent the editor of his monthly newsletter to interview and then, publish
the report of my journey to Czechoslovakia.

It was my understanding that the Bahá'ís in Prague made follow-up contacts with the same
officials and professionals that I visited.

The Olomouc Travel Teaching

Olomouc in central Moravia was one the largest and most beautiful cities in the Czech
Territory. In addition to its significant historic sites, it was also a center of education and
the home to Palacký, one of the oldest universities in the Czech territory.

I attended their Birth of the Bab Celebration and met with a young and vibrant Bahá'í
community. They told me that the Faith started to flourish among the university students in
1991. Within one year, they formed a Bahá'í Club and were granted an office location by
the university to hold their activities. The Bahá'í Faith was also offered as a university
course, with the hope of establishing a Bahá'í Chair soon.

The Townshend International School

When I was in Prague, I met a young Bahá'í, who was having her Year of Service as a
youth counselor in Townsend International School. When she learned that I was offering a
workshop on self-esteem and empowerment, she expressed the need for having such
training in school. As it would benefit the students as much as the youth counselors. I felt

great sympathy for them, as my son Faran went to the Maxwell Bahá'í International School

when he was 11 years old. I accepted the offer, and she contacted the school and made
arrangement for my visit.

'Townshend International School is a private, Bahá'í-inspired non-profit International school located in Hluboká mad Vltavou in the Czech Republic. Founded in 1992, the school draws some 140 students from approximately 30 countries each year. The school uses the Cambridge curriculum at all grade levels
from Kindergarten through secondary school and is recognized as Cambridge International Examination Centre. The school is named after the Irish scholar and
humanist George Townshend, who was a Hand of the Cause of God in the Bahá'í Faith. Boarding students reside in one of two dormitories.
(From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)
Townshend International School - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Townshend_International_School

I took a train to Ceské Budejovice, in the South Bohemian Region of the Czech territory
and met a few Bahai's in that city. Then, I was picked up by one of the staff of George
Townsend School and taken to school in Hluboká nad Vltavou, a historical and beautiful
city. The school campus was set in the forested mountains bordering Austria. It reminded
me of scenes from the Sound of Music movie.

Most of the 30 students were Czechs. The majority were boarders and a few, day students
from nearby towns. When I was introduced to their House Parents, the couple told me that
they were in Maxwell International School when my son Faran was there. They reminisce
about Faran's time in their dorm which was valuable to me.

My time with the young students was precious. I conducted interactive workshops for them
on Self Esteem. I also had a few sessions with the young counselors to enhance their
counseling skills. During my daily interaction with younger students, I noticed how much
they were missing their mothers. So, I tried to fill the gap for a few days. On the last day of
my stay, I made a trip to Hluboká and bought some famous Czech pastries as a treat for

them. That evening, they held a farewell party for me. It started with a candlelight musical
devotional, then pastries for refreshment. It was followed by moving remarks about my visit.
I was presented with a bouquet of orchids from the school and a surprise gift from the
students and counselors; it was a Crystal vase which they purchased with their own money.
I was so touched by this gesture that I hugged and thanked each one of them individually.

Karlovy Vary – Karlsbad

On my return trip to Prague, I made a stopover at Karlovy Vary and took a day tour of its
healing mineral springs. I heard from the Bahá'í friends that Shoghi Effendi spent some
time in Karlsbad during his retreat. So, I made sure to visit that city.

Karlsbad – Charles Bath, was founded by Charles IV in the 14 th Century, who discovered
the Thermal springs while hunting. When Charles treated his bad legs by bathing in the

mineral water springs, it became a favorite spa for European aristocrats.

My tour guide explained the healing power of drinking from 13 sources of mineral springs,
each with special properties to treat different ailments. The patients came for a prescribed
course of treatment and were under the supervision of medical staff. The holistic approach
also included daily baths in hot springs. The patients were encouraged to take a stroll along
the river, under the canopy of tall and ancient trees. While walking on this path, I could
imagine the beloved Guardian, in this serene and healing environment, breathing the air
that I was breathing. I was rejuvenated by this experience.

The Train to Hungary

A few days after my return, Nika, my host informed me that the main water pipe to her
apartment was broken and since she did not know when it would be fixed, we needed to
vacate the house. We went to her brother who was married to a Czech. During dinner, they
told me about a popular joke: a man wanted to buy a Skoda, the only manufactured Czech

car. The waiting list to get the vehicle was 2 years. So, they gave him February 6th, in 2 years, as a date to pick up his new car. The buyer looked at his calendar and said, that would be impossible, as his plumber was scheduled to come and fix his pipes on that day.

It was a hint that Nika's apartment would not be livable for a long time. The hotels in Prague were quite expensive. So I tried to find another accommodation. Just by coincidence, I learned that Neda was back from California and was staying with a friend. When I called her, she came and took me to her friend's small apartment. When consulting about a plan for the next week, We decided to make a trip to Hungary. Neda called the friends in Budapest and arranged for them to pick us up from the train station. We purchased first class tickets and boarded the overnight train to Hungary. To be safe, we got the whole compartment to ourselves and locked the door. We settled down and got ready to spend a luxurious night in our comfortable sleeper beds. In the evening, there was a knock on the door, and officers came in to check our documents. Neda had an American passport, and he stamped it without any problem. However, when he checked my New Zealand Passport, he asked for my entry visa to Hungary. His English was not very good, and I tried to explain that I could get a visa upon my arrival at the border, as I had done for Czechoslovakia. He gave me back my passport and left. Late at night, getting ready to sleep, I went to use the restroom. When I opened the door to return to my seat, I saw two officers with their guns pointing at me, waiting to escort me to my compartment. I was not sure what was happening as none of them could speak English. In compartment, I saw two other officers were holding my suitcases. Then their superior came and told me that when traveling by train, I should have obtained my visa prior to entering Hungary. Therefore, I needed to get off the train before the border, go to the nearest city, get a visa and then continue with my trip. At this time the train stopped at a remote train station. We were unceremoniously

escorted off the
train, between two railway tracks, and at a distance from the station. They put our luggage
down and took off immediately. We were still in shock of this unreal situation. It was very
much like a scene from WWII movies. We dragged our luggage to the station, which
consisted of a ticket booth and a few wooden benches. The ticket agent did not know
English, a police officer was there and tried to communicate with Neda who knew their
language a bit. They said the closest city was Storvos, which was an hour from the station

and there was no taxi until morning. We did not feel safe to stay, realizing if something
happened, we would disappear, and no one would find our bodies. So, we decided to forget
about going to Hungary and take a train to Bratislava. We had one hour to wait for the train
to arrive. So, we went to have a cup of much-needed coffee in the Station's cafe. It was a
smoke filled room packed with men from surrounding villages. They all stopped talking,
observing these two strangers. The only female was the bartender. It was evident that they
served only local beer and alcoholic beverages. However, she begrudgingly poured us two
cups of coffee. It was the local brew which was three quarter coffee grounds and the rest,
a very strong and bitter liquid. After a few sips, we decided to leave and wait on the bench
outside. There, we prayed for protection and for arriving at a safe destination. When I
recently watched the videotape of that evening, I noticed that both of us were nervously
chuckling and telling each other that it was God's will for not going on a sightseeing tour to
Hungary. A sign to follow His path and serve in Slovakia. Not knowing at that time that the
most successful part of my trip happened at this juncture.

Bratislava

'Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, is set along the Danube River by the border with
Austria and Hungary. It's surrounded by vineyards and the Little Carpathian
Mountains, crisscrossed with forested hiking and cycling trails. The

pedestrian-only,
18th-century old town is known for its lively bars and cafes. Perched atop a hill, the
reconstructed Bratislava Castle overlooks old town and the Danube.'
Bratislava - Wikipedia https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bratislava

We arrived at Bratislava at midnight and to be safe, instructed the taxi driver to take us to
the best hotel in the city. He took us to a posh hotel and carried our bag to the crowded
lobby. The guest service manager told us that all the rooms are booked for a conference,
and the only available suite would be $350.00 per night. The taxi driver took us to a few
nearby hotels, but none of them had any vacancy. Finally, he told us that he could take us
to a safe and reasonable hotel. He assured us that he knew the manager and would vouch
for our safety. We accepted his recommendation and finally, in the early hours of the
morning we were able to check into our room trying to have some needed sleep.

Our trip to the capital city of Slovakia was just a few months before its separation from the
Czech Republic. The spirit of independence filled the heart of Slovakians including the
young Bahá'ís. They were eager to prove that they could carry on the administrative tasks
and teaching activities without the help of the pioneers and the Czech Bahá'ís. We met at
Farah Imani's home, an Iranian pioneer, and had a lively consultation with the Bahá'í
community. Neda was a close friend of Farah Imani and Farzbod Sana'i. They were both
long-time pioneers in Slovakia, and soon were leaving to let the Slovakian Bahá'ís take
over the administrative and teaching activities. We had a wonderful time with the
community, which was a bit isolated, as there were few visitors who extended their travel
to Bratislava. Therefore, it was God's plan to divert our path to this beautiful and historic
city and their Bahá'í community.

Brno

In our return trip to Prague, we stopped at Brno and stayed with a Bahá'í family for a few
days. Brno is the second largest city after Prague and the capital of the

Margraviate of
Monrovia. I had traveled to Brno a few times before and met with a few pioneers and
Bahais, but never had a chance for a meeting. This time, as they heard from Neda that my
schedule has changed and would be staying in the city, they arranged for a Bahá'í seminar
on Self-Empowerment for the non-Bahá'í university students. It was my first public meeting
on this trip. The participants were quite receptive, and as I learned later, a few of them
embraced the Faith during follow-up meetings with the Bahá'ís. I praised God for granting
His confirmation in that remote train station when I recited the following prayer:

'I beg of Thee, O my God, by Thy most exalted Word which Thou hast ordained as
the Divine Elixir unto all who are in Thy realm, the Elixir through whose potency the
crude metal of human life hath been transmuted into purest gold, O Thou in Whose
hands are both the visible and invisible kingdoms, to ordain that my choice be
conformed to Thy choice and my wish to Thy wish, that I may be entirely content
with that which Thou didst desire, and be wholly satisfied with what Thou didst
destine for me by Thy bounteousness and favor. Potent art Thou to do as Thou
willest. Thou, in very truth, art the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.'

~ Baha'u'llah
https://bahai-library.com/uhj_dutch_prayer_book

A Tribute to Czechoslovakia

My trip to Czechoslovakia was an enriching and memorable experience. At the time of my
visit, the country was like a treasure chest which had been sealed for decades and was
now opened to the world to discover. For a history buff like me, the historic sites in each
city was a lesson to learn and a sight to relish. The natural beauty of the country, the
rivers and forests were majestic and delightful.

I found the Czechs, as proud people who had paid dearly for their independence. It was
evident in my visit to the national memorial site in Lidice, where, in 1942, the Nazi's killed
all the male adults and more than fifty women. They deported the rest of the population to

concentration camps.

In my conversation with the Czechs, they usually compared their country to the United
States and were apologetic for not being as advanced as other western countries. I always
responded that they should look at the positive side; like not having any panhandlers or
homeless people in streets. As everyone had a place to live and an income, which was
provided by the government. They quite enjoyed talking to me after stating this fact.
As the older generation was brought up under the communist regime, they were more
reserved and set in their beliefs. In contrast, the young generation was eager to evolve,
learn and adapt to the new state of mind and the spiritual values of the Bahá'í Faith.

'Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future!
Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will
come when it shall rise a glorious tree and the branches thereof shall be laden with
fruit.' ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'í Reference Library - Paris Talks, Pages 67-68

reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PT/pt-21.html

THE SECOND BAHÁ'Í WORLD CONGRESS
November 1992

Soon after returning from Czechoslovakia, I joined Terry and other Bahá'í friends to go to
New York and participate in the Bahá'í World Congress. In the Ridvan Message of 1990,
the Universal House of Justice, called the Bahá'í around the world to plan for the second
Bahá'í World Congress

'… to celebrate the centennial of the inauguration of the Covenant bequeathed to
posterity by Bahá'u'lláh as the sure means of safeguarding the unity and integrity of
His world-embracing Order. It is to be convened in November 1992 in New York, the
place designated as the City of the Covenant by Him Who is its appointed Center
and Who anticipated that "New York will become a blessed spot from which the call

to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testament of God will go forth to every part
of the world.”…’
Ridván 1990 – To the Bahá’ís of the World | Bahá’í ...
https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal...

The planning for the Congress started in 1990 and continued its progression by the Bahá’í
communities worldwide. Then came to fruition by following the guidance of the Universal
House of Justice in the Ridvan Message of 1991:

‘The World Congress scheduled to be held on 23–26 November 1992 in New York
City, where the beloved Master revealed the implications of His station as the
appointed Center of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh and which He designated as the
City of the Covenant. Throughout the world, Bahá’í communities will hold
appropriate auxiliary events to magnify the Congress’s purpose, which is to
celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh and to
proclaim its aims and unifying power. A corollary to these activities will be the wide
distribution of a statement on Bahá’u’lláh, prepared at our request by the Office of
Public Information, which will serve both as a source of study and inspiration for the
Bahá’ís themselves and as an informative publication for presentation to the public.
In these and other ways the community of the Greatest Name will endeavor to
blazon the Name of Bahá’u’lláh across the globe, to make it a known eminence in
the consciousness of peoples everywhere.’

Ridvan 1991: - Bahá’í Library

bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_1991

Bahá'í World Congress
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

1992: Second Bahá'í World Congress

‘The Second Bahá'í World Congress from November 23–26, 1992 took place in order
to pay homage to the 100th anniversary of the passing of the founder of the Bahá'í
Faith, Bahá'u'lláh. 30,000 Bahá'ís attended the event in the Jacob Javits Center in
New York City, United States, for four days of commemoration in the form of music,

speeches, artistic performances and social gathering.

The Congress participants represented the diversity of the Bahá'ís from over 180 different nations. The purpose of this World Congress was to "celebrate the Centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and to proclaim its aims and unifying power."

Bahá'í World Congress - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá'í_World_Congress

Program

The main sessions of the World Congress took place two hours each day at the Jacob Javits Center.

- Day one concentrated on the recognition of Baha'u'llah as the Promise of All Ages.
- Day two celebrated `Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant. The program highlighted the nature of the Covenant and New York as the City of the Covenant.
- Day three covered some achievements of the Bahá'í community.
- Day four explored humanity's encounter with Bahá'u'lláh as a prelude to the culmination of the Congress, a message from the Universal House of Justice.'

We booked a room at Marriot Marquis, in Union Square, where a group of Bahá'ís from South America was staying. Our room overlooked the Javits Center. There were designated buses that transported the Bahá'í participants from various hotels to Javits Center. It was an exhilarating experience to see the sea of Bahá'ís from every corner of the world pouring into the Congress Hall. On one side of the Center, there was the Hall of Banners, displaying mounted flags, representing Bahá'í communities around the world. Each banner was an exquisite patchwork, six square meters, mounted on a frame. They showed in their unique artwork, the name of the respective country or groups, and a Bahá'í quotation. It demonstrated the dedication and cooperation of many Bahá'ís to create that magnificent representation of their devotion and love for our Beloved Faith. A few of them

chose the quotation: “O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.”

As the Center could not accommodate 35,000 participants, the sessions were held in the morning and repeated in the afternoon. Therefore, participants were allocated to either morning or afternoon programs. There were hosts of other activities to fill our days,

including visiting a magnificent pavilion at the NY Hilton. The exhibit, entitled: Abdul-Baha’s Mission to America”, was a time capsule, filling five ballrooms, to pay homage to Abdul-Baha’s historic visit to the United States. The exhibit was opened by Ruhiyyih Khanum, giving a guided tour to 100 dignitaries, religious leaders, and reporters from around the world.

Thousands of volunteers performed duties for the smooth running of the sessions, making the sacrifice of missing some sessions, to serve.

It was a delight to catch up with some old friends that I have not seen for the past 10 to 20 years. Such as Tony Mantel, Josey Lava, Javanshir Sobhani from the Philippines; Mano Ala’i and a host of Maori Bahá’ís from New Zealand; Jo Ann Gilman, Beverly Brandon, and Beverly March from Cayman; Mrs. Gandomi from Kenya, and others whom I may have seen for the last time in my life.

One of the highlights of the Congress was its magnificent choir and musicians composed of professionals from around the world. When I was in Prague, I heard from my host Nikka that she was invited to join the choir. We also noticed Gina and Russ Garcia, singing in the choir.

In each session, the inspiring Bahá’í songs, music, and rendition of historical events, such as Garden of Ridvan, stirred the souls of participants. Especially when we were asked to accompany their songs, praising Baha’u’llah and his mission. We all simultaneously were on our feet, raising both arms, holding each other’s hands, singing His praises in perfect harmony. The World Congress music is a classic, which has been the favorite of

generations of Bahá'ís for 25 years.

In the evenings, when the Congress was not in session, we were treated with a variety of performances of more than 100 acts from around the world.

The first day of the Congress was a reflection upon the meaning and purpose of the life of Baha'u'llah. The gathering was opened with the soul stirring prayers and musical performances. Judge Nelson, the chair of the US National Assembly, read the message from President George Bush to the Congress. David Dink, the Mayor of New York, addressed the Congress and proclaimed November the 23 rd, as "Bahá'í World Congress Day." Hand of the Cause Ruhiyyih Khanum in her talk announced that the Congress was transmitted by satellite to the World Center and 52 countries around the World. She conveyed love and greetings from the Universal House of Justice, The International Teaching Center, and the Bahá'ís in Holy Land. She stated that "you couldn't put your finger on a map of the world where there are no Bahá'ís." Then, she read the Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Congress. Following is an excerpt from this Message:

'The second World Congress now convened is the mainspring in the launching of worldwide commemorative activities which will promulgate the Covenant as the axis of unity for all humankind and broadcast its qualities for reforming human society. Moreover, through these activities and other extended measures, the community at

all levels—local, national, continental, and international—will exert immense effort to spread across the planet the Name of the World Reformer, Bahá'u'lláh, that hearts may be attracted, and minds illumined.

But we speak of a proclamation which has more to do with deeds than words; and in this regard, we must, everywhere in our world community, attain a new awareness of the urgency of the times and of our sacred duties toward the Promised One of All Ages. A special expectation is therefore invested in you who are attending this focal

event in the City of the Covenant. For these four special days of commemoration,
may you all strive as never before to appreciate more adequately the life-transforming character and unific spirit of the Covenant, and to immediately demonstrate this heightened appreciation in the spiritual attitude you show among
yourselves. May you do this with the resolve that what you practice towards each
other during these few days will henceforth be sustained in your relations with all
others elsewhere. Such active resolution will endow the second World Congress with the radiant power to impress upon the public the incontrovertible fact that the
Bahá'í Faith is a world religion worthy of its claims and, hence, of public recognition

In a Tablet to the Bahá'ís in New York, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed a hope which it is
propitious to recall on this opportune occasion: "I eagerly anticipate the day," He
wrote, "when New York will become a blessed spot from which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testament of God will go forth to every part of
the world.…" Surely, through the auspicious circumstances afforded by this Congress, you will attempt thus to gratify His Spirit in the Abhá Realm, so that from
His retreats on high you may receive the benediction of His abiding good pleasure
and strengthening grace.

In our supplications at His blessed Shrine, we shall entreat Him graciously to secure
and in abundance vouchsafe to the entire community of His dedicated lovers the favors and confirmations of the Lord of the Covenant.'

https://www.bahai.org/.../the-universal-house-of-justice/messages

The gathering was touched by the poignant reminder of much loved friends from Iran, who
were unable to attend the congress. The unwavering message of the Bahá'ís of Iran was
that we must not allow a minute of grief to shadow over the victories brought about by their
sacrifices. The message of contentment to the will of God came in the form of a magnificent
gift of flowers sent to the Congress from the friends in the cradle of the Faith. When baskets
of flowers were brought to the stage, the heavenly voices of the choir were singing "Ya

Baha'u'l Abha!" The flowers remained prominently on stage during the Congress.

David Hoffman, the former member of the Universal House of Justice, gave a powerful talk about Baha'u'llah, the Promise of All Ages. He acknowledged the Hands of the Cause present at the Congress: Ruhiyyih Khanum, Mr. Furutan, and Mr. Varqa.

In culmination, the uplifting music accompanied the "procession of people of the world." It was announced that today, humanity in all its diversity, is representing 2000 races, tribes, and nations of the world. When each tribe and country was called, its representatives entered the Hall, many in their magnificent traditional customs, and joined each other on stage. Then, the narrator, upon completion of the roll call declared: We are the People of the World, reflecting the great transformation of human society to one unified family. At this time, the entire Congress raised on their feet, holding hands, many cries of joy, joined the choir by singing "We are the People of Baha."

The Second Day of the Congress was on the Covenant of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Mr. Banani made the introductions; stating that on stage, there were friends who had the bounty to be present with the Master. Then each told their personal stories. Amatu'l Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, recalled her childhood experience of the Master, visiting her house in Canada. Then she introduced the son of the first Japanese Bahá'í, who retold his story as a child in Oakland, California when he sat on the Master's lap. Mr. Aziz Yazdi, who lived as a child in the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, recalled when he followed the Master to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. The Master, who was aware of his presence, let him enter the Shrine and observe the sublime experience of the Master's pilgrimage.

The next part of the program was to experience historic moments in the development of the Faith through a dramatic vignette. Four American Bahá'ís who met the Master in 1912, each opened their hearts to us and revealed their personal understanding of the power of

the Covenant and obedience to its Center, the Master.

- Juliet Thompson highlighted her time with the Master while painting his portrait. The Master told her, “To keep my words, obey my covenant and ye will be marveled by the results.”

- Louis Gregory gave an emotional account of his life as the son of a slave mother, who became a black activist. How his vision was changed when he met Abdu’l- Baha. When he became a Bahá’í, he left his law practice and became a racial amity worker. In the segregated society of Washington DC, the Master ordered the Bahá’ís to have non-segregated meetings. When attending an all-white luncheon at the Persian Embassy, the Master took Louis by his hand, led him to the head of the table, the place of honor, to the seat beside him. Louis felt that he has been taken to a new height. The Master urged him to become the means whereby the black and white people will close their eyes to the racial differences. The Master introduced him to Miss Louisa Mathews, a British Bahá’í, advising them that interracial marriage is a good way to end prejudice. They were married in the City of Covenant in 1912. It was the time when in 38 States blacks and whites could not travel together. They had a loving and happy marriage.

