

FEATURES

Personal memories of Rúhíyyih Khánum

I made my first pilgrimage in 1961. Pilgrimage then was very different from now. Our group consisted of only six people and we were looked after by the Hands of the Cause.

On my last day of pilgrimage I was having lunch with Mr Faizi when the door opened and Rúhíyyih Khánum entered the pilgrim house. She told me that she knew I had come from England and that she had come to meet me. I was so happy to meet her. She was so warm and loving. After lunch she said that we were going to the Shrine of the Báb and I followed her. She chanted the Tablet of Visitation in Arabic in her beautiful voice and it was very moving. Then she gathered some flowers from the threshold and put them tenderly in a bag and asked me to place them on the resting place of Shoghi Effendi on my return to London. I left the holy land that afternoon with a heart full of love and admiration for the Hands of the Cause who looked after the pilgrims so tenderly, and for the privilege of spending a little time with our gracious 'Amatu'l-Bahá in Haifa. I treasured those memories of my pilgrimage for many years to come.

My husband, Ray, and I were asked later to take care of May Faizi while her parents were resident in Haifa. May was studying in Cambridge and for many years every time Rúhíyyih Khánum wrote to her, she also sent us a note, and then a gift for our new baby. She appreciated little services and she was a loving friend.

We got to know Rúhíyyih Khánum even better during our service at the Bahá'í World Centre from 1984-88 when we were helping her to restore the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh to the time of Shoghi Effendi. We called it the "Rúhíyyih Khánum team" as there were nearly ten of us responsible for carrying out various chores under her direction. She was a perfectionist, and it was not so easy sometimes! I used to have the great pleasure of preparing lunch for our team in the early morning before starting work at 9 am. We would take a break for lunch and have a walk to the Master's Tea House, our residence at Bahji. Rúhíyyih Khánum was a very gracious guest and always encouraging. She appreciated whatever I prepared for the team and we all enjoyed her company. We laughed a lot and she shared many stories of her travels around the world, giving us very useful advice as we were planning a pioneering move to Taiwan. I think the most precious advice she gave us was that, whatever the task undertaken, we must always do it the best we can in service to Bahá'u'lláh.

Rúhíyyih Khánum always worked hard. She said that Shoghi Effendi worked until the job was finished, regardless of the time of day. She was a great example for us and knew how to enjoy herself and how to cope in difficult times.

Our children were also blessed when they visited us in the Holy Land and had the privilege of spending time with her. My husband Ray and I have been very blessed in knowing dear Rúhíyyih Khánum.

Mahin Humphrey

Bahá'í Newsletter Bloomers

(please note: none of these were from Bahá'í Journal UK!)

The Center Fund Committee would appreciate it if area believers would lend their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Saturday morning.

The Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet 7pm Thursday, at the ... home. Please use the back door.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community.

Don't forget the Thursday night Potluck Supper. Prayer and medication to follow.

At the Friday fireside, the topic will be "Bahá'í viewpoint: What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Don't let stress and worry kill you, let the LSA help.

How I met my faith - Dan Wheatley's story

After my university studies I was more fortunate than most of my contemporaries. The world federalist association, a tiny and rather obscure organisation I had been a member of since teenage years received an unforeseen boon when one of its founding figures left a large legacy to its educational charity, the One World Trust. They needed someone young, sympathetic and recently educated to re-open their office in Parliament. I was thrilled to be offered such a rewarding opportunity.

Over the summer of 1994 I underwent a rapid metamorphosis from a scruffy student, mopping floors in a vegetarian