- Howard MacNutt shared the period of his life when his loyalty to the Center of the Covenant was not firm. How he was able to overcome personal challenges by obeying

Abdu’l- Baha’s command, and by passing the test which was given to him by the Master. He was then rewarded by Abdul-Baha to compile all the talks of the Master in the United States in a book entitled “Promulgation of the Universal Peace.”

- Juliet Thompson completed her presentation by joining Lua Getsinger, to tell the story of Lua, who was trying desperately to stay with the Master, rather than obeying his order to go to California. She deliberately walked barefoot on Poison Ivy to find an

excuse to
stay. However, the Master healed her by asking her to eat a lemon and a pomegranate.
She obeyed the Master, and when he visited her in the evening, he checked her feet
which were healed, and he laughed. The Master rewarded her for her obedience and
appointed Lua as the Herald of the Covenant. He asked her to rise and go to the
gathering downstairs and proclaim the Covent. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then followed Lua to the
first floor and proclaimed New York as the City of Covenant. Later in her life, Lua
traveled to India and pioneered in Egypt where she passed away in her post.

The Day 2 program was culminated by a talk on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, given by Dr. Firuz
Kazemzadeh.

The Third Day of the Congress was devoted to the Victories of the Covenant. Groups of
Persians, Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, New Zealand Maori, and the Americans from
the United States, all appeared on stage, some in their traditional customs, taking turn to
sing the Bahá’í songs in their mother tongues. Then, together, they asked the Congress to
join in, and all singing “We Are the People of Bahá”.

The speakers talked about the Covenant in Action: the Bahá’í communities achieving
Social and Economic projects in their countries. A number of representatives from different
countries talked about their projects which were recognized by the United Nations and
other International Organizations. Prominent among these recognitions was the
persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran, which brought the Faith out of obscurity in national and
international organizations, such as Amnesty International.

The highlight of the day was when the Three Hands of the Cause addressed the Congress.
Mr. Furutan talked about the blessing to witness the victories of the Faith in his life. He
said in his youth when reading the Tablets of Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he believed in
what was revealed but was facing the dilemma on when and how this glorious promise for
the future will be fulfilled. As it was the difficult period for the Bahá’ís, the time of Bahá’í

persecution and martyrdom. He continued that, in 1953, in his worldwide travels to the Bahá'í communities, he realized that many of those promises have been fulfilled. Among them, mass conversion, foretold in a powerful statement by Baha'u'llah in the Tablet of Sultan – revealed to the Shah of Iran. Then, in 1963 election of the Universal House of Justice, when participating in the first Bahá'í World Congress, he witnessed 7,000 Bahá'ís of all races and nationalities attended the gathering. Now, the Cause of Baha'u'llah had spread to 125,000 communities in the world – Based on the Encyclopedia of Britannica.

Mr. Furutan recalled that as a young man, studying at Moscow University, he was banished by the communist regime from Russia and had to go to Iran. In 1930, Shoghi Effendi assured him in a letter that he will be going back to Russia. That he just needed to be patient. Then, in 1954, the Guardian told him that the banner of Baha'u'llah would be raised in Siberia. He waited patiently for 60 years until 1990, when by order of the Universal House of Justice he traveled to Moscow, for the election of its Local Spiritual Assembly. In 1991 the Universal House of Justice ordered him to go back to Moscow for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Mr. Furutan continued that he was thankful for Baha'u'llah to witness the number of Bahá'ís who are attending the World Congress. That all of us have work to do for the future, especially youth. We are obligated to teach the Cause of Baha'u'llah. The Central figures of the Faith are waiting for us to bring about unity to the World. He concluded that when he leaves this world, he will thank God that he lived long enough to witness everything that he had read as a youth in the Bahá'í Tablets.

Mr. Varqa talked about the Master and the Tablet of Divine Plan. That how delighted was the Master to see that his visions have been fulfilled through sacrifices and endeavors of the Bahá'ís. He mentioned that we could not anticipate what would be the

results of this
Congress. In the first Congress, we had half a million of Bahá'ís in the world and 58 National Assemblies. Now, we have more than Five Million Bahá'ís and 150 National Spiritual Assemblies. He encouraged the Bahá'ís to mobilize their resources and through their pioneering and teaching endeavor lead the path to achieve the Lesser Peace.

Ruhiyyih Khanum told the Congress that it was hard to take in so much emotional meanings all at once. She was like a sponge that sucked up all the emotions and did not know what to do with it all. We could absorb what we could and go out from here, with our cups overflowing. Therefore, when we go out and share what it all meant to us, it is important to remember the intimate feelings and experiences of some early believers. She then shared some anecdotes about her mother May Maxwell, Martha Ruth, Marion Jack, and others. Their love, devotion, and dedication to serving the Cause. She asked us when we go back to our communities, we talk about the Congress and the Faith to the public and Mass Media. She suggested that what the Bahá'ís lack was not devotion, love, or financial means. What we lacked was imagination in accepting that:

• It is up to me to live my life and own responsibility for my life
• Who is going to do my work for me and live my life for me in this world?
• Who is going to answer to Baha'u'llah for me?
• I've got to do it myself!

We need to sacrifice for the service to Baha'u'llah and mankind. As the Guardian told her and she was relaying it to us "Your destiny lies in the palm of your hands." She continued that we are all here from different backgrounds, but we are together, eager to teach the glad tidings of Baha'u'llah so that we can be worthy of having heard the name of Baha'u'llah. Marvelous things will happen all over the world through the endeavor of all the Bahá'ís here in the Congress. At the end of the session, the three Hands of the Cause, stood arm in arm on stage, facing the audience, received adulation from the Congress.

Day 4 of the Congress was on Coming Humanity's Encounter with Baha'u'llah.

The facilitator announced that today, we join together, with the audiences around the world,
sharing this historic occasion in celebration of Baha'u'llah's call for the unity of mankind,
and for emblazoning his name across the planet. It will be through a constellation of
communication satellites, placed 22,000 miles in space.

As a demonstration of the unifying power of the revelation of Baha'u'llah, the Congress
exchanged greetings with the Bahá'ís gathered in conferences in every Continent:

- The communication with Western Samoa and Australia brought back loving memories
of the Bahá'ís from that part of the world whom I had met in New Zealand.
The message from King Malietoa Tanumafili II, Samoa's reigning Bahá'í monarch,
filled our heart with pride and joy. The King conveyed his greetings to the Universal
House of Justice and to the Bahá'ís around the world. The king wished that in view of
the current state of human affairs, the world leaders would heed the message of
Baha'u'llah, in order to establish world peace.

- Just returning from Czechoslovakia, the messages from Romania and Russia, moved
me to tears. The speaker from Bucharest, Romania was quite emotional. He mentioned
that "you cannot imagine the thrill of this magical moment for the Bahá'ís of Eastern
Europe, to be deprived of outside contact for 40 years, and suddenly to see the glory of
Baha'u'llah to bring a new dawn to all our land. To see hundreds of countrymen to
respond to his clarion call. To rejoice in the distinction of its first Bahá'í monarch, Queen
Marie, champion the Cause of Baha'u'llah.

- The communications with Nairobi, Kenya, Singapore, and India, took me back to those
continents and the wonderful communities that I visited, and some that became my
home in the bygone years.

- The final satellite transmission was from the Bahá'í World Center when in the presence
of the members of the Universal House of Justice, Dr. Ruhe delivered the Message of

the Supreme Body to the Bahá'ís of the World.

The highlights of the Holy Year and World Congress were best described in the following
excerpt of the Ridvan 150 Message of The Universal House of Justice To the Bahá'ís of
the World:
'Dearly loved Friends,
We have come to the King of Festivals in the undiminished glow of the marvelous
benedictions of the Holy Year through which we have just passed, confirmed,
renewed and energized in our sacred pursuits. For it was a time when the Abhá
Beauty shed upon His worldwide community the radiance of His grace in such
effulgence as to invest with astonishing success the efforts of His followers to

observe so significant a double anniversary as the centenary of His Ascension and
of the inauguration of His Covenant. It was the memorial pause that yielded a
proclamation of the Most Great Name that resounded throughout the earth as never
before; but what was so clearly an external phenomenon was quite markedly a
reflection of an inner attainment to a deeper understanding of our relation to
Bahá'u'lláh than hitherto obtained. The greater appreciation in ourselves of the
universality of the community, of its embodiment of the first and overarching principle
of His Faith, has left a new and compelling impression upon our hearts; the effects
of that awareness were strikingly demonstrated at the commemoration in the Holy
Land last May and more broadly at the World Congress last November, as if to
confirm our assurance in these desperately troubled times that the world of humanity
is moving inexorably towards its as-yet elusive destiny of unity and peace. Indeed,
during the Holy Year, we were transported on the wings of the spirit to a summit
from which we have seen the fast-approaching glory of the Lord's immemorial
promise that all humankind will one day be united."
The thrilling details of the happenings throughout the year are too numerous to
describe here, for the workings of the Holy Spirit were universally felt, imbuing the
activities of the friends with a mysterious force. Let it suffice, then, to recall such
highlights as the gathering last May of the largest number of Bahá'ís to participate
in an event in the Holy Land; the circumambulation of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh by
the representatives of virtually every nation; the presence of the majority of

the living
Knights of Bahá'u'lláh at the time of the depositing of the Roll of Honor at the
entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine; the unprecedented size of the World
Congress and the vast variety of its participants, including a huge body of youth who
engaged in their own auxiliary program; the procession of the representatives of the
races and nations of the world on that spectacular occasion; the satellite broadcast
which linked the Congress and the World Center with all the continents. These were
of a rare category of experience, and they have immortalized the fame of the
centennial commemorations.
The innumerable, imaginative efforts undertaken by the friends around the world,
from remote villages to great cities, in observance of these important anniversaries
illustrated afresh the profound degree to which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has been
consolidated, and they generated the teaching work in many areas, with unusual
and surprising results. The unprecedented publicity accorded the purpose and
activities of the Holy Year through the mass media in large and small countries, the
notice given by legislative bodies and public officials to the centennial, the gestures
of recognition and appreciation of the Faith by governmental agencies, the
involvement of representatives of the Bahá'í International Community in major global
events, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
held in Rio de Janeiro last June, in connection with which a public monument bearing
an inscription from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and a large imprint of the Greatest
Name was dedicated—such developments gave clear indications that the profile of
the community has been raised in the public eye.'
Messages from the Universal House of Justice - Bahá'í Library Online
https://bahai-library.com/uhj_messages_...

CHAPTER 10

Emblazoning the Name of Bahá'u'lláh
1993 - 2001

The participants of the World Congress carried the final remarks of Ruhiyyih Khanum in
their hearts, to focus their attention on the possible future of mankind, which

is the joy and
happiness of all nations. To take the Message of the Universal House of Justice to the
press and to the people of their communities and emblazon the name of Bahá'u'lláh on the
planet. To give assurance that although we may be in darkness and despair, we are
convinced of a glorious distant future. We have no fear of death, as we believe in life after
death and the immortality of the soul. Therefore, if the immediate future is dark, we pray
for the dead, but through our love and courage, we help to establish a glorious future for
the entire humanity.

We pledged to arise and respond to the appeal of the Supreme Body, in the Ridván
Message of 150, as stated:

'Our appeal for immediate, redoubled and sustained action on all aspects of the Plan
is addressed primarily to the individual believer of every locality, who possesses
within himself or herself the measures of initiative that ensure the success of any
global Bahá'í enterprise, and "on whom, in the last resort," as our beloved Guardian
plainly stated, "depends on the fate of the entire community." The goals of the Three
Year Plan will not be easily won, but they must be magnificently achieved, whatever
the sacrifice. There should therefore be no hesitation or delay on the part of
individuals or Spiritual Assemblies in attending to them, lest the problems of
mankind pile up unchecked, or the rise of internal crises slows us down. Let it ever
be borne in mind that we earn our victories through test and trial; we turn crisis to
the advantage of progress by seizing the opportunity it provides to demonstrate the
viability and winning power of our principles. In the onward surge of the Cause of
God, crisis and victory have always alternated and have ever proven to be the staple
of progress. As we savor the triumphs of the Holy Year, let us not forget the reality
of this recurrent experience. Let us also remember that our blessings are equal to
our challenges, as repeatedly shown by our glorious history.

Beloved friends: Do not be dismayed or deterred. Take courage in the security of
God’s law and ordinances. These are the darkest hours before the break of day.
Peace, as promised, will come at night’s end. Press on to meet the dawn.’

https://www.bahai.org/.../messages/19930421_001/1

Corona, California

In 1993, we moved to a new housing development in Corona and soon became the members of the Spiritual Assembly. We joined a community of young Bahá’ís who were
committed to fulfilling their pledge to emblazon the name of Bahá’u’lláh in Corona. We
specifically focused on achieving the main objective of the Six Year Plan, to carry “the
healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind” and to the “greater
involvement of the Faith in the life of human society.”

In 1994, we launched a teaching and proclamation campaign. The first phase was implemented by mailing an invitation packet to the communities where Bahá’í families were
residing. The following pages cover the flier and a summary of the packet:

You Can Make a Difference,
was the title of the next page. It
read:
‘Dear Neighbor, we are the
sum total of choices that we
make in our lives, what we
choose today will take us
where we will be tomorrow! ….
We believe humanity has
reached the age of maturity
and empowerment. Therefore,
when we make choices that
impact our spiritual destiny, we
are entitled to investigate the
truth for ourselves, and not to
walk in the other people’s
shoes …. We invite you to
take a moment and read the
enclosed message (the
proclamation pamphlet:
“Bahá’u’lláh, God’s Messenger
for Humanity”) … Asking you to
contact us for further

information.’

We had a successful workshop, and as the follow-up, we held the second event at my
home. We invited our neighbors and all the contacts from the Self Empowerment Workshop. The invitation read:

It was a well-attended and fun gathering. A dear Bahá’í who just came back from a travel
teaching trip to Russia talked about the Russian Bahá’ís, who were relishing their newly
found freedom to practice their world embracing Faith. It led to a lively discussion about the
Bahá’í beliefs in the oneness of humanity and unity in diversity. The most rewarding
outcome was the declaration of Judy, a wonderful soul who became an active member of
our community.

This campaign opened the door for establishing contact with a larger community in Orange
County, San Bernardino, and Clairmont. I developed friendships with the non-Bahá’í
Iranian community and was interviewed by one the Persian radio stations.

The next phase was annual participation in the Corona Fair. We set up a booth that offered
free bottled water, art workshop, and free Face Painting. As most of our Bahá’í families
such as the Amoui’s, Bethel’s, Vahid’s and Imani’s, had young children, it involved their
entire family. The kids helped with the art workshop; Judy and a few youths helped with the

face painting, and adults engaged the parents who were waiting, in conversation about the
Faith. Instead of a fee for our service, we handed them pamphlets and cold water.

In preparation for the event, each of us bought a T-shirt and on a Saturday morning, took
it to Judy, our new Bahá’í. She taught our junior youth how to screen print the shirts with
the following logo: “I’m a Bahá’í, ask me why.” We wore these shirts during all the teaching
and proclamation activities.

The most endearing teaching story was told by Mr. Amoui, a pleasant elderly gentleman,
who was imprisoned in Iran for being a Bahá’í. When finally released, he

came to Corona
with his wife to live with his daughter Neda. Mr. Amoui did not know a word of English, but
he wore the shirt, and when people asked him “why he was a Bahá’í?” He proudly handed
them the proclamation pamphlet.

Video Presentation on the Holy Land

In 1997, after returning from my pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I held a devotional and video
presentation of my trip for the Bahá’ís and friends. This pilgrimage was a memorable
experience for me, as my daughter Anisa, accompanied me on this trip. I remembered my
1973 visit to Holy Land, when I was 7 months pregnant with her, praying for the safety of
my unborn child at the Holy Shrines.

This pilgrimage took place 30 years after my first visit in 1967. At that time Mr. Furutan
used to tell us, how fortunate we were to have such intimate pilgrimage and the bounty of
having easy access to the Holy Shrines. He recalled the beloved Guardian’s prediction that
in the future, due to a large number of pilgrims, they would only be able to circumambulate
the shrines in procession.

On this trip, I had a glimpse of the future foretold by the Guardian. As the lower terraces to
the Shrine of the Báb was then completed, they opened the gate to the first terrace and
allowed a large number of pilgrims from all over the world, climb the steps of terraces,
leading to Shrine of the Báb. We were fortunate to witness the beauty of the lower terraces
before the completion of the upper terraces and their official opening on May 22, 2001.

The following are excerpts from the Bahá’í World News about the history of the lower
Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb:

‘… Nine rudimentary terraces below the Shrine were constructed in the 1930s, and
throughout the years other parcels of land were purchased until all the necessary
property had been acquired. Extending beyond the immediate area of the Shrine,
the gardens transformed the barren mountain slope into a natural sanctuary in

the
middle of the growing city of Haifa.

The decision in 1987 to complete the gardens and administrative buildings galvanized the millions of Bahá'ís, by then established in more than 150 countries.
In 1990, the latest phase of development commenced, with the construction of the

19 terraces designed by Canadian architect Fariborz Sahba, who has also served as project manager for the complex.

In the face of renewed persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran during this period, the
worldwide community gathered the necessary financial and human resources, and the mountain was reshaped.
The terraced gardens magnify the spiritual significance of the Shrine of the Báb,
who foretold the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

The 19 Terraces represent the Báb and His first followers. The extensive lighting
of the Terraces and of the Shrine itself contrasts dramatically with the conditions in
which the Báb was imprisoned in a remote fortress in northern Iran. Even some of
the flora on the Terraces is deeply symbolic to Bahá'ís. On the ninth terrace, just
below the Shrine, stand two young orange trees that were propagated from seeds
taken from an orange tree in the courtyard of the Báb's house in Shiraz, Iran.'

~ Bahá'í World News Service
The official news source of the worldwide Bahá'í community
ww.beliefnet.com/faiths/bahai/terraces-of-the-shrine-of-the-bab.aspx

The poignant remembrance etched in my heart was that for the last time in this world, I was
able to be in the presence of Ruhiyyih Khanum, Mr. Furutan, and David Hofman.
Mr. Furutan was still inspiring us in the evenings at the Pilgrim House. He recalled the
meeting that I arranged for him in 1969, at UP Diliman in Manilla.

As our pilgrimage coincided with the First Day of Ridvan, we had the privilege of attending
the Ridvan celebration in Bahji. I never forget the awesome experience of taking seats on
the garden paths of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, with all the Hands of the Cause, members of

the Universal House of Justice, and the Bahá'ís residing in Holy Land. David Hofman, the former member of the Universal House of Justice, was present, sitting close to the pilgrims. After the Holy Day program, we followed the procession, led by Ruhiyyih Khanum, to circumambulate the Holy Shrine. Then, we were treated to refreshments, on the tables set on the garden paths close to the shrine. It brought back my childhood memory of the Holy Day celebrations in the National Bahá'í Center in Tehran.

Ridvan celebration in the Garden of Bahji
Second from left: David Hofman, Shahla, Esther Kumo – daughter of Joan, from Kenya

The Unity Fest

A proclamation gathering was held in 1999, to celebrate Naw Ruz and the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Corona Spiritual Assembly. It was a well-publicized event, inviting the public to join us for a Fair at the Park. The organizing committee worked for 3 months setting up and coordinating the program. We had the cooperation of many neighboring Bahá'í communities as far as Rialto and Redland. I partnered with Kerry Korianski, a Bahá'í musician, to facilitate and conduct the program. It was a beautiful day in the park with many artists offering free musical performances, face painting, sketching portraits, and helping to make traditional African stick dolls. The bouncing tent, balloons, hula hooping and other games were popular among the kids. A Bahá'í stand had a banner that read: "You Can Make a Difference! Explore the Solution." There were free barbeque and drinks for everyone, donated by a Bahá'í family who owned a restaurant in a neighboring city.

The program started by welcoming the audience to the Unity Fest and explaining its theme, which was "Uniting the World, One Heart at a Time." Then, we asked anyone who knew a language other than English, to come forward and translate it into their own language. The participants volunteered to translate the theme in Spanish, Portuguese, Chines, Indonesian

and Persian. Each one receiving applause from the crowd. A talk about the Bahá'í Faith
and its spiritual principles emphasized the concept of building a united and sustainable

global community. We highlighted social and community development projects, sponsored
by the Bahá'ís worldwide. Then, elaborated on the role of the Bahá'í Administration and
the national and local Spiritual Assemblies. The program continued with introducing the
Spiritual Assembly of Corona, asking the original members who were no longer residing in
the city, to share stories about the community of the past 20 years.

Different speakers talked about celebrating Naw Ruz and reciting the Bahá'í readings about
the divine springtime. We completed the program by asking the Bahá'í youth and children
share their own poetry and sing Bahá'í songs on unity. We concluded with a prayer for
Unity. It was a well-attended and successful gathering, bringing together many
communities from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties.

The Millennial party

Just before the end of the century, when the Millennial fever of doom and gloom was
spreading and making everyone anxious, we held a Millennial party at my home.
Approximately 40 people participated, including our neighbors. We talked about the joyous
message of Bahá'u'lláh and the New World Order. Then, we had experiential games,
songs, and dinner.

A poignant memory

We heard that a prayer support group was meeting weekly at the hospital. A Chaplain who
was coordinating these sessions was also the Chair of the Interfaith Group. I consulted with
the Assembly on whether we could co-sponsor the program, offering my services as a
volunteer. Frank Vahid, who was both a member of the Assembly and the Interfaith Group,
offered to set up a meeting for me with the Chaplain. In that meeting, I learned that the
Chaplain knew very little about the Faith. So, we had an hour conversation, and then gave
him a copy of "The Divine Art of Living," along with a number of pamphlets

and booklets
for the support group participants. He told me that the prayer support group was quite
informal, and he would be interested in developing a more structured program with my help.
Meanwhile, he would be placing the Bahá'í materials on the "take one" table for the
participants. A few weeks later, I received a voicemail from the Chaplain. He said in the
message that he was studying the book and had a few questions, asking for a meeting to
discuss his inquiries. He sounded genuinely interested to know more about the Faith. I
called him back to set up a meeting, but it went to his voice mail. That evening, we had an
Assembly meeting, and I shared the voice message from the Chaplain. Frank informed us
that the Chaplain and his grandson were involved in a car collision and both did not survive.
We were all saddened by this news and shared our collective thoughts that based on his
phone message, the chaplain may have been traversing in the Valley of Search when his
soul left this earthly abode. We prayed for the progress of his soul to the realms of the
nearness of God.

This Life is but a fleeting Moment

In 2001, I had a dream that once again made me reexamine my life. I dreamed that I was
traveling in the Caribbean when a Bahá'í friend asked me to visit him and pick up a package
from Dr. Muhajir. When I arrived at his house, he handed me a box of Bahá'í books and
said that Dr. Muhajir left this box with my name on it a long time ago. He never thought that
I would be passing by to claim it. I opened one of the books and read the message from
beloved Dr. Muhajir to me. He has written "Shahla, Life is but a fleeting moment!" I woke
up thinking of the following quotations:

'Wert thou to consider this world and realize how fleeting are the things that
pertain unto it, thou wouldst choose to tread no path except the path of
service to the Cause of thy Lord. None would have the power to deter thee
from celebrating His praise, though all men should arise to oppose thee.'

Bahá'í Reference Library - Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/GWB/gwb-144.html

'This handful of days on earth will slip away like shadows and be over. Strive then that God may shed His grace upon you, that you may leave a favorable remembrance in the hearts and on the lips of those to come.'
~~ Abdu'l-Baha
Bahá'í Reference Library - The Secret of Divine ...
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SDC/sdc-6.html

I thought about the events of my life in the past few years. My daughter Anisa was married and my son Faran, after serving with the US Marines, was living in the Netherland. So, once again, Terry and I were free to "pack our chutes" and soar into the horizon of service. God opened the door when I learned that after working for more than 15 years and passing the age of 55, I was able to retire from my job and receive a pension. It coincided with Terry's phone conversation with his brother, who told him that we could live a comfortable life with my retirement income in New Zealand. Soon after, I filed for early retirement and sent out farewell emails to the DPSS staff. I was overwhelmed with the responses from my former trainees, letting me know how I had touched their hearts and impacted their lives. I had a bit of crying in the last few weeks in my office. One of them especially touched my heart by quoting this Irish blessing for the traveler:

'May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back.
May the sunshine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.'

CHAPTER 11

A NEW PATH OF SERVICE
NEW ZEALAND
2002-2004

Initiating a New Path of Service

In January 2002, we moved to New Zealand and made it our home for the next few years, while keeping California as our main residence. At that juncture, my highest aspiration was

to dedicate my knowledge and skills to serve the Faith. For the past decade, I had completed professional training and was certified as a Training Manager, Performance Consultant, and Instructional System Design specialist by some of the largest training companies in the United States. In addition to developing training programs, I created and published close to 20 training manuals for various courses. When I became familiar with the scope of work and training manuals of US Bahá'í Office of the Assembly Development, I had the vision to contribute to the work of that agency. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to go back to New Zealand, I consulted with Terry and decided to offer our services on a voluntary basis, to establish the Office of Assembly Development under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand. I then wrote to the National Assembly and shared our intention to serve in that capacity.

Journey to Wellington

I had fond memories of Wellington from my first stay in New Zealand, its cosmopolitan nature, its scenery, and location. Therefore, this time I consulted with Terry about making Wellington our home. A part of Terry's family lived in Wellington. Thus, he was happy with this plan. When still in Corona, we found a house which was advertised on the internet, in a new housing development in Newlands and arranged to visit it upon our arrival. Meanwhile, we shipped our car and most of our household items to Wellington.

We stayed for 3 weeks in an extended stay hotel in downtown Wellington and became familiar with the city, which has changed considerably within the past 30 years. Angela James, an old friend, was the Secretary of Wellington Assembly and was a great help in taking us around the city and accompanying us to see the house that we were planning to buy. This house was built by its owners as their dream house, but sadly they got divorced before its completion. Now, it became our dream house. It was a two-story house built on

a ridgeline, overlooking Wellington Harbour. On one side we had a panoramic view of
Wellington City and Somes Island, and on another side, the shores of Petone. From my
office, I had a panoramic view of sailing boats racing through the mouth of Wellington
Harbour, and the breath-taking view of sunsets and frequent rainbows. I remember a Bahá'í
friend, once driving to our house and seeing the view, made a remark that she thought she
died and went to heaven. It took us a few months to receive our shipment and set up our
home. During that period, we faced a new challenge of adjusting to the weather conditions
of Wellington, which is known as the windiest city in the world. As our house was sitting on
a ridgeline, it had direct exposure to the constant winds averaging 26 km/h. Also, frequent

Southerly fronts, gusting between 120 to 160 km/h, rocked the house like a ship caught in
a storm. It took us a while to get used to the constant sound of the wind blowing at night.
However, when we had overnight guests, they always remarked about the noise disrupting
their sleep.

Wellington generally has a moderate climate for New Zealand. However, for us who were
used to the dry heat of southern California, it felt pretty cold. For example, when we left Los
Angeles in January, in the winter, the temperature was around 50F. When we arrived in
Wellington a day later, which was summer in Southern Hemisphere, the temperature was
also in the 50's F.

Soon after settling down, the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand asked us to meet
at the National Office in Auckland. Some of the Assembly members were our old friends
from the 1970's. The Secretary was Suzanne Mohan, the daughter of Manoo Alai. We had
a productive consultation on our proposal to establish the Office of Assembly Development
in New Zealand.

After returning to Wellington, we received correspondence from the National Secretary to

let us know that: '… your excellent offer is warmly accepted by NSA, and we think the idea
of an office of LSA Development is a great idea and want you to go ahead as per your
proposal. Please feel free to get started.'

On May 30, 2002, The Assembly Development Office received the following correspondence from the National Spiritual Assembly:

'Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly would like to congratulate you on the proposed plan
contained in your email of 9 May 2002, for an Office of Assembly Development. Your emails
of 24 May and 29 May 2002 are also acknowledged, with thanks.

The excellent offer you have made to offer your services in order to run the Office of
Assembly Development is warmly accepted. In addition to the many aspects of Local
Spiritual Assembly development which are thoroughly covered in the proposal, the National
Spiritual Assembly would like to mention some further considerations. An aspect which we
feel is important to cover in the Programme is how, in practical terms, the Local Spiritual
Assemblies may collaborate with the Auxiliary Board members and their Assistants. Please
also take cognizance of the different cultural approaches towards "Becoming a More
Efficient and Effective Assembly" and "Developing a Strong and Vibrant Community," when
implementing these in New Zealand, with our varied cultural mix. Should you require any
advice on cultural matters, please approach the National Spiritual Assembly Secretariat,
for help in identifying Bahá'ís who could assist.

The schedule of courses which you prepared has been checked to ensure it does not
conflict with any major training courses organised by the Aotearoa Institute, or other major
Bahá'í community activities, and has been sent out to Local Spiritual Assemblies. (A copy

of the information, in the form it was distributed, is being emailed to you separately.) The
National Spiritual Assembly will be very interested to see the results of the pilot programme

in Wanganui and Wellington. We are informing the Counsellors of your offer, and the fact
that the National Spiritual Assembly is establishing this Office, and that we look forward to
a level of collaboration evolving between this office and the Arm of the Learned.

Your request for advice and support from Alan Wilcox for setting up the terms of reference,
budget, etc., for the Office of Assembly Development has been accepted. Alan is happy to
work with you on these matters. Regarding the schedule of the Aotearoa Institute, a copy
of the latest institute information is attached to this message. We are asking the Aotearoa
Institute to put you on the email list for future circulars. A list of all Local Spiritual
Assemblies, with contact details, will be posted to you shortly. We will also put you on the
mailing list for the "Gazette" and "Feast Bulletin," as per your request. Your query regarding
the number of copies of existing course materials in stock is being looked into by the
Aotearoa Institute Coordinator, and you should receive word about this soon.

The National Spiritual Assembly feels positive that the approach you have designed will
provide a strong impetus for the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies which is called
for in the Five Year Plan. The initiative that you are taking attracts our gratitude and
admiration. We hope that your endeavours will be amply confirmed by assistance from the
unseen realm.

Warmest Bahá'í Love
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF NEW ZEALAND

Suzanne Mahon
Secretary
****

The following document regarding the establishment of the Office of Assembly Development was submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand:

THE OFFICE OF ASSEMBLY DEVELOPMENT

The Office of Assembly Development is being established to coordinate all major national

initiatives in the area of Local Spiritual Assembly Development.

THE FIVE YEAR PLAN VISION OF THE OFFICE OF ASSEMBLY DEVELOPMENT:

The Office of Assembly Development will become securely established in the consciousness of the New Zealand Bahá'í community as a resource for the National Assembly, Local Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Summer Schools in the training of the friends in the principles and processes of Bahá'í administration.

GOAL: To facilitate the development of "a new state of mind" on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling the Assemblies to rise to the "new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities" envisioned by the Universal House of Justice in the Five Year Plan.

FOCUS: The creation of a deep understanding among Assemblies and individual believers of what the process of entry by troops entails and the awareness of the Local Spiritual Assembly's role as "a channel of God's grace not only for the Bahá'ís but for the entire village, town or city in which it serves."

SERVICES AVAILABLE FROM THIS OFFICE:

The Office of Assembly Development will be responsible for a number of initiatives in the following general categories: materials development, resource development, internal coordination, and analysis, providing training and supplying information on resources and promoting their usage. Specific examples in each area are detailed below.

? Materials Development:

? Self Assessment Tool for Assemblies: This asks Assemblies to rate themselves on the basis of the roles and responsibilities outlined in the Ridván 153 message from the Universal House of Justice.

? Assembly Development Modules: These consist of a number of module workshops on a variety of topics which help Assemblies understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, improve their performance, and attain an ever advancing level of maturity. When used with the general community, the modules heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and should serve to deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions.

? Resource Development:

Assembly Development Representatives Training: Nationwide training for a group of experts who will conduct Assembly Development Workshops in the Regional Forums around the country. They will also make presentations at the regional schools and Bahá'í conferences.

? Analysis and Internal Coordination
? Local Spiritual Assembly Survey: Conducting a survey of Local Assemblies which includes questions regarding the training they have received, their internal functioning and the demographics of the community. Assemblies will also be given the opportunity to make comments and/or suggestions to the Office of Assembly Development and the National Spiritual Assembly. This data may be analyzed as

input for the deliberations of the National Assembly, its agencies, and the Cluster Steering Committees.

? Providing Training
? Assembly Development Forums: To be held in various regions across the country. These bring Assemblies and communities together to consult with each other on issues of common concern and offer a variety of the Assembly Development Workshops covering topics that are essential to efficient and effective Assembly functioning.
? Workshops at Regional Summer Schools: Available on a variety of topics and facilitated by the Assembly Development staff.

? THE OFFICE OF ASSEMBLY DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE:
? STAFF:
? Shahla Gillbanks, OAD Consultant; Responsible for materials development, resource development, strategic planning, implementation, and analysis, providing training and follow up a consultation with the participating LSA's.
? Terry Gillbanks, OAD Coordinator; responsible for a) Office coordination: budget, training supplies, mailing, etc.… b) Liaising with LSA's for setting up the ongoing Forums, supplying information on resources and promoting their usage.

DEVELOPING THE ASSEMBLY DEVELOPMENT FORUM COURSE MANUAL

One of the major tasks of implementing the program was developing the Forum Course Manual. I contacted the US Office of Assembly Development and asked for their permission and support in developing the New Zealand Manual. They offered me their full support and emailed me the US Modules of their manual.

This coincided with a visit from Counsellor Paul Lample, from the International Teaching Center, who later became a member of the Universal House of Justice. Mr. Lample's objective for a visit was to consult with the members of the Bahá'í Institutions and the community, about the recent call from the Universal House of Justice, described in the Bahá'í OnLine Library:

'Creating a New Mind: Reflections on the Individual, the Institutions, and the Community by Paul Lample, 1999. In this creative book, Paul Lample discusses the influence of the human mind in shaping human reality. He identifies three vehicles for changing reality: the individual, the institutions, and the community at large. He highlights the need for study and learning and places the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot around which learning, and change can happen

With the conclusion of the Four Year Plan, the Faith has passed through a critical moment both in the "scheme of Bahá'í and world history." During this time, the Universal House of Justice called upon the individual, the institutions, and the community to become more systematic in their efforts to advance the process of entry by troops, and beyond, to build a new civilization. This book reexamines the nature of each of these protagonists and focuses on the process of learning in the light of divine guidance that lies at the heart of our ability to progress toward the purpose intended by Bahá'u'lláh. The subjects raised are central to the progress of the Bahá'í world in coming decades.'

I had the privilege of consulting with Paul Lample when he was staying at our house in Wellington, and I followed his recommendation to develop the Assembly Development Forums Project. Paul Lample suggested documenting the program and its progress, in order to see the possibility of its implementation in other parts of the Bahá'í world. On a later date, I forwarded the Course Manual, The Forum report, and related information to the World Center for their review.

I also had the help of Paddy Payne, a member of the Spiritual Assembly of Wellington,
with the editing of the Manual.

Excerpt s from the Course Manual Introduction:
‘Acknowledgment

The Assembly Development Forum Manual is an amalgamation of a number of existing resources, such as Paul Lample’s book, “Creating A New Mind”, modules
developed by the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’ís of the United
States, segments from the modules developed by Lawrence M. Miller for Mottahedeh Development Services, in addition to a number of original modules which were developed by Shahla Gillbanks (OAD consultant).
Sincere thanks to Terry Gillbanks and Paddy Payne, for their help in editing and
production of the manual.’

Shahla Gillbanks
OAD Consultant

A Message from the National Spiritual Assembly to the Assembly Development Forum Participants

Dear Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly would like to warmly commend to you the important learning experience that you are embarking on as participants in the Assembly Development Forum. We are confident that you will be uplifted by a sense of wonder as you explore the wide-ranging implications of Bahá’u’lláh’s
Administrative Order. At the same time, this course offers a solid and practical
approach to becoming ever more systematic in carrying out the functions of the Local Spiritual Assembly, which is the bedrock of that wondrous Order.

Over the years, the beloved Universal House of Justice has repeatedly emphasised the important role which Local Spiritual Assemblies have to play in the dynamic growth process that the Bahá’í community is pursuing. The maturation of the Assemblies, as they come to function with ever-increasing competence in carrying out their duties, will have a huge influence on the well-
being of their communities and the promotion of the teaching work. Given that such systematisation requires the application of skills, the development of those
skills on the part of Assembly members, and other members of the community, to assist in carrying out the Assembly's work, is an unavoidable necessity. The weighty responsibilities of the members can be shouldered effectively if they will

equip themselves fully for the task through conscientious study and training.

The courses offered by the Office of Assembly Development are designed to highlight the Bahá'í principles upon which the Local Spiritual Assembly is

based, thus empowering Assemblies to adhere ever more faithfully to principle in
both the protection and propagation of the Faith, as it moves forward. These courses also prepare Assemblies to be able to respond rapidly, and in a clearly focused manner, to issues and challenges in the community.

The National Spiritual Assembly trusts that you will be inspired by your participation in this course. Whether as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly
or playing some other role in your Bahá'í community, the support of each individual believer for the work of the Assembly is essential. We would like to lovingly thank you for showing your support, through your participation in this course, and all your devoted endeavours in service to Bahá'u'lláh.

Warmest Greetings

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF NEW ZEALAND

A Note from the Office of Assembly Development

Dear Participant

Welcome to the Assembly Development Forum. By bringing this programme to you, the National Spiritual Assembly is acknowledging the important role you play in
the initiation of a systematic process that will lead to the entry by troops in New
Zealand. The Office of Assembly Development supports your growth and development because your contribution counts.
By participating in this program, you will gain an edge by exploring a variety of
tools and skills that will enable you to take a more active role in examining responsibilities of your Local Spiritual Assembly and to help in developing a plan of
action to fulfill these responsibilities. The more you contribute, the more you will
benefit. Your contribution also affects fellow LSA members, your Assembly as a unit,
the Bahá'í community, and ultimately the citizens of the world.

Programme Objectives:

The Assembly Development Forum has been developed in support of the National Spiritual Assembly's Spiritualisation campaign programme for the New Zealand Bahá'í community. It is aimed to enable the Local Spiritual

Assemblies to
effectively perform their sacred duties in administering the affairs of the Bahá'í
community, in generating spiritual renewal among the believers, and in developing a
systematic approach to the process of teaching and consolidation.

The Forum participants, within the context of their Spiritual Assemblies, will be able:

To develop a systematic approach to facilitate the growth of a strong, vibrant and ever expanding Bahá'í community
To identify reasons why believers become inactive, and take proactive steps in motivating and empowering the believers
To take an active role in the development of human resources of their communities
To initiate a dynamic partnership between the individual believers, the Assembly, and the Auxiliary Board and Assistants
To effectively implement the CAR (Consult-Act-Reflect) Model in their Clusters
To identify and apply Spiritual and Administrative Principles to the Assembly's decision making process
To apply specific skills in Time Management, Agenda Planning, Delegation, and Process Assessment, in order to increase the Effectiveness and Efficiency of their Assemblies

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WELLINGTON PILOT PROJECT

In consultation with Alan Wilcox and the Wellington Assembly, we planned to hold the first
OAD Forum in Wellington Region, as a pilot project.
Terry and I made real effort to meet with all the Assemblies and encouraged their participation in the Forum. It was quite a helpful and challenging work. We met with
the Assemblies of Kapiti, Carterton, Upper Hutt, Masterton, and Porirua. In some
communities, we offered to make a presentation at their Feasts. In all these occasions we
limited our consultation to the Assembly Development project. With all these challenges it
was wonderful to see representation from all but one Assembly.
Overall, the Wellington Forum was extremely positive and wonderful. Some Assemblies,
especially those with only one or two representatives, felt a bit overwhelmed to do the Pilot
Project's follow up work. However, we ensured them that they would be working within the
Cluster and had the full support of the Wellington Assembly, which was taking the lead, the

National Assembly, and the Auxiliary Board members.
It was concluded that the Forums would have a rippling effect to start an upward movement
in New Zealand. The feedback from the Forum participants was quite helpful in revising
some parts of the Course Manual.

THE SUMMARY REPORT

The following report is intended to summarise the planning and implementation process
of the pilot project for the Assembly Development Forums in New Zealand.

The Programme:

The programme was initially based on the modules developed by the Office of the Assembly Development of the Bahá'ís of the United States. However, after consultation
with Mr Paul Lample, and with further review of his book, and the report of the joint meeting
of the National Spiritual Assembly and members of the Continental Board of Counsellors,
the programme has evolved to mirror the systematic approach to planning and implementation strategy of the CAR Model – Consultation, Action, Reflection. The
sequential curriculum defined:

? The vision, goals, services, and functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies, and helped
participants to develop a Mission Statement for their Assemblies
? The Call to a new state of mind
? How to assess and respond to the needs and aspirations of the believers, by
applying the spiritual principles of the Faith, utilising the scientific approach of
motivation, Self Empowerment, and Performance Management
? Role of the Assembly in harmonising collective actions
? The dynamic nature of relationship of the individual believer, the Assembly, and
the Auxiliary Board and Assistants
? The application of Spiritual and Administrative principles in the decision making
process of the Assembly

? The dynamics of consultation-skill practice
? The Effective Functioning of the Spiritual Assembly

Course Manual: Each participant received a course manual, containing the background
information, tools, and worksheets. Quite a few Assemblies purchased additional

manuals for the absentee members.

The Participants:

The target group of this Forum encompassed two clusters and seven assemblies. Within the last two months, the OAD staff met with each Assembly/ community to consult about the programme. There has been continuous communication with the Auxiliary Board members. These efforts were fruitful in getting to know the Assembly members and developing a partnership with them and the Auxiliary Board member, David Lew. As a result of this preliminary interaction, six out of seven Assemblies were represented.

In addition, the Forum had the privilege of having full-time participation of Auxiliary Board member David Lew, and a number of Assistants to the Auxiliary Board.

The Process:

The Forum started with an inspiring opening address by the beloved Counsellor, Judge Heather Simpson. The schedule was as follows:

Saturday, 24th of August 2002

8:30–9:30 Introductions
Call to “A New State of Mind”
Opening Address; Counsellor Heather Simpson

9:30 –12:00 Developing a Strong and Vibrant Community
? Unlocking the Power of Action – What is the Vision for the community, and how to achieve it?
? How to Awaken the Initiatives and galvanise the Community Members to Action?
? Systematic Approach to Human Resources Development
? The Dynamic Nature of Partnership
1:00 – 5:00 Executing A Systematic Plan of Action
? Building Visions of Growth
? Devising Strategies
? Establishing Lines of Action
? Motivating Dedication to Service

Sunday, 25th of August 2002

8:30 –12:00 Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles to the Assembly’s Decision Making Process
? The Administration of Justice
? The Importance of Principle
? Distinguishing between Principles and Procedures
? Identifying and Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles

1:00– 4:00 Becoming a More Efficient and Effective Assembly
? Consultation - Using Differences to Enhance Assembly's Functioning
- Skill Practice
? Managing the Assembly's Time
? Planning Effective Agendas
? Delegation Within the Assembly and Beyond

4:00 – 5:00 Reflection session on the Assembly Development Forum
- Review of the implementation plan of The Assembly Development Pilot Project – next page …

The Wellington Assembly Development Pilot Project

As the initial stage of the New Zealand Assembly Development program unfolds, it will be essential to examine the critical steps of the programme, reflecting on the final results, and make the required adjustments to enhance its effectiveness. To achieve this purpose, the Wellington Forum will be used as an arena to pilot the program.

The partnership involves the Forum's participating Assemblies, The OAD Consultant, and the Auxiliary Board member and Assistants. The Pilot project will attempt to follow the systematic Process of CAR. The Dynamics are as follows:

Training Phase - During the Forum

? Participants are encouraged to work with the Consultant and the Auxiliary Board to:
? Identify their Assemblies Developmental needs
? Set personal objectives and planned action for learning and participation in training
? Actively participate in training activities
? Network with the Forum participants
? Offer feedback to the Consultant about the training

The Assembly Development Project

? The Consultation Phase

? To be completed by the first week of September

The LSA members are asked to:
? Call for a special Assembly meeting – as soon as possible
? Review the Key Points of the Forum
? Consult on the items of the Process Assessment Sheet and develop strategies for their implementation.

? The Action/Reflection Phase

? For the months of September and October 2002
? The ongoing process of implementation and Assessment of the Assembly's functioning based on the items of the Process Assessment Sheet.
? Complete a Process Assessment Sheet at the end of each month, and send a copy with your recommendations to OAD

The Community Development Project:

? The Consultation Phase

? To be completed by the 9th of September

The working units are asked to:

? Invite the LSA/community members to a Focus Group Meeting. – as soon as possible
? Review the Key Points of the First Day of the Forum, and present the "Action Plan" which they have developed in the Forum,
? Consult on the key elements of the Action plan and develop a short term goal for the community.
? Develop an implementation strategy.
? Document the progress and send a copy to OAD.

? The Action Phase

? To begin on the 10th of September, and completed by the 31st of October

? To initiate, implement, and complete the short term plan of the community,
utilising the systematic process, covered in the Forum.
? Document your progress and send a copy, with your recommendation to OAD

? The Reflection Phase

? The Community Reflection Meeting -- to be held on the 10th of November

Call for a Reflection Meeting to Review the Project, Reflect on its systematic process of action, and consult on the following issues:
? What worked, what needed fine tuning?
? How much the process helped in harmonising the individual initiatives towards a collective action?
? What did you learn, and how can you apply the results to the next plan of action?
? What will be your next plan of action?
? Develop a Reflection Report, send a copy with your recommendations to OAD

? The Wellington Cluster Reflection Meeting, on 12th of November 2002

Share your community report with the Cluster communities and celebrate your success!

TRIP TO CALIFORNIA AND HOLLAND

We had a pause in our Forum schedule, in order to go back to California for a while and then to the Netherlands for the wedding ceremony of our son Faran and Kim, his bride from Holland. I spent most of my time in California revising the Forum Manual and sent it to Wellington for Paddy Payne to edit. We enjoyed being with our daughter Anisa and her family who lived in Los Angeles. We also visited our friends and family in California. We had round trip tickets for Amsterdam, Singapore and Kyoto, our first time to visit all those countries. In Holland, Faran made all the arrangements for an American Bahá'í wedding, patterned after his sister's wedding. He asked me to have the same readings from the Bahá'í Writings that I developed for Anisa. We had a wonderful family reunion and enjoyed spending time with our children. After the wedding, Faran booked us in a hotel close to the German border. That gave us an opportunity to go to Frankfurt and visit the Mother Temple of Europe and take part in the Sunday devotional. We were thrilled to visit our 3rd Mashriqu'l-Adhkár - Sydney, Wilmette and now Frankfurt. Before leaving Amsterdam, Faran and Kim consulted about moving to New Zealand. Faran always had fond memories of New Zealand and considered it as his home. They moved to Wellington the following June.

FOLLOW UP ON THE WELLINGTON PILOT PROJECT

We returned to New Zealand in October and resumed our service. On October 13th, I sent the following correspondence to the members of Institutions in Wellington Region.

To: Michael Holden, Lynne Holden; Ridvan Firestone; Angela James, James Firestone, Lida & Ramin Kousari; Maria Clayton; Paddy Payne, Patricia Wilcox; Eddie Cook; LSA Carterton; LSA Lower Hutt; LSA Masterton, Mike Fudakowski; LSA Porirua, Lauren Richardson

Cc: NZ National Secretary; Alan Willcox; Counsellor Heather Simpson; ABM David

Lew

Subject: WELLINGTON PILOT PROJECT

Dear Bahá'í Friends.

It has been a blessing to have the bounty of hearing Mr. Nakhjavani's talk last night, in Wellington: Encouraging the New Zealand believers in striving to reach our spiritual destiny; aspiring to achieve the station of a "lover" of the Beloved. To dedicate our lives to service, and to promote the welfare and happiness of humanity.

I was delighted to hear from some of your Assembly members that the majority of the Wellington Forum Assemblies have been working on the processes and goals of the Pilot Project. We are eagerly anticipating to learn more about your success stories and feedback.

THE REGIONAL FORUMS REPORTS

A series of Regional Forums were held in 2002- 2003. Some of the Forum's reports are as follows:

Report of the Wanganui Assembly Development Forum

The Wanganui Forum was held from November 2 to 3, 2002, in Wanganui. 24 participants from 4 communities of Horowhenua, Manawatu, New Plymouth, and Wanganui participated in the programme. In addition, Auxiliary Board member, Glenys Forsyth, as the guest consultant, fully participated in the program.

The programme was revised to reflect the Spiritualisation Campaign of the National Assembly and suggestions from the participants of Wellington Forum. Each participant received a Course Manual which was also revised to reflect the above changes in the curriculum.

The Wanganui Assembly excelled in their hospitality, by providing sleeping quarters in a Marae, and food and refreshments for the participants. Their hospitality was greatly appreciated by all participants. The energy, enthusiasm, professionalism, and sense of unity of participants were exemplary.

At the end of the Forum, participants of each community consulted on the effectiveness of the workshops and completed a Reflection Sheet.

As a follow up to the Forum, each Assembly was given a number of Action Plans for consultation and implementation.

Upon completion of the Forum John Wehrman accepted to work with the Auxiliary Board member Glenys Forsyth, in providing follow-up training within the communities of the Wanganui Forum area. This act of service will assuredly have positive results in the implementation plans of the participating Assemblies.

Wanganui Forum participants with the ABM Glenys Forsyth, standing first on the left

Back, 4th from Left: Linda McArthur; Beryl Bird; then John Werhan; next row, forward second from Left: Jeni Wright; Mary Martin? Jill Chivers. Terry Gillbanks, Far Right Top: Mervyn Chivers; in front of him, Santana Ponga. Next Row down: Glenys Forsyth. Front left: Syd Ponga; TeMo Ponga; Carwyn Taitumu Ponga; Chelsea Lee Ponga; mixture of Wanganui and Manawatu Bahá'ís. Second from left, back row, Barrie Forsyth

Report of the Nelson Assembly Development Forum

The Nelson Forum was held from November 23 to 24, 2002, in Nelson. 12 participants represented communities of Marlborough, Nelson, and Tasman.

This heart warming Forum was blessed with the participation of three of the elder Bahá'ís in New Zealand. The diversity of cultural background of participants was also noteworthy.

The small number of participants allowed the Forum to take a more in-depth approach to consultation and group discussion. It was wonderful to see the transfer of what was discussed in the Forum to the consultation portion of the Nineteen Day Feast of Nelson Community, that evening.

As a follow up to the Forum, each Assembly was given a number of Action Plans for consultation and implementation. In order to help the three Assemblies to implement the

plans, Lucia Wielsma accepted to work with Jill Bonny, the Auxiliary Board Assistant, to

provide follow-up training in January. This act of service will assuredly have positive results
in the implementation plans of the participating Assemblies.

Report of the Palmerston North Assembly Development Forum

The Palmerston North Forum was held from January 18 to 19, 2003, in Palmerston North. Nine participants represented Palmerston North and Tararua communities.

This make-up Forum was held in response to Palmerston North and members of other
communities who were not able to attend the previous Forums in Wellington and Wanganui.

This was the first Forum held after the approval of the Course Manual by the National
Spiritual Assembly.

Due to the small number of participants, there were more sharing of opinions, followed by consultation on topics that were of concern to participants. Among them was
the concept of creating a vibrant and growing community through an increasing number of
friends who would complete the main sequence of Study Circles, and the ability of the
Assemblies to channel their energies and talents to some acts of service.

The concern was that this method is for the communities who have a large number of
new believers and since presently the number of declarants in New Zealand that the
numbers of enrolments in the Faith at that stage were not high enough to sustain it. This
was followed by a dynamic consultation on the following quote that “Indeed, given that
only a small fraction of the … Bahá’ís can be considered active supporters of the Faith,
the very act of training a few thousand believers, and thus increasing the number who
have a strong Bahá’í identity and a commitment to teaching the Cause, would in itself
constitute an advance in the process of entry by troops.”

As a follow up to the Forum, each community was given a number of Action Plans for
consultation and implementation.

Report of the Dunedin Assembly Development Forum

The Dunedin Forum was held from 22 to 23, February 2003, in Dunedin. 16 participants
from the Dunedin community attended the Forum.

This Forum was unique due to a large ratio of youth participants, and a number of Farsi
speaking participants who needed help with translation. The collective effort of community
members who helped with translation and clarification of concepts for youth made this
Forum an enjoyable and energising experience for all.

The other distinguishing feature was the hospitality of the Dunedin community, and
especially a dear friend who offered her house for the Forum venue and provided

refreshment, lunch, and dinner for participants and their families. This collective effort
showed a model Bahá'í community in action.

As a number of participants showed interest to have follow-up training, Adrian Hindes and
Soheila Boag accepted the responsibility to arrange to follow up training in English and
Farsi, respectively.

As a follow up to the Forum, the community was given a number of Action Plans for
consultation and implementation.

Report of the Hamilton Assembly Development Forum

The Hamilton Forum was held from 29 to 30, March 2003, in Hamilton. 13 participants
represented Hamilton, Matamata – Pako, Waikato, Waikato South communities.

This was the first Forum which was held at a Bahá'í Centre. The presence of a pioneer
from Japan and the synergy created by a group of interested and enthusiastic participants
compensated for some who did not show up for the Forum.

The participants expressed their pleasure in working in a safe and positive environment,
where each could contribute and be energised by interacting and learning from each other.

As a follow up to the Forum, the community was given a number of Action Plans for
consultation and implementation.

The Overall Impact of the Forums

The above Forums had a positive impact on the communities. It gave an impetus to unify the communities and Assemblies at a regional and Cluster level. It also energized the community members through individual initiatives and diverse actions to work towards a common purpose. Some members expressed that after years of being inactive, they realized that they could play an important role in the community building initiatives in their neighborhoods. The presence of the Auxiliary Board Members in most of the Forums facilitated close cooperation of the Bahá'í Institutions in the Cluster and Regional level.

FACING NEW CHALLENGES

At the onset of 2003, I encountered a few health challenges which impacted our plan to stay in New Zealand. Within the last few years in California, I had suffered from Meniere disease in my right ear. In order to release the pressure and fluid in my ear, the doctor punctured my eardrum. Unfortunately, this procedure impacted my hearing and caused recurrent ear infections. This problem intensified after moving to Wellington, by living at a high elevation. In 2003, I developed a severe middle ear infection which affected my mobility. The doctor prescribed an antibiotic to treat the infection, but I had a bad reaction to the medication and had to go to the Emergency Room. I was sick the entire month of March and lost hearing in my right ear. I was still suffering from illness while conducting the Forum in Hamilton. As my ability to travel was limited, we accepted the offer from Karen Te'o, who was a training consultant and attended one of the Forums, to facilitate the upcoming Forums. I decided to explore the possibility of applying for Social Security Disability and went to the American Embassy to receive the required documents. However, I was Informed that there was no reciprocal agreement between the US and New Zealand governments regarding Social Security payments. Therefore, I would need to be in the US to apply and receive Social Security Disability. At this juncture, we had no choice but to go

back to California for an extended period. In June, right after our son and his wife arrived in Wellington, we left them at our home and asked them to take over the Bahá'ís meetings which were scheduled there.

We arrived in Los Angeles, just a few weeks after our daughter Anisa had her first son, Kyle. We had the opportunity to take care of her and the baby. We also got involved with the Bahá'í community of LA and the activities at the Bahá'í Center. Just before I left Wellington, I received the following correspondence from the US Office of Assembly Development:

'From: Mullen, Theresa
Friday, June 13, 2003, 10:58 AM
To the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand
Dear Bahá'í friends:
Thank you for sending us a copy of the Course manual for the Forum project that you have launched in New Zealand and for your kind words of appreciation. We were pleased that our materials were of some use to you in developing your excellent course, which has expanded greatly upon the original ideas. This manual will be most helpful to us as we continue to update and revise our materials. Should you find it convenient, we would love to hear more about the results of your program as you proceed, and we would be glad to reciprocate, should you so desire. Your kind offer of you and your husband's services during your upcoming visit to the United States is greatly appreciated. Please let us know more about the types of service you can offer and the time that you think you will have available. Should your visit take you to the Chicago area, we would love to meet you.
Best wishes for the continued success of your valuable efforts.'

I offered to help with the Assembly Development project in Southern California. However, our stay was shortened after filing the required documents with the Social Security Administration and our return to Wellington.

The second trip to California was for the application interview. During this extended stay, I developed debilitating symptoms of a malfunctioning gallbladder. Unfortunately, it was not

properly diagnosed, and for the next two years I could barely live a normal life or carry on
with all my Bahá'í activities. After months of waiting, my application was rejected, and I
was advised to file an appeal. I was not aware that it was normal process for Social
Security application, so I returned to Wellington sick and disheartened. Somehow the
fresh air and new diet made me reasonably functional to resume the Bahá'í activities in
the Wellington Region.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CLUSTERS

Wellington Cluster's First Inter-Institutional Meeting

The Focus Group held on 25 September 2003, was sponsored by the Wellington Spiritual Assembly and coordinated by the Office of Assembly Development consultant, Shahla Gillbanks.

The majority of Assembly members from Wellington, Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt, a representative from Porirua, and the majority of ABM Assistants participated in the
meeting.

The Purpose of the meeting was:

To consult on the role of the institutions in cluster development and
To develop strategies to facilitate the growth of the Wellington cluster, from C to B
category.

The Group consulted and assessed the "Propitious Conditions for Intensive Growth*" in the Wellington Cluster as follows:
A high level of enthusiasm among a sizeable group of devoted and capable believers who understand the prerequisites for sustainable growth and can take ownership of the programme*
The Group concluded that the number varied from community to community. Considering the factor of 40% participation in Nineteen Day Feasts, close to 50%
of the community members are actively involved in the Cluster activities.
Goal: To increase the number of devoted and capable believers
Some basic experience on the part of a few communities in the cluster in holding classes for the spiritual education of children, devotional meetings, and the Nineteen Day Feast*
Based on the regional Stats, this condition exists in the Cluster. Presently there
are 12 Devotional meetings, and 8 Children's classes being held per month within
the Cluster. Regular Feasts are being held in each community, with the average

of 40% participation.
Goal: To strengthen the existing core activities, to support the individual initiative through Cluster Reflection Meetings.

* Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Jan 09, 2001, Conference of the Continental Boards of
Counsellors

The existence of a reasonable degree of administrative capacity in at least a few Local Spiritual Assemblies*
This condition exists in the majority of the Cluster's Assemblies
Goal: Rendering support to other Assemblies- if and when requested, through the Cluster Task Forces for Human Resources.
The active involvement of several assistants to Auxiliary Board members in promoting community life: *
The Cluster has the benefit of active involvement of the ABM and the ABM Assistants within the Cluster communities.
A pronounced spirit of collaboration among the various institutions working in the area: *
The recent initiatives from Lower Hutt and Wellington
Assemblies indicate the maturation of the Assemblies
in developing strategies for Inter-Institutional
collaboration. WE ARE
HERE
Goal: To develop strategies for the Inter-Institutional
Collaboration

Strong presence of the training institute with a scheme of coordination that supports the systematic multiplication of study circles. *

The recent statistical information shows that there has been considerable progress
in this area. The Comparison Statistical chart shows that 45% of Cluster population is involved in the Institute process. With 17 trained tutors, who can
facilitate more than one Book. Therefore, increasing the number to 27.
In the light of the emerging advancement of the Institute process in Wellington Region, the issue was raised about re-categorisation of the Wellington Cluster from C to B.

Results of Consultation on Strategic Planning:

To hold periodic Inter-institutional meetings, as they create a unity of vision, a
learning experience that bonds the member of institutions together and would empower them to serve.

To form a Teaching and Publicity task force, in order to identify different means of
publicity in Wellington Cluster

To adopt the Wellington Bahá'í Community Brochure for the Cluster. This Brochure,
developed by a task force, based on the individual initiative, was supported and
approved by the Wellington Assembly. Community members may use it to invite their

friends to the Bahá'í activities or place them in public places, such as Citizens Advice
Bureaux, waiting rooms, Bulletin Boards, etc...

To broaden the roles of the Cluster Coordinators in working as a team to:

Increase attendance at Reflection Meetings - by publicising and encouraging participation.
Track the Cluster statistics
Promote the Institute Process – i.e., asking graduates to take part in the programme.
Communicate progress of the Cluster to the community and National agencies
Increase fulfillment of pledges

How:

LSA's annually elect new Coordinators – from the grassroots, young, energetic
believers, along with the more experienced ones.
Revisit the timing of Reflection meetings, i.e., weekend evenings
Create a regional Calendar of events

Working towards Creating a Human Resources Taskforce

Aim:
To plan for and set up specific community activities that can be organised
by the individuals who are appropriately skilled.
To encourage initiatives by those individuals who are appropriately skilled.
To utilise "…the energies and talents of the swelling human resources
available…" from "a community whose individuals recognise the importance
of the institute process, who work systematically through its courses and who
then serve the community through the skills and talents they have acquired
as part of this training or which they might naturally possess."

Participants of Wellington Cluster's First
Inter-Institutional Meeting

WELLINGTON COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

We had a wonderful and productive time with friends in the Wellington community. When
we were not traveling, we participated in a wide range of community activities, supporting
individual initiatives and hosting a few at our home. On a July 9 th Holy Day
Commemoration, we had the dramatic audio presentation of Martyrdom of the Báb,

performed by the Canadian Youth, as our program. After lunch, our guest, Layli Miller-Muro
the founder of Tahirih Justice Center, talked about her non-profit organization which was
dedicated to protecting women from human rights abuses.

In the year 2003- 2004, I was elected as the Secretary of Wellington Spiritual Assembly. I
had the bounty of serving in the Assembly and joining my dear friends and dedicated
servants of Bahá'u'lláh to implement the action plan which was developed by the Assembly
in the AOD Forum for Wellington. The members, Paddy Payne, Patricia Wilcox, Angela
James, Alex Maehe, James Firestone, Maria Reynen Clayton, Lynne Klap and Erica
Zemke-Smith were all involved in undertaking different activities.

The vibrant young members of the community were actively involved in all aspects of
Bahá'í life. When our son Faran, moved to Wellington, he helped to start the "Twenty
Something and Youth Group," that initiated a wide range of Bahá'í activities.

SOUL FOOD Devotional Participant
L to R; Zafar Smith, Patricia Wilcox, Jess Jacobs, Nick Jacobs,
Daniel Wilcox, John Wilcox

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Wellington

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION:

The Assembly sends loving greetings to all members of the community and thanks them
for the support shown over the past year. Our community is growing in maturity and
capability, and we look forward to seeing the increasingly rich fruits of this growth process
this year.

OUR VISION:

To utilise the energies and talents of the swelling human resources available
To create a vibrant community life and
To begin influencing the society around us. *

OUR LONG TERM GOAL:

To contribute to the growth of the cluster of which we are a part of being C status to

being a B cluster.

To support the pattern of growth by:
helping an ever-increasing number of friends to move through the main sequence of courses offered by the institute, and
By calling upon them to help deepen the generality of the Bahá'ís by visiting them
regularly; teach children, arrange devotional meetings and form study circles, making it possible to sustain expansion. *

OUR APPROACH:

To align our goals and plans to the Five Year Plan, and ensure that all of our activities
at a community level are contributing to the achievement of the Plan's goals

To adopt an outward-oriented systematic approach, based on a culture of encouragement, learning, consultation, action, and reflection.

SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC GOALS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

Developing and supporting a culture of learning in the community

The Century of Light Study Group: The Assembly supported the individual initiatives to hold a series of deepening sessions on Century of Light for the Cluster community
Feast Consultation on the Letters of the Universal House of Justice: Based on the directives from National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly arranged for a series of presentations, followed by consultation on such important topics, in the
Feasts.
Community-wide sessions for visiting Bahá’ís and ABM: The Assembly sponsored cluster-wide sessions for Guy Sinclair, ABM, and John Griffin.
Consultation meeting on Building Momentum: The Assembly held a meeting with its Committee members and representative, to consult on their role -- highlighted
in the above document, and to develop implementation strategies.
Focus Group Inter-Institutional Meeting: The Assembly, in collaboration with the
Office of Assembly Development, sponsored the first Inter-institutional meeting for
the Wellington Cluster, to learn and consult on the role of the institutions in the
development of the Cluster, and to develop implementation strategies.

Creating a Vibrant Community Life
A celebration of Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days: The community held regular Nineteen Day Feasts, with the dynamic participation of youth, who played
an important role in creating inspirational devotional readings and atmosphere. There have been skits and presentations on holding firesides, Cluster

Development, and Messages from the Universal House of Justice.
Presently, the community agreed to form regional teams to take turn in creating vibrant Feasts and Holy Days for the entire community.
Twenty Something and Youth Activities: The community has been enriched by the activities of two groups of energetic young adults and youth, who met regularly to discuss topics of significant interest, develop a social network, and
undertake service projects in the cluster community. One of the noteworthy projects was the Cuba Street Carnival which was a resounding success.
Supporting Cluster Reflection Meetings: Wellington representatives have actively
participated in the Cluster Coordinators consultation to help in collecting statistical
information about Cluster activities, helping to hold well attended, and dynamic
Cluster Reflection meetings. The Assembly rendered both financial and human resources to support the reflection meetings. The community helped with encouraging participation, by creating a telephone tree to invite all the community
members to attend. Our community helped with a successful children programme which went concurrently with the Reflection meeting and inspired all with their fundraising artworks for the Porirua Bahá'í Centre.
Children Classes: Bahá'í Children classes offered a systematic and well organised programme for the spiritual education of our children. Four children classes were operating throughout the year. Bahá'í children participated in the

Education for Peace Programme, and Children Camp, both held in the Cluster communities.
Devotional Meetings: In addition to a weekly Dawn Prayer meeting, a number of other devotional meetings are being held based on the individual initiatives.

Influencing the society around us

Monthly Forums: Teaching Committee sponsored a series of public forums to discuss the Bahá'í perspectives on current social issues. The forums that were
publicised attracted up to 30 participants.

Soul Food: Soul Food was started based on an individual initiative as a Devotional
Meeting and evolved into a community sponsored activity to meet the goal of Community Worship Meeting. The Soul Food Team were dedicated to creating a well-publicised inspirational programme, with a community-wide participation of local artists and musicians.

International Day of Peace: The External Affair Officer, initiated a heartwarming
programme for this event, where children were involved in making a sweet

offering
of heart candies with Bahá'í quotations, to be given by the community members to
the greater community as a "Peace Offering."

Random Acts of Peace: The Bahá'í Youth initiated this project to offer their
services to the public free, as a "random act of Peace."

Cuba Street Carnival: The Bahá'í Youth helped to make the Bahá'í community
visible to the wider Wellington.

Interfaith Forum: The Bahá'í Interfaith representative played a major role in
organising the First National Interfaith Forum in Parliament.

Week of Prayer for World Peace: Our Representative helped in producing a leaflet
for the interfaith observance around the country.

The External Affairs Activities: The External Affairs Officer was instrumental in
involving Bahá'ís in a number of national and international events that were held in
Wellington. i.e., International Federation of World Peace, Human Rights
Workshop, Race Relations Day Celebration, International Women's Day,
Observance of Commonwealth Day.

BENZ: The Assembly supported the individual initiative of a group of dedicated
teachers and parents, to start the Australian Bahá'í education programme at
Newlands School. A brochure, describing the programme was distributed among
parents, and 22 students registered to attend the sessions on a weekly basis.

Helping an ever-increasing number of friends to move through the main
sequence of courses offered by the Institute

The Assembly had a number of meetings with the ABM, his Assistants, and the
Institute Coordinators, to consult on ways and means of encouraging the believers
to go through the sequence of Study Circles.

Recently the Assembly initiated the formation of a dedicated team to develop and
implement strategies to facilitate the implementation of the above objective.

Calling upon them to help deepen the generality of the Bahá'ís by visiting them
regularly; teach children, arrange devotional meetings and form study circles,
making it possible to sustain expansion

The Assembly has called upon the graduates of Study Circles to help with:

? The devotional parts of the Feast and other community events
? The Feasts Children and Pre-Youth programme
? Visiting youth and involving them in Youth activities
? Holding Deepenings and discussion groups for youth
? Helping with the Holy Day celebrations.

LEAVING NEW ZEALAND

The year 2004, was a bittersweet year for Terry and me. We were delighted that our services were bearing fruit at the national and regional level. We reconnected with our old friends and family while finding new friends throughout New Zealand. This was the first time that we had served at a national level and contributed to the goals of the Universal House of Justice. We enjoyed the support of loving relationship of the Counselors, Auxiliary Board members, the National Spiritual Assembly, and its agencies. It was sad leaving all this behind and venture into the unknown. However, we had no other option in securing our future stability. I was badly in need of medical treatment, especially when I managed to fall and break my wrist and undergo a few surgeries. We also needed to ensure receiving our Social Security pensions, which was possible only, by going back to the States. I must admit that I had a few good cries for leaving our little haven. I found solace in prayers and the farewell words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, reported to have said:

‘I am leaving Paris for the Orient though I am always with you. The place does not matter. Two people may be in the same room and yet not attain to a visitation. When I was in prison, many people came to see me. They crossed seas and deserts and yet remained in the city of the blind while others in far-distant lands attained the meeting.’

(Divine Philosophy, p. 187)

‘I say unto you that anyone who will rise up in the Cause of God at this time shall be filled with the Spirit of God, and that He will send His hosts from heaven to help you and that nothing shall be impossible to you if you have faith. And now I give you a

commandment which shall be for a covenant between you and me - that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endures through all things even to the end; even should ye hear that your Lord has been crucified, be not shaken in your faith; for I am with you always, whether living or dead, I am with you to the end. As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the standard-this is the standard-this is the standard.'

(Star of the West, Page 251)

CHAPTER 12

TRUSTING IN THE ALL MERCIFUL LORD
FLORIDA, 2004 – 2017

When in New Zealand, we explored the option of residing in California but realized that within a few years the housing market had doubled and purchasing a house was beyond our reach. Therefore, we decided to move to Tampa, Florida, where my extended family was residing. So, with a heavy heart, we bade farewell to our son, friends, and family, and left New Zealand in December 2004. The prospect of moving to a new area, with limited financial means and suffering from a broken wrist and an array of physical illness was grim.
For once in my life, I did not have any plan of action nor had I envisioned a light at the end of the tunnel. I ardently asked for His mercy and recited this tablet which was revealed by Abdu'-Baha for a grieving mother:

'O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.'

https://www.bahaiprayers.io/prayer?id=201080

I put my whole trust in Him, let go and let God take over! One night after meditation and asking for guidance, I decided to take the last shot and file a final appeal for an Administrative Hearing for my Social Security Disability. I was sure that there was no hope, but as I had nothing to lose, I did it anyway.

As soon as we arrived, we started looking for a house. The housing market in Tampa Bay area was booming. Within one month we made a contract with a development company to build our new home in Land O Lakes. The property was by a pond, overlooking a Cypress Grove conservation area. We chose a plan with a large lounge to hold future Bahá'í meetings. By July, our house was ready, and our car and household items which was shipped from Wellington had arrived. We loved our tranquil environment, especially not having gusts of winds constantly blowing. There were an incredible variety of tropical and migratory birds in our backyard. There were those that could be seen in aviaries, such as Sandhill Cranes, Egrets, Cranes, Cardinals, Hummingbirds and much more. It was like living in a tropical paradise.

Our house was in Pasco County, but close to Tampa. Therefore, we enjoyed both communities and attended the musical devotionals at the Tampa Bahá'í Center. I took Book 2 Study Circle and developed close and lasting relationships with friends in Tampa.

We submitted the letter of transfer from New Zealand to the West Pasco Assembly. It included the following excerpts:

'Shahla and Terry's enthusiastic offer of service after they arrived in New Zealand enabled the establishment of an Office of Assembly Development, which the Gillbanks operated. They developed a training programme, based on materials from the Assembly development training programme in the United States, and adapted extensively to local requirements. The training workshops that they have held around the country for Local Assembly members (and other interested friends) have

been found by the participants to be beneficial to perform their duties effectively.

We understand that it is with considerable reluctance that the Gillbanks have decided to leave New Zealand, which they have had to do because of circumstances beyond their control. The New Zealand National Spiritual Assembly expects that their enthusiasm and dedication will continue to be assets to the Bahá'í community after their return to the United States, where they intend to take up residence in Florida.'

The US National Assembly was quite kind to us and sent a camera crew to interview us for the Feast News. We soon became active members of West Pasco community and were elected to its Assembly. Within that year, we held a few workshops from the New Zealand Assembly Development Modules for the Local Assembly members and community.

In 2006, the West Pasco Assembly initiated a Teaching Campaign called "Road Map to Success," and produced a Bahá'í community activities brochure. I submitted the following report of to the Cluster meeting, where Farah Rosenberg, the Auxiliary Board Member was present:

REPORT ON THE ROADMAP TO SUCCESS TEACHING CAMPAIGN

Pasco Spiritual Assembly launched a teaching campaign in order to:

Fully engage in the practices of the Institute Process
To develop an outward-looking orientation,
To meet people who aren't yet Bahá'ís,
To give them an opportunity to learn about our Faith and declare their belief in its Founder,
To begin reaching out systematically to more and more such potential believers

- Taken from the Counselors gauge our progress thus far in Plan, Counselor Andrew's address to the National Convention

The Plan:

To systematically, reach 2400 residents in Pasco County with the purpose of inviting them to the Bahá'í core activities by:

? Creating 3 sectors, where the Bahá'ís of each sector, through their collective efforts and initiatives, take turn once every 3 months to:

1. Hold a Devotional Meeting or Tranquility Zone within their Sector. Each sector
may initiate other activities – mentioned in the Brochure, as needs arise.

2. Distribute 200 “Community Activities Brochure,” with an invitation to their
Devotional Meeting.

Achievements:

The following sectors were formed:

? The Eastern Eagles for the Eastern part of West Pasco, part of Newport Richey, Land O Lakes, Lutz, and East Pasco County
? The Northern Nightingales for the Northern Pasco, Hudson, Port Richey, and Hernando County
? The Sector of Light for the Central Pasco, part of Newport Richey, Holiday

Following activities took place
? The Eastern Eagles Sector:
• Two Sector Meetings were held
• Regular Monthly Tranquility Zones were held in two Bahá’í homes
• Invitation letters, along with the Community Activities Brochures were mailed to the neighborhood homes, in addition to personal invitations
• Eight non-Bahá’ís attended the Tranquility Zone meetings, from whom one declared her Faith to Bahá’u’lláh
• The Sector members made efforts to contact the less active members
• The Sector held one of the Study groups for the Universal House of Justice letter and invited the Eastern Pasco Bahá’ís.
• The Sector offered help for the formation of a Bahá’í Group in the Eastern Pasco.

? The Sector of Light:
• Held a Sector Meeting
• Held a Devotional meeting
• Made efforts to contact the less active members
• The Sector held one of the Study groups for the UHJ letter
• In Port Richey, regular sessions of Tranquility Zones were held.

? Northern Nightingales
• Held a Sector meeting
• Held Regular, monthly Tranquility Zones in Hernando County - where they always had seekers present – they had 7 seekers in the last session
• Had regular ads in newspapers
• Created their own version of the Community Activities Brochure

The Auxiliary Board Member, Farah Rosenberg was impressed that our “C” Cluster

community initiated such campaign which would have been the implementation plan for
an “A” Cluster.

Overcoming Life Challenges
2005 – 2007

Shortly after arrival, the stress of the move and adjusting to our new life took a toll on me.
It manifested itself by the symptoms of a heart attack and a trip to the emergency room at
University Hospital. After performing all the required tests, I was informed that it was not
related to a cardiac arrest. So, I was referred to the Cardiologist and Gastrointestinal
specialist for additional tests and diagnosis. Most of these procedures like endoscopy had
side effects which were worse than my original symptoms. All came negative, and their
final diagnosis was that my symptoms were all stress related. We had a basic insurance
with a high deductible. The co-pays were draining our limited savings, creating more stress
for us. A Bahá’í friend suggested that I go to Dr. Robert Dean, a Bahá’í doctor in Tampa.
He was an Internist and a general practitioner. His parents Pouran and Ardeshir were our
friends from Tampa Bahá’í Center. Robert reviewed all my test results and told me that I
should take a HIDA test which measured the gallbladder function. When I was going
through the procedure, I experienced all the frightening symptoms of my disease. In a
follow-up appointment, Robert told me that I had biliary dyskinesia, or lazy gallbladder
Syndrome -, which was related to the chronic inflammation of the gallbladder. The fraction
test showed that my Gallbladder was only releasing 20% of its content. He referred me to
a surgeon who has operated on his father. In my appointment with the surgeon, he told me
that in acute cases, the symptom of this syndrome was similar to that of a heart attack and
the patients end up in the Emergency Room. In 2006, I had surgery to remove my
Gallbladder. It took me one year to gradually find the proper medication to control the side-
effects of living without a gallbladder.

In my opinion, Robert with his proper diagnosis saved my life. He also helped me with my other problem, my chronic ear infection and profound hearing loss. He referred me a doctor, who was one of the few specialists in this field in the country. Dr. Bartels had a series of MRI and other tests done to eliminate more serious conditions and told me that he would need to repair the eardrum of my right ear to prevent future infections and place an implant to fit me for a BAHA – Bone Anchored Hearing Aid. However, this procedure was extremely expensive, and my insurance would not cover it. He referred me to the Florida State Vocational Rehabilitation agency to receive counseling and apply for the medical assistance to cover the expenses for this procedure. It was an irony of fate that now I was a client in need of services from a program for which I trained the GAIN Counselors in California for, more than 10 years.

In February 2007, I met with a counselor who was sympathetic and accepted my application. She referred me to the legal team for evaluation. The legal counseling helped me to map my course of action for the next two years. I signed an EP- "Employment Plan" with the Vocational Rehabilitation. This plan provided me with resources for treatment plan of Dr. Bartels, while actively seeking employment opportunities. My EP contract was until August, which gave me time to undergo the required surgery and medical treatment. I had my surgery in March, a very difficult and painful procedure. Due to some injury during the operation, I also developed severe joint pain in my arm that limited my arm's mobility for lifting and driving.

Despite these problems, I actively followed the conditions of my EP, by working with a job placement counselor and applying for all the available employment opportunities. I applied to 20 colleges and educational institutions in the greater Tampa Bay area. Unfortunately, I did not have any positive response.

On May 29th, my BAHA was fitted and tuned. Unfortunately, the result was

somehow
disappointing; It affected the clarity of what I could hear from my left ear before BAHA. I had a problem distinguishing words, as it was magnifying the background noises which interfered with my hearing and understanding conversations. It took me six months to adapt to the new device and benefit from it. By this time, my first counselor was retired, and I needed to sign a plan with a new Counselor in June. During this time, although I managed to improve my chronic conditions, my depleted financial problem was not resolved. In desperation, I surrendered to the will of God and followed the guidance of Abdu'l-Baha:

'Rely upon God
Trust in Him, Praise Him, and call Him continually to mind.
He verily turneth trouble into ease, and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter
peace.
He verily hath dominion over all things.'

http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-151.html

And God fulfilled His promise. I received a letter from the Social Security Appeal Court indicating that I was scheduled for an Administrative Hearing the next week and needed to call and confirm my appointment. In reviewing the circumstances for this Hearing, I was doubtful of a positive outcome. I called the Legal Aide who had previously approved my application for the Employment Plan and was informed that they would not be handling this case. They suggested that I contact private lawyers who specialized in Social Security Disability claims. I called a number of law firms in the Tampa Bay area, and all turned me down, as they did not find my case viable for granting disability benefits. I was so discouraged that I gave up and did not call the Social Security Office to meet with a caseworker and confirm my appointment. A few days before the scheduled appointment I received a final notice. That night, in complete despair, I prayed for assistance and went to bed. I had a dream that I was appearing in Court and stating my case. When I

woke up, I
decided to follow my dream and prepare for presenting my case. I called the caseworker
assigned to me. She was surprised to hear from me and told me that it was too late for her
to work with me. She said that she would be confirming my appointment and I should
appear for my Hearing appointment the next day. I spent that day compiling legal
documents which were originally presented for my Vocational Rehabilitation case. It
contained my resume, my medical history, and my efforts to pursue gainful employment.

The next day I reported to the Administrative Hearing Office. I was the only one who was
not accompanied by a lawyer. The clerk collected my file and took me to the Hearing Room.
The Administrative Judge was a middle age lady. The Clerk made the introduction to the
court. The judge addressed me to verify my case and asked for my legal counsel. I told her
that I did not have one. She stated that it was quite unusual but assured me that she would
give the same consideration to my case as it would have been presented by legal counsel.
The judge reviewed my job history and thanked me for my services, training Riverside
County's Social Services staff. Then, stated that she noted my efforts to pursue an online
training position which would not need verbal communication, thus hindering my ability to
interact with students. At the end of the session, she summarized her findings, stating that
it was a complicated case that needed further deliberation. She once again assured me
that she would equitably take my appeal under consideration and would announce her final
verdict by the next week.

I waited for one week, praying every day for God's Mercy. The verdict arrived as a formal
document at the appointed time. The Judge had granted me full Social Security Disability
benefits, including Medicare. I was also allocated a lump sum of accumulated benefits from
the date of my first application in 2002. In reading the judgment, I lost control and screamed

with joy. Terry rushed into the room wondering what had come over me. The Words of
Abdu'l-Baha echoed in my ear: "I am with you Always!" I prayed for that compassionate
Judge who helped secure our future.

BIHE – Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education
2006 – 2007

Norma Hemmat, a dear Bahá'í from Tampa, invited me to her house to attend a meeting
of the BIHE faculty members, Florida Branch. Norma's husband, Amrollah Hemmat, who

was a Bahá'í author, was a graduate of Dr. Ghadimi's class in Iran. He initiated the
formation of the English faculty of the BIHE in Florida.

Excerpt from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27í_Institute_for_Higher_Education

'The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), established by the Bahá'í
community of Iran in 1987 to meet the educational needs of young people who have
been systematically denied access to higher education by the Iranian government.
Currently, through a main faculty in Iran and an Affiliated Global Faculty from
universities around the world, BIHE offers a total of 38 undergraduate and graduate
programs in Sciences, Engineering, Business and Management, Humanities, and
Social Sciences. More than 80 universities in North America, Europe, and Australia
have thus far accepted the BIHE's graduates directly into programs of graduate
study at the masters and doctoral levels. BIHE has a decentralized and fluid
structure and uses a hybrid approach of offline and online delivery methods which
has enabled it to grow under unusual sociopolitical circumstances. Despite
numerous arrests, periodic raids, several imprisonments, mass confiscation of
school equipment and general harassment, BIHE has continued and even expanded
its operation. BIHE has received praise for offering a non-violent, creative, and
constructive response to ongoing oppression.

Faculty

As of 2016, the BIHE operates through the services of approximately 700 faculty,
who are academic and professionals residing in Iran, and a network of affiliated

global faculty that support the Institute through online courses, curriculum development, and other services. A significant number of faculty are BIHE graduates.

At the outset, the administrators and faculty of BIHE were mainly Bahá'í professors dismissed from Iranian universities after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Other faculty members included doctors, dentists, lawyers, and engineers many of whom were fired from their jobs by the Iranian authorities following the Islamic revolution. BIHE also drew on the expertise of a small and anonymous group of Bahá'í academics in North America, Europe, and Australia, who sent the latest textbooks and research papers, occasionally made visits to Iran as guest lecturers, and otherwise provided instructional and technical support.

With the expansion of the online capabilities of the BIHE over the past decade or so, has also been assisted by a large and growing number of volunteer professors from around the world who form its Affiliated Global Faculty (AGF).

Although catering to the Bahá'í community of Iran, the BIHE is hardly an exclusively Bahá'í institution. Non-Bahá'í Iranians worked with the BIHE and contributed to its success

Almost all of the professors and administrative staff of BIHE are volunteers who serve without receiving payment.’

In 2006, Amrollah Hemmat approached a group of the University educators in Central Florida to develop an English language curriculum for the Institute. In that meeting, I offered to assist the faculty in curriculum development. I worked on this project full time, writing articles for each module. It was one of the most rewarding ventures of my life. After completion of the courses, both Terry and I became online tutors for the students in Iran. It was heartwarming for me to spend the time to tutor the Bahá’í youth, who gathered in one of the centers to attend the online classes. Although there was no video, we did our best

to communicate with these precious students through Skype audio service. Despite the rule to conduct the entire session in English, when students found out that I was an Iranian, they asked me to spend time after the lessons to counsel them in coping with their numerous challenges. I wholeheartedly accepted to be their mentor, helping them to resolve their problems. Those sessions affected me so much that for hours after each session, I thought about each one of them and remembered them in my prayers.

“Ring the Bells that Still Can Ring” – 2008 – 2009

In 2008, after a routine mammography, followed by a series of tests and procedures, I was diagnosed with having breast cancer. It was a frightening time of my life. As I had three dear friends in California, who had succumbed to breast cancer within the past 10 years. One was my old friend from the Philippines, Delia Brown. The others were two Iranian friends Jila Imani and Layla. I mourned their suffering and passing away and prayed for their souls. A few months before my diagnosis, my dear friend Jean was diagnosed with breast cancer and had undergone surgery and prolonged treatments. I was with her through every step and was astonished by her strength and courage to make difficult decisions. She hardly complained about her pain and discomfort. So, she became my role model and mentor. It was amazing how I surrendered to the Will of God and accepted my fate with serenity and contentment. Norma Hemmat was another friend who was a survivor and helped me to overcome my anxiety. In October, which was the Breast Cancer Awareness month, I listened to the interview of Elizabeth Edwards about how she coped with her end term breast cancer. Her response became my blueprint for surviving cancer. She said that she listened to this song called Anthem, by Leonard Cohen, and tried to apply it in her life:

‘Don't dwell on what has passed away, or what is yet to be
Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in.’

I followed her advice to think in the moment, with no regrets of the past and no fear of the future. To accept the “crack” of the cancer, to let go of perfect offering, and to let the light

of God’s mercy penetrate my being. My Bahá’í friends sent a request to the National Office to offer prayers at the Temple. The loving note from the National that they had offered healing prayers for me warmed my soul. The World Center granted my request for the Universal House of Justice to pray for me in the Holy Shrines. The love of the community was overflowing. There was the Regional Council Conference in Atlanta that my fellow Area Teaching Committee members attended. As I was recovering from my surgery, I was not able to go. I received a call from one of the ATC members and on the speakerphone was the Auxiliary Board Member Farah Rosenberg. They were having reports from the Clusters and wanted me to hear the entire session on the phone and receive my input. They also offered prayers for me at the meeting. This love helped me during my struggle and led me to the path of survival.

It was the Divine blessing that I lived close to the Moffitt Cancer Center, one of the leading cancer treatment hospitals in the country, also, having my Disability Medicare which covered most of the expenses. I had a double mastectomy on November 4 th, the anniversary of the passing of the Beloved Guardian and the election day, when Obama became the first African American president of the United States. The treatment continued for one year, consisting of painful reconstructive surgeries and procedures. I am blessed that I have been Cancer free for 10 years, hoping that with the Grace of God the Cancer will never come back!

Since then, I have been reciting the prayer which was revealed by Abdu’l-Baha for Lua Getsinger day and night:

‘Thou knowest, O God, and art my witness that I have no desire in my heart save
to attain Thy good pleasure, to be confirmed in servitude unto Thee, to consecrate
myself in Thy service, to labor in Thy great vineyard and to sacrifice all in Thy
path. Thou art the All-Knowing and the All-Seeing. I have no wish save to turn my
steps, in my love for Thee, towards the mountains and the deserts to loudly
proclaim the advent of Thy Kingdom, and to raise Thy call amidst all men. O
God! Open Thou the way for this helpless one, grant Thou the remedy to this
ailing one and bestow Thy healing upon this afflicted one. With burning heart and
tearful eyes, I supplicate Thee at Thy Threshold.

O God! I am prepared to endure any ordeal in Thy path and desire with all my
heart and soul to meet any hardship.

O God! Protect me from tests. Thou knowest full well that I have turned away
from all things and freed myself of all thoughts. I have no occupation save
mention of Thee and no aspiration save serving Thee.’

www.bahaiprayers.org/teaching9.htm

Tranquility Zone Devotionals
2006 – 2018

I learned about the Tranquility Zone when I was in New Zealand. The description of the
program read:
‘The Tranquility Zone started as a community service project in 1998 and is based
at the Health Hydro in Swindon. Tranquility Zones provide a relaxing environment
created with flowers, candles, and soft furnishings, a programme of words and music
and, above all, a special atmosphere where people can reflect and relax. The
Tranquility Zone is described as "an oasis of calm and well-being for the body, mind,
and soul" and is a place where guests can enjoy a few tranquil moments in a
specially prepared setting. Tranquility Zones have been set up at Swindon Borough
Council, in local businesses, the local hospital, and various other charity
organizations. In the first 4 years, approximately 3,500 people have attended the
Tranquility Zones.’
The Tranquillity Zone - bahaiswindon.aoehost.de
bahaiswindon.aoehost.de/32.html

In 2006, I adapted the basic framework of the Tranquility Zone, and with their

permission,
developed a series of guided imagery, meditation, and devotional programs for the Pasco
community.

Terry and I wrote a joint invitation letter and mailed them to all the neighbors in our
Development. We also advertised the activity, in the event section of local newspapers of
Pasco, Tampa and St. Petersburg.

During the next ten years, Tranquility Zone became a monthly devotional for Pasco,
Hernando, Tampa, and Pinellas. Friends from these areas accompanied their contacts to
the devotional. We had between 7 to 25 participants each month, with the majority being
non-Bahá'ís. I sent out personal invitations via email and Facebook or made calls to the
seekers referred by the National Seekers Response.

As participation from Tampa area increased, we formed a Teaching Team with members
from Tampa, East Pasco, and West Pasco. We called it the 3 Zones Team. Jean Philbrick
from East Pasco, Tom Rykwalder, Jutta B. Sasse and Jutta Lever, from Tampa, supported
Terry and me to hold these gatherings.

Personal interactions and invitations were the keys to the success of this activity. Within
the past 10 years, Tranquility Zones created a safe space for participants to relax, meditate
and have a friendly conversation about the Faith and overcoming their personal challenges.
I developed more than 20 programs for the Tranquility Zones. The themes were tailored
towards meeting the needs of participants who had RSVP'd. The platform helped 23
seekers to embrace the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. When we had visitors from the Regional
Council, they asked to introduce the program to the Bahá'í communities in the Southern
Region. I responded by sending a program and pictures for their Newsletter.

Picture of 2010 Tranquility Zone with a group of participants - From the total number of
attendees, 40% were Friends of the Faith- some are not in the picture. This devotional

was featured in “The American Bahá’í” Magazine.

Bahá’ís sitting in front row, from left: Liliya and Ofaylia Gevorgian, Jay Miller, Terry Gillbanks, Jean Philbrick, Shahla Gillbanks.
Back row, second from left: Jutta Lever, Sumnima Shah, Sharon Miller

In February 2013, we had the pleasure of having Hoda Hosseini, a member of the Regional Council and her husband as special guests in our Tranquility Zone. The theme was “Achieving the State of Radiant Acquiescence,” and “Living a Joyful and Spiritual Life.” The majority of the 20 participants were from Tampa. We had 6 Friends of the Faith from West Pasco, among them a wonderful young lady from the Seekers Response. Elsa, a dear Bahá’í friend who embraced the Faith earlier that year, brought a friend to the gathering to join our “Group”!

The devotional was followed by a fireside with Hoda as the speaker. We mentioned that these gatherings were a part of the Core Activities that the Bahá’ís were offering as a service to the community. This led to the explanation of the Study Circles. Right there, three of the seekers and a new Bahá’í showed interest to participate in the Book One Study Circle.

We started the class at our home the next Wednesday, with Tony Quinones as the tutor. Two of the seekers, who were now Friends of the Faith became Bahá’ís. The young lady from the Seekers Response attended the sessions and had memorized all the assigned quotations. However, she faced opposition from her father for leaving their church and participating in Bahá’í activities. We then lost contact, while I continued to pray for her to overcome her challenges. A year later, I received an email from the Seekers Response Office in New York, inquiring about a university student from Tampa, who was interested in participating in Bahá’í activities. It was the same young lady, giving my name as her reference. I was moved by her resilience and provided the Office with the background information about this wonderful Friend of the Faith.

In 2016, the following report from the 3 Zones Team meeting was submitted to the American Bahá'í Magazine:

The 3 Zones Team members decided to respond to the call of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world that:
'Far from disheartening you, let the world's prejudices and hostilities be reminders of how urgently souls all around you need the healing balm that you alone can present to them.'

Therefore, we planned our upcoming devotionals on the above theme.
• The first of this series was held at the Gillbanks on "Healing Balm to the hostiles and prejudices." It was well received by the Friends of the Faith participants. The Bahá'í readings were on: The Causes of Prejudice and Hostility, Actions to Overcome Differences, Steps to Achieve the Most Great Peace, and Divine Guidelines. The participants from West and East Pasco and Tampa had an in-depth fireside discussion following the Devotional.

• The second Tranquility Zone was on: "Finding Peace." The topics included: The Power of Holy Spirit to Bring Peace, Working Towards Harmony, The Coming of Peace, Summoning Mankind to Peace and Amity, and Setting Examples to Reform Human Character. We concluded with the Prayer for Mankind. It followed by an inspirational

sharing of what touched the participant's hearts from the Holy Writings. The Friends of the Faith who joined us for the first time showed appreciation for the topics and the message of unity and Peace. One Fiend mentioned that it was the first time that her husband "opened up and shared his views in a meeting." She asked to be invited to the future meetings, as "it will be good for both of them!"

In 2017, some of the Team members faced serious health issues. Dear Jean suffered a stroke, and dear Jutta Lever had to be confined in a Rehab facility. Also, I had to deal with my own health problems and surgeries which hindered me from hosting the meetings on a monthly basis. Since then, I accepted to conduct Tranquility Zone devotional in other communities and helped the friends in Tampa to hold a guided meditation, using

my
programs.

Recently, I posted the program on my “footprints in the sands of time” Facebook and
received positive response from the readers across the world, who were planning to host
this devotional in their communities.

My hope is by including the program in this Chapter, the readers will be interested in starting
a similar program in their community. The following are sample personal invitation and step
by step implementation for holding a Tranquility Zone:

Dear friend: you are lovingly invited:
To: The Tranquility Zone – Healing Balm to the hostilities and prejudices
On: Saturday, September 17, 2016
From: 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., followed by lunch and fellowship.
At: The Gillbanks
The Tranquility Zone is a place where we can enjoy in a simple but dignified atmosphere
of peace, serenity, and well-being, some unhurried moments of contemplation. To unwind
by inspiring readings and music chosen to uplift the heart, rejoice the soul, and refresh
the spirit. It aims to create for each person who attends a state in which:

“God shall bestow upon his heart a divine tranquility and cause him to be of them
that are at peace with themselves.”
- From the Bahá’í Writings

Please let us know if you will be joining us.
We are looking forward to hearing from you and having the pleasure of your company.
With loving Regards
Terry and Shahla Gillbanks

The implementation process of holding a Tranquility Zone:

10:00 - 10:30 a.m.
Social, tea, and cookies in the living room area - for participants to get to know
each other and have an informal chat.

Shahla distributes the Readings among a few friends and asks them to read aloud
when their question was called.

10:30 - 12:00
Tranquility Zone in the Lounge area. Participants are seated in a circle, with

flowers and scented candles on the tables - subdued natural lighting.

Terry welcomes the participants and goes over the invitation letter about the Tranquility Zone.

Shahla plays a soft meditation background music and starts the program, by asking the friends to sit comfortably and follow the guided meditation:
Close your eyes… relax, breath in, breath out, in and …out

Imagine you are in a beautiful rose garden. Smell the perfume; enjoy the burst of white,
red, pink, and yellow colored roses around you.

See a pair of white doves perching on a tree nearby. Listen to them as they fill the air
with their melody. Touch them with your eyes. Feel the peace of being so close to them.

Walk to the spring nearby; immerse your feet in the cool water.

Feel the fragrant breeze on your face, as you gaze into the clear blue sky

Feel the warmth of the sun on your face, your eyes, your mouth, relaxing you and making
you whole

Feel the light getting closer and closer until it touches your heart, and then gradually
going through your body, relaxing you and making you feel whole: Your head… relax….
Your eyes... relax… your ears... relax…. Your jaws… relax… your neck… relax…. Your
face… relax… your chest… relax… your back… relax… your shoulder and arms…
relax… your legs… relax… your feet…relax…,

Now you feel light, relaxed, and safe…

Feel the joy and tranquility in your heart and soul … Let the peace in…, knowing that all
is well

Stay in this blissful moment for a while

Put all your cares and worries in a basket, tie it to a balloon and let it go, higher and
higher… as they disappear…. Let God take over….

Now you are ready to meditate on important issues in your life

Your soul is connecting to the Higher Power, to God

In the next 15 minutes, you will commune with God. You join me to ask a series of

questions from God and listen to the answers from the Bahá’í Holy Writings

Your1st question is about: Prejudices and Hostilities
The first guest reads:

‘Let us thank God who has drawn us together evening. It gives me great joy, for I see that you are seekers after truth. You are not held in bondage by the chains of prejudice, and your greatest longing is to know the truth. Truth may be likened to the sun! The sun is the luminous body that disperses all shadows; in the same way does truth scatter the shadows of our imagination. As the sun gives life to the body of humanity so does truth give life to their souls. Truth is a sun that rises from different points on the horizon.

In the days of old an instinct for warfare was developed in the struggle with wild animals; this is no longer necessary; nay, rather, co-operation and mutual understanding are seen to produce the greatest welfare of mankind. Enmity is now the result of prejudice only.

All the teaching of the Prophets is one; one faith; one Divine light shining throughout the world. Now, under the banner of the oneness of humanity, all people of all creeds should turn away from prejudice and become friends and believers in all the Prophets.

Then all disputes would disappear, all then would be united. Bahá'u'lláh came for this purpose. He has made the three religions one. He has uplifted the standard of the oneness of faith and the honour of humanity in the centre of the world. Today we must gather round it and try with heart and soul to bring about the union of mankind.

God has created the world as one -- the boundaries are marked out by man. God has not divided the lands, but each man has his house and meadow; horses and dogs do not divide the fields into parts. That is why Bahá'u'lláh says: "Let not a man glory in that he loves his country, but that he loves his kind." All are of one family, one race; all are human beings. Differences as to the partition of lands should not

be the cause of separation among the people.’

Bahá'í Reference Library - Paris Talks, Pages 127-134

Shahla: You meditate for a moment and then ask the
2nd question: Causes of Prejudice and Hostilities
The 2nd guest reads:

‘One of the great reasons of separation is colour. Look how this prejudice has power
in America, for instance. See how they hate one another! Animals do not quarrel
because of their colour! Surely man who is so much higher in creation, should not
be lower than the animals. Think over this. What ignorance exists! White doves do
not quarrel with blue doves because of their colour, but white men fight with dark-
coloured men. This racial prejudice is the worst of all.

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is, that religious, racial, political, economic,
and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity. As long as these prejudices
prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest. For a period of 6,000 years history
informs us about the world of humanity. During these 6,000 years the world of
humanity has not been free from, war, strife, murder and bloodthirstiness. In every
period war has been waged in one country or another and that war was due to either
religious prejudice, racial prejudice, political prejudice, or patriotic prejudice. It has
therefore been ascertained and proved that all prejudices are destructive of the
human edifice. As long as these prejudices persist, the struggle for existence must
remain dominant, and bloodthirstiness and rapacity continue. Therefore, even as
was the case in the past, the world of humanity cannot be saved from the darkness
of nature and cannot attain illumination except through the abandonment of
prejudices and the acquisition of the morals of the Kingdom.

These blind imitations and hereditary prejudices have invariably become the cause
of bitterness and hatred and have filled the world with darkness and violence of war.
Therefore, we must seek the fundamental truth in order to extricate ourselves from
such conditions and then with illumined faces find the pathway to the kingdom

of
God.’

Shahla: You meditate for a moment and then ask the:
3rd question: Actions to Overcome Differences
The 3rd guest reads:

‘The Universal Races Congress was good, for it was intended for the furtherance
and progress of unity among all nations and a better international understanding.
The purpose was good. The causes of dispute among different nations are always
due to one of the following classes of prejudice: racial, lingual, theological, personal,
and prejudices of custom and tradition. It requires a universal active force to
overcome these differences. A small disease needs a small remedy, but a disease
which pervades the whole body needs a very strong remedy. A small lamp may light
a room, a larger would light a house, a larger still might shine through the city, but
the sun is needed to light the whole world.

These meetings teach us that Unity is good, and that suppression (slavery under
the yoke of tradition and prejudice) is the cause of disunion. To know this is not
enough. All knowledge is good, but it can bear no fruit except by action. It is well to
know that riches are good, but that knowledge will not make a man rich; he must
work, he must put his knowledge into practice. We hope the people realize and know
that unity is good, and we also hope that they will not be content to stand still in that
knowledge. Do not only say that Unity, Love and Brotherhood are good; you must
work for their realization.

Knowledge is not enough; we hope by the Love of God we shall put it into practice.
A spiritual universal Force is needed for this. Meetings are good for engendering
spiritual force. To know that it is possible to reach a state of perfection, is good; to
march forward on the path is better. We know that to help the poor and to be merciful
is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man, nor
can the poor be warmed by knowledge or words in the bitter winter; we must give
the practical help of Loving-kindness.

I ask you all, each one of you, to follow well the light of truth, in the Holy Teachings,
and God will strengthen you by His Holy Spirit so that you will be enabled to overcome the difficulties, and to destroy the prejudices which cause separation and
hatred amongst the people. Let your hearts be filled with the great love of God, let it
be felt by all; for every man is a servant of God, and all are entitled to a share of the
Divine Bounty.'

Bahá'í Reference Library - 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, Pages 59-61

Shahla: You meditate for a moment and then ask the:
4th question: Steps to Achieve the Greatest Peace
The 4th guest reads:

'The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind
and of the fundamental oneness of religion. War shall cease between nations, and
by the will of God the Most Great Peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world, and all men will live as brothers.
Knowledge is the first step; resolve, the second step; action, its fulfillment,
is the third step.

To construct a building, one must first of all make a plan, then one must have the
power (money), then one can build. A society of Unity is formed, that is good -- but
meetings and discussions are not enough…. These meetings here in London are good, the knowledge and the intention are good, but how can there be a result without action? Today the force for Unity is the Holy Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. He
manifested this spirit of Unity. Bahá'u'lláh brings East and West together. Go back,
search history, you will not find a precedent for this.

Universal Peace is assured by Bahá'u'lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God; that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races, and all conditions of mankind. This is one of the
special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation.

Bahá'u'lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education. This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance characteristically new in this dispensation.'

Bahá'í Reference Library - 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, Pages 19-20

Shahla: You meditate for a moment and then ask the:

next question: The Divine Guidelines
Tow guests, together, take turn and read:

‘When hatred and animosity, fighting, slaughtering, and great coldness of heart were governing this world, and darkness had overcome the nations, Bahá'u'lláh, like a bright star, rose from the horizon of Persia and shone with the great Light of Guidance, giving heavenly radiance and establishing the new Teaching. He declared the most human virtues; He manifested the Spiritual powers, and put them into practice in the world around Him.

- First...: He lays stress on the search for Truth. This is most important, because the people are too easily led by tradition. It is because of this that they are often antagonistic to each other, and dispute with one another. But the manifesting of Truth discovers the darkness and becomes the cause of Oneness of faith and belief: because Truth cannot be two! That is not possible.

- Second...: Bahá'u'lláh taught the Oneness of humanity; that is to say, all the children of men are under the mercy of the Great God. They are the sons of one God; they are trained by God. He has placed the crown of humanity on the head of every one of the servants of God. Therefore, all nations and peoples must consider themselves brethren. They are all descendants from Adam. They are the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits of One Tree. They are pearls from one shell. But the children of men are in need of education and civilization, and they require to be polished, till they become bright and shining. Man and woman both should be educated equally and equally regarded. It is racial, patriotic, religious and class prejudice, that has been the cause of the destruction of Humanity.
- Third...: Bahá'u'lláh taught, that Religion is the chief foundation of Love and Unity and the cause of Oneness. If a religion become the cause of hatred and disharmony, it would be better that it should not exist. To be without such a religion is better than to be with it.
- Fourth…: Religion and Science are intertwined with each other and cannot be

separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly. One wing is not
enough. Every religion which does not concern itself with Science is mere tradition,

and that is not the essential. Therefore, science, education and civilization are most
important necessities for the full religious life.

- Fifth…: The Reality of the divine Religions is one, because the Reality is one and
cannot be two. All the prophets are united in their message, and unshaken. They
are like the sun; in different seasons they ascend from different rising points on the
horizon. Therefore, every ancient prophet gave the glad tidings of the future, and
every future has accepted the past.

- Sixth…: Equality and Brotherhood must be established among all members of
mankind. This is according to Justice. The general rights of mankind must be
guarded and preserved. All men must be treated equally. This is inherent in the very
nature of humanity.

- Seventh…: The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that
poverty shall disappear, and that everyone as far as possible, according to his
position and rank, shall be comfortable. Whilst the nobles and others in high rank
are in easy circumstances, the poor also should be able to get their daily food and
not be brought to the extremities of hunger.

- Eighth…: Bahá'u'lláh declared the coming of the Most Great Peace. All the nations
and peoples will come under the shadow of the Tent of the Great Peace and
Harmony -- that is to say, by general election a Great Board of Arbitration shall be
established, to settle all differences and quarrels between the Powers; so that
disputes shall not end in war.

- Ninth.: Bahá'u'lláh taught that hearts must receive the Bounty of the Holy Spirit, so
that Spiritual civilization may be established. For material civilization is not adequate
for the needs of mankind and cannot be the cause of its happiness. Material
civilization is like the body and spiritual civilization is like the soul. Body without soul
cannot live

This is a short summary of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. To establish this Bahá'u'lláh
underwent great difficulties and hardships. He was in constant confinement and He
suffered great persecution. But in the fortress (Akká) He reared a spiritual palace
and from the darkness of His prison He sent out a great light to the world.

It is the ardent desire of the Bahá'ís to put these teachings into common practice:
and they will strive with soul and heart to give up their lives for this purpose, until
the heavenly light brightens the whole world of humanity.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London - Baha'i Reference Library

Shahla: You are at the end of your communion with God for now … Meditate for a
while …. When you are ready open your eyes and share one thing from the Writings
that has touched your heart….

The music stops, the lights turn on, and participants start sharing their thoughts, their
inquiries, and sometimes personal issues. A friendly and warm-hearted discussion follows.
The Bahá'í ideas and teachings take center stage of this session. The friends of the Faith
frequently mentioned that it was the first time that they could open up and feel safe to
discuss their personal ideas and problems and receive answers which help them to resolve
them.

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At noon, we break for lunch and fellowship. At this time, a few informal firesides take place.
I offer "Bahá'í Faith" books and prayer booklets which were placed on the tables for the
seeker and Friends of The Faith to take. One of the dear seekers who was referred through
National Seekers Response went home, shared the book with his wife, and in a follow-up
meeting with friends in Hernando, told them that they would like to declare. He became an
active member of the community and regularly attended the Tranquility Zones. He passed
away from Cancer a few years later.
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PASCO AND HERNANDO ATC – AREA TEACHING COMMITTEE
2006 – 2016

In 2006, following the success of the Road Map to Success Campaign of the previous year, the Pasco - Hernando Cluster achieved “B” status. The South Eastern Regional Council appointed the Cluster’s Area Teaching Committee, with members representing each locality within the Cluster. I represented the West Pasco community and consequently in 2008, was appointed as the Secretary of the ATC- Area Teaching Committee.

We had the bounty of the ongoing communication, guidance and nurturing of the Regional Council members and its Office of Cluster Development. Our Reflection Gatherings often had a special guest to guide and galvanize the community. Among them, Counselor Andrews, some of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Auxiliary Board, and the Regional Council. The following excerpts from the Cluster Newsletters describe the progression of our Cluster to the “A” status in 2009 and beyond.

December 2006, Issue 1
Cluster Reflection Gathering
Our recent Reflection Gathering was a resounding success. Thirty nine participants, representing all areas of our cluster participated in an exciting program, aimed to fulfill the objectives set by the Universal House of Justice for the Reflection Phase “in which lessons learned in action are articulated and incorporated into plans for the next cycle of activity .... as much a time of joyous celebration as it is of serious consultation."
We celebrated the “Tree of our Achievements and Successes, and Reflected on what worked and what needed to be fine-tuned.” The participants, who responded to the Feedback Survey, indicated that the visual displays and graphs which showed the Cluster progress month by month were an effective tool to make the statistical information easy to read and understand.
“The Community Sharing” was the favorite part of the program, with 90% participation of friends sharing their success stories, or made dynamic and artistic presentations. Participant’s feedback stated that “there was an allowance for

everyone who wanted to say something to do so." They liked hearing from all aspects of each community in fulfilling the goals of the 5 Year Plan. They especially liked "When the sharing was acted out in a fun, cute and amusing way." And "the variety, creativity, and efforts put forth by participants." They found "the devotions by the children very moving." And "the Pasco junior youth presentation was well done."
We had the bounty of the presence of the Auxiliary Board member, Santosh Kamath, who inspired and assisted us with serious consultation. Participant's feedback showed great appreciation for this part of the program. They Indicated that the "ABM Santosh was so encouraging; he recognized our efforts; it was nice to hear that we are doing well." They liked "the input from people and the feeling of being heard."

Participants were involved in a skit from Book 6 on Unity and Cultural Diversity with ABM Santosh on the right.

The last part of the program was dedicated to service. We viewed an inspiring video presentation on the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, followed by calling on the participant's commitment to "Develop the Cluster Activities Tree Charts" for the next three months. The Tree branches were soon decorated with colorful leaves representing Core Activities. Overall, the highlight of this part of the program was "the universal participation in consultation."

April 2007 Issue 2
"Month of May" Prayer Campaign

The Pasco and Hernando Area Teaching Committee is initiating a "Month of Prayer" Campaign for May 2007. The goal is to hold 25 neighborhood Devotional Meetings in one month around our Cluster.

Reflection Gathering

Our cluster had another successful Reflection Gathering. We had the bounty of the presence of Counselor Eugene Andrews, and Auxiliary Board David Dean, who inspired and guided 39 participants, representing East Pasco, Hernando,

West Pasco, and Port Richey.
The ATC was informed by the National Spiritual
Assembly, that Pasco/Hernando is considered #1
cluster in the USA over the past 6 months for
declarations of 5.31 per 100 Bahá'ís.
Some of the highlights of topics addressed by
Counselor Andrews are as follows:
? Look ahead toward the end of this Five Year Plan, Ridvan 2011
? 234 clusters to advance to A status in the USA. Florida currently has three
A clusters:
Broward County, Gainesville, and Tampa.
? See the end at the beginning (Seven Valleys)

Celebrating the May Month of Prayer Campaign
At our last Cluster Reflection Gathering, we celebrated the culmination of the
successful
Month of Prayer Campaign.
There was a total of 14 neighborhood Devotional meetings held, with a total
participation
of 100 Bahá'ís and 28 COI's - Community of interest. An average of 9
Bahá'ís and 2 COI's
attended each devotional gathering.
The hosts of the Devotional meetings shared their success stories and their
experiences
of what worked, and what needed fine-tuning for the future endeavors.
The lessons learned:
• Devotionals in the home were a wonderful experience and visiting each
other's homes
was unifying.
• Personal invitations and hand delivery yielded great results. Lilli
Carson's flyer was
effective for the Quinones.
• Prayer has been an important preparatory procedure.
• Devotional gatherings based on themes were effective and could serve a
purpose to
get certain populations to attend. (Pilgrimage, graduation was utilized to
expose others
to the devotional gathering.)
• Good free food was a plus.
• Writings from other religions make individuals comfortable (Christians).
• Devotional gatherings serve as a place for other Bahá'ís to bring their
family, friends,
and coworkers.
• Tranquility Zone with guided meditation and Focused questions are
effective.

? David Dean, the Auxiliary Board Member encouraged us to continue to hold
devotionals, emphasizing that the May initiative should not be an isolated

event.

The participants of one Tranquility Zone, one of the 14 devotionals held

A Culture of Love – Home Visit Campaign
At the Reflection Gathering, our Cluster initiated a campaign of Home Visits: "A Culture of Love" for the period of June 15th - September 15th.

The ATC is delighted to report that there will be 9 Action Teams who are committed to visiting a friend, family, coworker, and neighbor, new or isolated Bahá'í once monthly for the next 3 months. The purpose is to provide loving support, friendship, prayer, and spiritual themes of the Faith.

The ATC is praying that Bahá'u'lláh will be with you every step of the way, especially as you stretch new spiritual muscles in this Home Visit Campaign. Please keep track of your visits so you can inform the ATC of your achievements. Please call us with your questions and concerns.
If we can provide assistance or team you with another individual for support, please contact us.

Pasco Hernando Cluster Reflection Gathering

Our cluster had a wonderful Reflection Gathering on June 9th. Participation was incredible with 42 children, junior youth, youth, and adults in attendance. Everyone had a part to play in the success of the day. Prayers, songs, skits, role plays, celebrating our achievements, consulting on the future actions, encouragement, food, and love enveloped us.
Our Reflection Gathering success of 40 plus attendance is in large part due to the support of both the West Pasco and Hernando Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Our Cluster Institute Coordinator: Maaza Eshetu reported that there are approximately 110 Bahá'ís in the Pasco Hernando Cluster. The immediate goal is to get a critical mass of Bahá'ís through the complete sequence of Ruhi Books. This will create the available supply of human resources needed for sustainable growth of the cluster.

Junior Youth/Youth Group meets 2 times a month at 6:30 p.m., at the Gadelha's and or
other scheduled locations.

Junior Youth skit presentation on Home Visit at Reflection Gathering

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Reflection Gathering 1ST CYCLE OF GROWTH APRIL 2009
Thirty Cluster community members participated in an invigorating and inspiring Reflection
Gathering on April 18th.

Erica Tousant brought us greetings from National Spiritual Assembly and suggested
specific courses of actions that were successful in other clusters.
John Hatcher, Chairman of the Regional Council, shared the message of the Regional
Council and the important role of the Assemblies in helping the cluster community to
achieve its goals.

The Auxiliary Board members, Trish Irons and David Dean, emphasized the importance of
systematic action. The 1ST collective teaching program took place prior to the Reflection
Gathering at Spring Hill. Seven teams, including Erica Tousant, John Hatcher, and David
Dean, participated in the teaching event. We knocked on 114 doors and had the bounty of
having 6 interested souls to be visited next Saturday. One team had a friend who was not
yet a Bahá'í. They knocked on the door of an African American woman. She invited them
in and actively listened to the entire Anna's Presentation, reading the quotations and
prayers and really enjoying the message of Bahá'u'lláh. She mentioned that she was going
through a hard time and the prayer card – Refresh and Gladden my spirit, is a great help.
She said that she was working for the Hospice and would like to have Bahá'í prayers to
share with her dying patients. Next Saturday, we will be having a devotional, followed by a
few pages of Book 1, at her house.

Erica Toussaint's suggestion for success:

• Daily prayers for guiding the receptive souls to the Faith
• Making a list of your contacts and pledging to invite them to the firesides

and
Devotional meetings
• Forming teaching teams for direct teaching

EXPANSION PHASE OF THE 2nd CYCLE OF GROWTH JULY 18th – AUGUST 2nd

John Hatcher, in a loving message from the Regional Bahá'í Council, praised the unified and collective actions of our cluster community and encouraged us to develop strategies to reach out to the community at large, inviting them to our Children's Classes and Junior Youth Groups.
The Reflection Gathering in Spring Hill was a wonderful platform to celebrate our successes of the 1st Cycle of Growth: 10 devotional meetings with, 27 COI's participating; 31 teachers involved in the direct teaching endeavors; 3 Firesides, with 15 seekers participating; 2 Children's class, with 4 COI's participating; 1 Junior Youth Group, with 1 COI participating; 3 Study Circles, with 5 COI participants.

SEPTEMBER 2011, REFLECTION GATHERING

In our special Reflection Gathering, we had the pleasure of the presence of a Regional Council member, Aniela Costello, from the Cluster Development Office, as the guest consultant. Aniela, who has been following our Cluster's amazing progress, traveled far to meet with the members of our Cluster community.

The participants from all areas of the Cluster joined Aniela for an inspiring experiential devotional. Then, Aniela facilitated a discussion on: Rejoicing on our accomplishments, The process of meaningful and distinctive conversation; Development of spiritual communities in the neighborhoods; The concept and purpose of the Teaching Teams

The Highlights of consultation with Aniela:

- The importance of intensive teaching activities during the Expansion Phase.
- Counting how many meaningful and distinctive conversations we've had.
- Aniela told about a study circle where each person was charged with taking one quote

to someone else to discuss and get a better understanding. These people came back
to the study circle with more people with whom they had discussed the quotes.

- Pilot program of prayer partners for teachers – divide cluster into sectors; visit Bahá'ís who are not involved, encourage them to take part in the Expansion Phase by praying for the teachers. Maybe they can even pray at the same time as the teachers are actively teaching. Teachers can call the prayers and tell them about the teaching events. Encourage prayers to have a devotional, inviting Bahá'ís nearby. Prayers can ask the attendants of the devotional to write a list of people whom they are going to teach.
- Teaching Teams are composed of people who live in close proximity and have rapport with each other. Teaching Teams of Children's classes are formed to involve the parents in social activities, Teaching Teams plan fun activities like movie nights or dinner, invite their friends and neighbors, initiate Meaningful and Distinctive conversation with them, inviting them to the neighborhood core activities and firesides.

We then launched the 10th Intensive Program of Growth, with Tony Quinones' energizing talk, and developed a Master Action Plan.

- Aniela was delighted with the energy and depth of the participants' consultation in their Teaching Teams and developing their action plans in the form of commitments.

In 2012, the ATC Secretary sent the following Feast message for consultation, regarding the dynamic of the relationship between ATC and the Cluster community:

Beloved teachers and coworkers, The Area Teaching Committee is sending its loving gratitude for the wonderful service that each one of you individually and collectively is

rendering to our Beloved Cause. As a recent communication from the Regional Council indicates: "The efforts of the Pasco-Hernando Cluster is simply delight after delight!!! Keep these heartwarming stories coming! Love to you, dearest sister, Aniela" Our Cluster is doing an amazing job and has been maturing at an accelerated rate.

The ATC Secretary felt at this stage to share with you the process of

communication with
the Cluster: The ATC is following a few specific guidelines from the Regional Council,
stated in the Guidelines for the Area Teaching Committees and the attached guideline for
the Teaching Teams. The forms of communications are as follows:

? NEWSFLASHES: According to the Regional Council Guidelines, the ATC Secretary should “Sends out to the cluster email list daily newsflash during the intensive expansion phase of each IPG cycle and on a weekly basis during the remaining of the cycle.” The ATC Secretary is doing her best to share with you the stories and reports of you dear friends with the email list of
the friends who are active in teaching work and Core Activities.

? The PG NEWS UPDATE AND REPORTS: The Regional Council Guidelines indicated that the ATC Secretary should: “Produce cluster newsletter several times during each cycle, sharing the victories and achievements of the current cycle with the Assemblies and friends at large. This is particularly effective to be
done shortly before each Feast.”

? Working with the Teaching Teams: The Regional Council Guidelines indicate that
the ATC Secretary should: “Facilitate the formation, training, deployment, and
sustainability of teaching teams, and setting up opportunities for sharing what they
have learned.” The ATC Secretary, with the help of the ATC Liaisons, is carrying out
this responsibility, with love and humility, via emails and in person, in different stages
and with few options. The attached Teaching Teams Guidelines suggests:

? The Role of the Facilitator: “The facilitator is a liaison in regular contact with
the Area Teaching Committee secretary to share victories, observations, new
believers and their consolidation in the Plan, and the status of the Community Of
Interest.” The Team may appoint a Facilitator to report the information to the
ATC Secretary, and or share the report with the community at Feasts or Reflection Gatherings.

? “Reporting to the ATC: “Accurate lists of our contacts must be maintained, so
the needs of the contacts are being met continuously. Part of this list1 is reported
quarterly to the Area Teaching committee so that a count of the community of

interest can be sent to the Regional Bahá'í Council and ultimately to the International Teaching Centre." The ATC Secretary usually sends a request for the reports of Firesides and Core Activities periodically.

? The ATC Secretary sends a request for the reports of the following Team Activities,
right after the Reflection Gathering, during the Preparation Time, at the end of the
Expansion Phase, and one month before the culmination of each Cycle, in the form
of "CALL TO ACTION":

? "Planning Teaching Activities
• The team is free to employ any direct teaching method from door-to-door teaching to firesides and Deepenings. The goal is to engage seekers in "meaningful and distinctive conversations."
• Each member will identify and list their circle of contacts from among their
friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers, then create individual teaching plans
to reach them.
• As a team, we will also create a plan to reach our collective group of seekers.
• We will consult on how to approach our contacts or seekers and raise their interest towards the spiritual teachings of the Faith by engaging in deeper conversations in their homes or our homes.
? Reflection on Teaching Activities
One of the benefits of teaching teams, for its members, is having the continual opportunity to reflect and analyze the methods, approaches, and strategies of teaching, in order to become more effective teachers. Learning in action and reflection is an essential component of developing capacity to teach effectively. As team members, we will reflect after our encounters with seekers by simply asking ourselves a few questions. Examples:
"How did we do?"
"What was effective and what needs improvement?"
"How can we bring this seeker closer to Bahá'u'lláh?" What are their obstacles? Spiritual obstacles are often fear; how can we remove it? Physical obstacles are simpler; do they need transportation? If they are busy maybe a home visit is better than an invitation to a meeting."

? The other important communication is "Organizing a Successful Cluster Reflection
Meeting; The Cluster Reflection Meeting11 can be a wonderful time for the friends
in a cluster to come together and rejoice in the achievements of the previous cycle
and create a collective vision for the upcoming cycle. As the title implies, it should

be a time when there can be collective, thoughtful reflection on the state of the
cluster and the possibilities that lie ahead." This ATC communication is done through
the Flier, and request for the Teaching Teams facilitators and friends to contribute
to the different segments of the program.

Dear friends, as the Counselor Eugene Andrews used to remind us, we are building a
spiritual enterprise in each Cluster. Each one of us is contributing to this mighty
enterprise with our love, talents, skills, and sacrificial deeds.

"This is the time for growing; the season for joyous gathering! Take the cup of the
Testament in thy hand; leap and dance with ecstasy in the triumphal procession of
the Covenant! Lay your confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence

of the generous God; ask assistance from the Kingdom of Abha; seek confirmation
from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the horizon of eternal wealth; and pray
for help from the Source of Mercy!
Soon shall ye see the friends attaining their longed-for destination and pitching their
tents, while we are but in the first day of our journey."

Bahá'í World Faith—Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and
'Abdu'l-Bahá
('Abdu'l-Bahá's Section Only)
http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/BWF/bwf-40.html

EXPANSION PHASE OF THE 17th INTENSIVE PROGRAM OF GROWTH
FEBRUARY 13 TO MARCH 6TH
REFLECTION GATHERING
The East Pasco community hosted an inspiring Reflection Gathering at Fallah's house.
The A-Team organized a delightful Devotional, presented by their adorable Children's Class.
The youth arranged for a silent bake sale fundraiser to help them attend the Atlanta
Youth Conference.
The ATC Secretary shared the news of our Cluster being featured for the 3 rd time in
the American Bahá'í.
We celebrated the culmination of the IPG 16th, with a cake, which was decorated

with the icing that spelled all the goals, and 16 lighted candles, and cups of sparkling
cider and grape juice.

On Reflection on the lessons learned, it was recommended:
To utilize the Newsflashes in seeking help from the community, e.g., asking for volunteers to help the teachers of children's classes as adult supports or helping with
art projects.

To report all the teaching and Core Activities to the ATC and Statistical Officer. As we
don't have the Cluster Institute Coordinator/s, we need the support of the community
to help with the statistical reports.
On Launching the 17th IPG, we reviewed the Guidance of the Universal House of Justice:

"Key to the progress of an intensive program is the phase dedicated to reflection, in
which the lessons learned in action are articulated and incorporated into plans for
the next cycle of activity. Its principal feature is the reflection meeting – as much a
time of joyous celebration as it is of serious consultation."
27 December 2005 - To the Conference of the Continental ...
https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/activities-bahai...

We consulted on the importance of planning the next Cycle of IPG, by setting realistic Goals, and by "take(ing) into account increased capacity in terms of the
human resources available at the end of the cycle." Our new believers shared their
experience in being integrated into the Teaching Teams, and how the team members helped them to increase their knowledge and their capacity to be actively
involved in teaching and Core Activities. Randi reported on the success of her neighborhood community building activities, which started with her family embracing
the Faith; and now with having a Children's Class, a Junior Youth Group, and a Book
One Study Circle.

The 16th IPG'S HIGHLIGHTS OF ACHIEVEMENTS
1 new believer
60 friends were involved in teaching activities
50 Firesides/direct teaching events were held
12 Teaching Teams were formed and fully functioning
15 Devotional Meetings were held

11 Study Circles were held
6 Children’s Classes were held
1 JYEP in West Pasco
6 home visits to new believers
99 friends of the Faith and seekers participated in the Core Activities and Firesides

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ATC Received the following correspondence with regards to the recent Newsflash:

? From the Auxiliary Board member, Trisha Irons: Ya'Baha'ul'Abha! What wonderful news on all fronts. New registrations, consistent follow up on the seeker response line, seekers entering study circles, and regular firesides! I always love the sharing from the teams. Keep up the good teaching work! With love, Trish

? From the Regional Seekers Response System, Fran Young: Thank you! Thank you! What an inspirational report! I will share this at our Reflections. Sharing like this is what we need from each other. I feel such joy and relief knowing the seekers are in good hands with happy and joyous soldiers of Baha u llah, enthusiastic about teaching, loving, and serving our neighbors. I feel your joy and energy! Glory be to God! Much love, Fran

? From The American Bahá’í, Tom Mennillo: Thanks so much for this update, Shahla. Your teaching teams seem to be operating at such a high level in terms of engaging seekers and involving them in the core activities. Anything you can tell me about how this has evolved and what you're learning would be greatly appreciated. And if you can point me toward any of these individuals who members of teaching teams, that would be wonderful as well. Thanks. Tom

The following Report to the community was shared with Tom Menillo, for an article in the American Bahá’í Magazine:
Beloved teachers and coworkers;
During the Planning Period for 22nd Intensive Program of Growth, the Area Teaching Committee met and consulted on the attached Interim Report. In reviewing the amazing success of the community, in meeting and exceeding the goals of the IPG 21, we reflected on the reality of our Cluster and what has been working well in this IPG. The

followings are
the highlights:
1. The support of the Clusters Local Spiritual Assemblies and Groups, where the majority of members are either a part of the Teaching Teams or supporting the activities of the teams.
2. ATC's evolving role in becoming a Task Force, where the majority of members,
acting as the Liaisons for the Teaching Teams, support their respective communities
and report their success to the ATC Secretary for Newsflashes.
3. The wonderful help of the Statistical Officer to collect data for all the teaching and
Core Activities in the community and providing the data to the ATC for the final report
and the Cluster Growth Profile.
4. And finally, our wonderful Teaching Teams who work diligently to follow the Guidelines of the Universal House of Justice and the Regional Council; to Reflect,
set Goals and Achieve the Goals of each IPG.
? The dynamics of the Teaching Teams in our Cluster is fluid and unique. The membership in each team has been voluntary and has transcended beyond Cluster boundaries and Assemblies jurisdictions. An example is Parents Team, working closely with members in Tarpon Springs. The 3 Zone Team, where

members are from Tampa, East, and West Pasco. The team members support and attend each other's Devotionals in all 3 zones.
? The Teams follow the Guidelines of "Unity in Goals and Diversity in Actions" -
Team members have been setting their own individual goals for teaching and Core Activities while supporting other members endeavors.
? The concept of accompaniment is strong in each team. The more experienced members accompany other members who would like to initiate a Core Activity. In addition, each team has been nurturing the new believers, seekers, and the Friends of the Faith, accompanying them to the Bahá'ís activities within the
Cluster.
? The majority of our new believers and some Friends of the Faith have been the
referrals from the National or Regional Seekers Response. The ATC Secretary, after receiving the names from the Cluster's Seekers Response, request the Team members who are in the same locality, to contact the seekers and accompany the seekers to Bahá'í activities. This approach has been highly effective in developing friendship and trust with the seekers.

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"EDUCATION IS NOT A CRIME" CAMPAIGN
This Memoir started with the historical perspective of the Bahá'ís in Iran

and will continue
with a loving tribute to the ongoing persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í educators and students
best described in the article taken from the Bahá'í World News Service website:
The official news source of the worldwide Bahá'í community
8 February 2015

"Education is Not a Crime" gains momentum

'LOS ANGELES, United States — Education is Not a Crime, a worldwide campaign
drawing attention to the constructive response of the Bahá'í community to the
Iranian government's systematic denial of university education to young Bahá'ís , is
gaining momentum as it nears its global day of action, 27 February.

The campaign's website highlights the breadth of efforts by authorities in Iran to
persecute the Bahá'ís there, and it provides historical context.
Calling on people around the world to participate in the campaign, the homepage states, "Education is a crime in Iran. But we can change that".
Launched in November 2014, the campaign, organized by Maziar Bahari, an Iranian-Canadian journalist, and filmmaker who was himself imprisoned in Iran in
2009, was inspired by the film "To Light a Candle," a documentary made by Mr. Bahari.

The film uses interviews, personal stories, and archival footage – often smuggled
out of Iran at great personal risk – to explore how the Bahá'ís in Iran, in the face of
ongoing oppression, have found creative ways to respond to injustice. In particular,

it highlights the constructive resilience of Bahá'í youth who have expressed their
desire to pursue their education by developing informal arrangements through which
they could have access to university-level studies.

The campaign is leading up to a major event titled Education Is Not A Crime Live
2015, to be held in Los Angeles on 27 February, where "To Light, a Candle" will be
shown – one of the hundreds of screenings to be held around the world on that day.

A significant element of this campaign is the support it has received from

across the
world. Notably, a growing number of Iranians have decided to defend the rights of
the Bahá'ís against decades-long efforts by authorities and religious leaders in Iran
to misrepresent the Bahá'í community.
"Many people are learning from the Bahá'ís ," Mr. Bahari said during the premier of
his film in London this past September. He added that, in the past, Iranians "were
indifferent to the fate of the Bahá'ís. We didn't care to care.'
'Most young Iranians today have Bahá'í friends despite the fact the government
continues to harass them and portray them in the same negative light," Mr. Bahari
said.

The Education is Not a Crime campaign has been endorsed by many prominent individuals. These include Nobel Peace laureates such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Shirin Ebadi, Tawakkol Karman, Jody Williams, and Mairead Maguire. In addition, it has won the support of a number of other artists and intellectuals including Nazanin Boniadi, Abbas Milani, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Azar Nafisi, Omid Djalili, Eva LaRue, and Mohammad Maleki, former president of the University of Tehran.
A section of the site has been devoted to providing information on how individuals
can become involved in the initiative. In addition, numerous videos have been posted, both on the website and the Facebook page of the campaign, by people around the world who have sent messages supporting the right of the Bahá'ís in Iran
to study.
"Education is a basic human right," says an individual in his video posted on the
website. "It's like...the right to livelihood, safety or work, right to shelter. It's a basic
human right, it's not a crime. Deprivation of it is a crime.'

Responding to a Nationwide campaign:

The following press release was submitted to the American Bahá'í Magazine and was
included in the coverage of the Education is Not a Crime Campaign:
'On February 25th, the Hernando Bahá'í community showed the solidarity to the Education
Is Not a Crime Campaign, by sponsoring a free screening of "To Light a Candle"; a film that
depicts the Bahá'ís as the largest religious minority in Iran are systematically imprisoned,

tortured and killed by the Iranian government. The Islamic regime bans the Bahá'ís to study
or teach in Iranian universities.

The impact of this film was so powerful that a new seeker could not stop crying. A friend of
the Faith commented: "Wow! What a powerful film. It was heartbreaking to see what the
Bahá'í's have had to endure for something some of us take for granted (freedom of
education). Yet it is inspiring to see how they have stayed strong in their faith and despite
their many adversities, continue to find ways to further their education- even if it has to be
in secret."

Shahla Gillbanks moderated the discussion after a heartfelt sharing of her experience as a
Bahá'í in Iran. She mentioned how the Bahá'ís, by following the spiritual principles of the
Faith, are always striving to gain knowledge and skills in order to serve the greater
community. She shared a personal experience of some of the personalities in the film.
Among them, Dr. Farahngi, who sixty years ago organized a group of doctors - including
Shahla's father, nurses, and pharmacist, to regularly go to the remote villages in Iran and
offer free medical service to the villagers - Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís .
After the Revolution,
Dr. Farhangi was arrested and executed, and his desecrated body was found with a sign
depicting him as an enemy of Islam.

The other personality was Dr. Davoudi, a professor at the University of Tehran who was
Shahla's mentor when she was a student. After the Revolution, Dr. Davoudi, as a member
of the National Spiritual Assembly was abducted, never to be found. Professor Davoudi's
daughter, who was featured in the film, was banned from university to continue her
education!

Shahla mentioned that Genocide,
according to the Amnesty
International definition, is the
systematic elimination of a group
of people by the government,

based on their race, color and
belief, among other things. This
happens by depriving the group of
their source of livelihood, their
family, their belongings, their right
to education, freedom of religious
practice and social interaction. This
is in addition

to imprisonment, torture, and
execution.

Iranian Bahá'ís are facing the genocide by peaceful resistance. The
Bahá'í educators
around the world have been supporting the BIHE. Shahla joined a group of
dedicated
educators in Florida who developed the English Language Curriculum for the
Institute.
Later, she and her husband became online tutors for a group of BIHE students in
Iran. It
was a bounty and a privilege!

In open discussion, the participants were asked to respond to 2 questions:

- The Iranian government seems to say that the education is a crime for the
Bahá'ís.
What do you say about it?

- What do you think Iran is losing by not allowing the Bahá'ís to
study?

The lively discussion resulted in a resolution that each of us needs to take a
stand and
speak out for the Bahá'ís of Iran, affirming that Education is Not a
Crime!'

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2017 Highlight, Celebration of Bicentenary of Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

Taken from the Bahá'í World News website:
http://feeds.bahai.org/bwns/rss

'Sunset in Hawaii closes extraordinary period of worldwide celebrations
BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE — With sunset in Hawaii moments ago, the period
marking the bicentenary of Bahá'u'lláh's birth has come to a close.
Over the last 72 hours, a cross-section of humanity, unprecedently diverse, in
virtually every spot on the globe, joined in a striking diversity of action to
commemorate the birth of Bahá'u'lláh.
Countless individuals were inspired by the festivities surrounding the
bicentenary
and were moved by their encounters with the life and writings of

Bahá'u'lláh.

One of the more than 27,000 visitors who viewed an exhibit on the life of Bahá'u'lláh held in Frankfurt said, "My wife and I were just talking before we came here about how life was without purpose. But then we visited this exhibition. Here we have found the answer to our purpose in life."

In Suriname, Vice President Ashwin Adhin planned to attend a reception for the bicentenary held at the National Bahá'í Centre. After a short program which included prayers, a film about the history of the Faith in Suriname, and a talk, he decided to cancel his plans, so he would have time to speak with the Bahá'ís about community-building in the young country. On the same day, the Bahá'í community of Canada received a public message of good-will from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, one of the last of a wide array of such messages received in recent days from officials.

Traditional dance performed in Bangui, Central African Republic

Many celebrations throughout the world featured screenings of the film Light to the World, which tells the story of Bahá'u'lláh's life and the impact of His teachings. A participant at a gathering in East Asia said, "After watching the film, everyone was saying 'Bahá'u'lláh' with so much ease and comfort...It was as if they had known Him for many years and He was a familiar Figure to them."

At a national celebration in Madrid, one attendee said, "the message of Bahá'u'lláh is exactly what humanity needs. Listening to these principles is not just a matter of hearing a beautiful message, it is essential for the progress of the human race.'

Engaging with society

'At various gatherings attended by government leaders, NGOs, and faith groups, the Bahá'í community offered its contribution to pressing matters, such as the role of religion in society, migration, peace, the environment, education, and gender equality.'

~ Bahá'í World News Service,
The official news source of the worldwide Bahá'í community
2017: A momentous year for the Baha'i world | Bahá'í World ...
https://news.bahai.org/story/1231

The Bahá'í community of Pasco had an opportunity to take part in this endeavor when the Seeker Response received a request from an organization to have a Bahá'í representative at their upcoming Panel Forum. I was asked to be the Bahá'í speaker. The following press release was shared with the American Bahá'í and excerpts appeared in local newspapers:

'The American Association of University Women in West Pasco, Florida, sponsored a forum on Who Is My Neighbor: A Racial & Religious Minorities Panel, to address: What's it like living in America today if you're a member of a racial or religious minority? Panel members represented Jewish, Bahá'í, Muslim, Latino American, African American, and Native American Communities. They talked about their personal experiences and perspectives, interspersed with brief musical accompaniment. A group of Bahá'ís from West Pasco and other Cluster Communities were present to support the endeavor. Bahá'í information brochures were provided for distribution.

Shahla Gillbanks, the representative of the Bahá'í community, stated:

"I was born in Iran to a Bahá'í family. My father was a medical doctor and my mother a teacher. I learned as a Bahá'í child that religion is progressive in nature. That all the messengers of God came to this world to help mankind to develop and receive the love of God. So, I learned about all the religions and loved all the messengers of God.

However, my extended family was Muslims, and some of them considered us as unbelievers and defiled. My old aunt used to cover my face with her veil before kissing me and dipping fruits that we offered her in a fishpond. It was strange for me that with my father being a doctor, she was treating us as unclean. But my mother taught me to be kind and respectful.

When I was in my teens, my father joined a team of the Bahá'í doctors who

started
a group similar to the “Doctors without Borders.” He used to take us along with other
family members while going to the villages around Teheran to take medicine and treat patients free of charge, irrespective of their religion.

In 1980’s after the Iranian Revolution, the Regime captured and imprisoned my elderly and sick father and confiscated all his properties. When he was released on
furlough, he fled Iran and became a Bahá’í refugee in France. Soon after, he passed
away penniless and was buried in a cemetery for the Destitute.

During this time most of my close friends, teachers, and professors were imprisoned,
tortured, and killed for being a Bahá’í. This included the doctor who coordinated the
“Doctors without Borders Team.” After he was tortured and killed, his body was left
in the street of Tehran, with a sign on his neck reading: “Here is the enemy of Islam.”

Bahá’u’lláh asks each of us to develop a sense of world citizenship. So, when I was
in my early twenty’s, I left Iran to study and work in the Philippines, Kenya, and New
Zealand.

When I became a United Nations Consultant for the Caribbean, I found the United Nations mandates reflect the teaching of the Bahá’í Faith; on Respecting Human
Rights, Equality of the Rights of Men and Women, Universal Education for boys and
girls, Harmony between Religion and Science, and the Elimination of the Extremes
of Wealth and Poverty.

My husband is a New Zealander, and my children were born in Kenya. So, we truly believed that we were World Citizens when we moved to California. It was the same
time that Iranian Islamic Revolution initiated a widespread policy of elimination of
the Bahá’í community in Iran. This also coincided with the hostage crisis in Iran. So,
the normal American reaction to me was that I was a fanatic terrorist.

I became the Staff Development Officer of Riverside County, and among other subjects, I trained Social Service Workers on Civil Right and the Dynamic of prejudice. When I walked into my classroom, I felt the tense negative reaction towards me for being an Iranian. So, I started my sessions by asking my

trainees
what their first impression of me as an Iranian woman was. It gave them the freedom
to voice their opinion and stereotypes, which ended up with me being a terrorist.

Then, I mentioned that I was a Bahá'í, and told them the story of my father and
persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran. I also explained that the Bahá'ís believe in equality
of women and men, in the oneness of mankind and elimination of all types of
prejudice. I concluded with telling them that Bahá'ís abhor violence and work in
creating the Universal Peace. I felt gradually the negative reaction was replaced with
empathy and understanding.

Then I talked about the dynamic of prejudice which starts with systematically
spreading lies, misinformation, and stereotypes attributed to a minority group. These
lies are targeting the primal fears of the general population. They create the feeling
of "Otherness": "Us" vs. "Them." They aim to dehumanize the minority and therefor,
as they are less than human, they don't have the feelings that we have. So, we can
hurt and violate them and their families.

I helped my trainees to understand that we have the same needs and aspiration as
others. Therefore, we need to develop empathy and understanding towards them.
To accept the differences and the individuality of each person, as far as they are not
hurting or violating the rights of others. That we would need to be an agent of change
and stand up for the rights of others.

Since then, it has been my mission as a Bahá'í to advocate our common humanity
as a factor which leads us to spiritual transformation, to achieve Universal Peace.
To go beyond racial, religious, ethnic, and cultural difference which divide us to a
world that welcomes Unity in Diversity. I hope you join us in this quest.

At the end of the Panel discussion, a number of Panel members and participants
mentioned that they have attended the Bicentenary of Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in West
Pasco. Others stated that it was the first time that they heard about the

Bahá'í Faith
and expressed interest to have follow up meetings to know more about the Faith.

In response to Shala Gillbanks Facebook post, thanking the organizers and participants for sponsoring and supporting this enriching event, the Panel Facilitator
wrote: "Your presentation was wonderful! A real eye opener! Please tell your Facebook friends about your father and the other doctor who was killed because of
his faith, and the discrimination you experienced in California as a trainer for Cultural
Awareness. After hearing you speak, I want to learn more and join the Bahá'ís!"

Follow up Activities
Following the Panel forum, I was invited to a luncheon where I met the president of the
Association, who shared with me that she and her husband were stationed in Iran during
the Revolution. They met the Bahá'ís there and were interested in attending Bahá'í
meetings in our area. She published a summary of my talk in the Association's national
newsletter and my meeting with her. In consultation with the community, I invited the
Association members and Panel presenters to a Tranquility Zone at our home. The theme
was on Healing Prejudices and Hostilities, Bahá'í contribution to this pressing issue. I
publicized the event on Facebook. We had a wonderful gathering with 18 participants from
Pasco and Tampa communities. There were 6 Friends of the Faith, including the
Association president, her husband, and Association's officials.

The community members established a relationship by supporting the African American
and Jewish community events.

The third activity was holding a Workshop on Finding Peace. I integrated the messages
from the Universal House of Justice to develop a practical framework for action in our
community. The following is the outline of this workshop:
'In our daily life, from the time we wake up, we are bombarded with negative vibes from
people around us and from the mass media.
It affects our spiritual and physical wellbeing. At times, we feel angry, hopeless, and sick in
the pit of our stomach.

The question is: How to gain control of our life?
Bahá'í Teachings express that physical, mental, and social ills emanate from a lack of balance and harmony in the living organism.
Physical illness starts with the elements that attack the immune system and organs. If not treated, this leads to disease and eventual death.
In society, lack of balance affects harmony, which leads to strife, conflicts, war, and the eventual destruction of humanity.
Bahá'ís believe that Manifestations of God are Divine Physicians who came to bring healing remedy for humanity in different ages. Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings are remedy for this age.
Today, we are going to develop tools which will help us to heal and create balance and harmony in our life. Let us read the following quotation from the Bahá'í Writings:
"Bahá'u'lláh is the real Physician. He has diagnosed human conditions and indicated the necessary treatment. The essential principles of His healing remedies are the knowledge and love of God, severance from all else save God, turning our faces in sincerity toward the Kingdom of God, implicit faith, firmness and fidelity, loving-kindness toward all creatures and the acquisition of the divine virtues indicated for the human world. These are the fundamental principles of progress, civilization, international peace and the unity of mankind. These are the essentials of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, the secret of everlasting health, the remedy and healing for man."

Now, let us discuss the acquisition of some of these Divine virtues which would help us to bring Harmony and Peace to Humanity:
Working on a spiritual path to construct a plan of action to achieve peace.

Just as the viability of every cell and every organ depends upon the health of the body as whole, so should peace and prosperity of every individual, every family, and every people be sought in the wellbeing of the entire human race

? The First Virtue: Acceptance

"God has not created men that they should destroy one another. All races, tribes, sects and classes share equally in the Bounty of their Heavenly Father. The only difference lies in the degree of faithfulness, of obedience to the laws of God. There are

some who
are as lighted torches, there are others who shine as stars in the sky of humanity. The
lovers of mankind, these are the superior men, of whatever nation, creed or colour they
may be. For it is they to whom God will say these blessed words, ‘Well done, My good
and faithful servants.”

~ Abdu’l-Bahá

Paris Talks | Bahá’í Reference Library

https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/’Abdu’l-Bahá/paris...

? Key Principles:

? Challenging intolerance and prejudice – to see each other first and foremost as human beings.

? Promoting a culture of acceptance and mutual respect

Our reward is to attain God’s pleasure

? The Second Virtue: Love and Unity

“Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. Let your eyes be directed
toward the kingdom of truth and not toward the world of creation. Love the creatures

for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are
imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them
and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete
mercy.”

~ Abdu’l-Bahá

The Promulgation of Universal Peace - Baha'i Reference Library

reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/pup-39.html

? Key Principles: Ways to create love and harmony

? Reaching out to people in our community – with understanding that different segments of society are not inherently in conflict with each other. They need to see their diversity as an opportunity rather than a threat.

? Finding commonalities among different groups – ideas and principles

based on unity in diversity

? Construct a plan of action to achieve peace – community building activities and projects to improve the life of the community

? Create Social Spaces open to new possibilities – neighborhoods, social groups

? The Third Virtue: Confirmation

“O thou candle of the Love of God!
I ask God to grant thee by His favor and grace that which is thy utmost desire; that
the closed doors become opened, the uneven roads become even, thy face shine by the love of God, thy sight become brighter by witnessing the signs of God; that
thou mayest attain spiritual joy, eternal happiness and heavenly life.”
~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

O Thou Candle Of The Love Of God ...
https://iaccidentlyatethewholething.com/2017/08/17/o-thou-candle..

? Key Principles:

? Have faith and spiritual courage

? Be selfless – Do this for the sake of God

? Have empathy

? Don’t let these to stop you or hold you back:

- Fears – are a part of the journey
- Self-doubts – replacing them with positive thoughts and believing in yourself.

? Get out of your comfort zone

? Have inner peace through prayers and meditation to receive divine confirmation

? The Fourth Virtue: Resolve and Volition; Deciding firmly on a course of action

“There is nothing so heart-breaking and terrible as an outburst of human savagery!
I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on
love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love.
Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. ...

Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness.
If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought,
spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing
stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men.
Do not despair! Work steadily. Sincerity and love will conquer hate. How many seemingly impossible events are coming to pass in these days! Set your faces steadily towards the Light of the World. Show love to all; ‘Love is the breath of the
Holy Spirit in the heart of Man.’ Take courage!

God never forsakes His children who strive and work and pray! Let your hearts be
filled with the strenuous desire that tranquility and harmony may encircle all this
warring world. So, will success crown your efforts, and with the universal brotherhood will come the Kingdom of God in peace and goodwill.

In this room today are members of many races, French, American, English, German,
Italian, brothers and sisters meeting in friendship and harmony! Let this gathering
be a foreshadowing of what will, in very truth, take place in this world, when every
child of God realizes that they are leaves of one tree, flowers in one garden, drops
in one ocean, and sons and daughters of one Father, whose name is love!”

~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
Bahá'í Reference Library - Paris Talks, Pages 28-30
reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PT/pt-6.html

? Key Principles: How to achieve that

? Strive to establish a world filled with divine love and founded on justice, where every soul finds acceptance and fulfills the true purpose of life.

? Visualize multitudes of talented people eagerly working together to create a better world. Action – Service

? The Fifth Virtue: ACTION - SERVICE

“Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race.
Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the
opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God’s

loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the
Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all and reorient
the minds of men. In this way, the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the

blessings of God will cradle all mankind: for love is light, no matter in what abode it
dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may make its nest."

~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'í Reference Library - Selections From the Writings of ...

reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-2.html

? Key Principles:

? Share your ideas with others

? Find partners with the same vision
? Create deep friendships, inclusive of all people, consult about the conditions of our community and act together for our common benefits.

? Set up the Goal: Individual, institutions, and communities, imbued with the spirit of Faith, through systematic action, contributing in meaningful ways to the life of the community

Moving forward together: persistent and systematic acts of service to create a healthy and vibrant community
At this point the participants were asked to form teams which were composed of Bahá'ís
and Friends of the Faith, to develop a service project, based on the following steps:

Path of Service – Steps to apply these remedies to impact the community:

1. Set up Goals and measurable objectives

? To progress both in the material and spiritual well-being of the community

2. Find partners with the same vision and form teams

? To work for building a healthy and vibrant community

3. Define what each team member can do

? What we can do to find solutions and help understanding to live in harmony

4. Identify Social Spaces and groups

? To come together, to transcend the traditional barriers that divide people. Inspired by the Bahá'í Teachings, consult on challenges facing the community.

5. Become Credible Resources that people can turn to
6. Develop and Implement an Action Plan

7. Visualize the Success

8. Think of it as a journey, enjoy every step of your Achievements

9. Celebrate your success – it will give us impetus and energy to go to the next step

10. Reflect: Get feedback, change course based on the feedback
The teams were encouraged to have follow up meetings to plan the implementation of their respective projects. This opened the door for the Friends of the Faith to participate in the future Bahá'í meetings and activities.

Recently, I was invited by the Association to a follow up meeting to the Panel Forum. My hope and aspiration would be to serve my Beloved, in the remaining years of my life. I ardently pray:

'I magnify Thy Name, O my God, and offer thanksgiving unto Thee, O my Desire, inasmuch as Thou hast enabled me to clearly perceive Thy straight Path, hast unveiled Thy Great Announcement before mine eyes and hast aided me to set my face towards the Dayspring of Thy Revelation and the Fountainhead of Thy Cause, whilst Thy servants and Thy people turned away from Thee. I entreat Thee, O Lord of the Kingdom of eternity, by the shrill voice of the Pen of Glory, and by the Burning Fire which calleth aloud from the verdant Tree, and by the Ark which Thou hast specially chosen for the people of Bahá, to grant that I may remain steadfast in my love for Thee, be well pleased with whatsoever Thou hast

prescribed for me in Thy Book and may stand firm in Thy service and in the service of Thy loved ones. Graciously assist then Thy servants, O my God, to do that which will serve to exalt Thy Cause and will enable them to observe whatsoever Thou hast revealed in Thy Book.'

~ Bahá'u'lláh

I magnify Thy Name, O my God...

www.bahaiprayers.org/steadfast9.htm

Fact Sheet About the Author

Shahla Gillbanks holds a master's Degree in Social Work and Professional

Certificates as Training Manger/Director from the International Board of Training
and Development, and Performance Consultant from the American Board of Training and Development.
In her professional life, she held positions as the Community Advisor of Auckland
City Council in New Zealand, Associate Professor in Kenya and Iran, and United Nation Consultant for the Caribbean.
Shahla and her family moved to California in 1982 and for 20 years, Shahla managed the Administrative and Human Resources Training for the Department of Social Services, Staff Development Division, in Riverside County. Among the programmes she developed was core curriculum training on Cultural Diversity and Civil Rights, and a number of professional courses on Self Development/Empowerment, and Stress Management, where she incorporated the Baha'i principles into the professional training for the County employees.
In 2004, Shahla and Terry moved to the Tampa Bay area and continue serving the Tampa Bay community.

Previous publications (books, magazine articles, etc.; please include titles, dates, publishers):
• 1968, The University of the Philippines
Thesis Dissertation on: The Role of the Baha'i Faith in the Social Development of the Baha'i Youth in the Los Banos Laguna, Philippines
–
dedicated to the Universal House of Justice

• 1990 – 20001 Department of Social Services, Riverside County, CA
Series of training manuals on Stress Management, Self Empowerment, Safety in the Workplace, Professionalism in the Office, and Administrative Training

• 2002 – 2004, New Zealand National Assembly, Office of Assembly Development
Assembly Development Forum Course Manual

• 2006, Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, Florida
Writing a series of articles for the English Language Curriculum of BIHE

• 2008 – 20016 Area Teaching Committee of Pasco Hernando, FL
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Developing and publishing Cluster Newsletters, News Flashes and Reports for the Cluster, The Regional Council and "The American Baha'i"
Significant organizations or associations you belong to (include offices held, dates
of office, etc.):

• 2006- 2016 Secretary of the Area Teaching Committee of Paso and Hernando
Cluster, FL
• 2018 Affiliated with the American Association of University

Women, Pasco, FL

Managing Facebook Pages:

- 2018 – 2019 “Footprints in the Sands of Time” and “West Pasco Baha’i Community”

— Footprints in the Sands of Time (Used by permission of the curator)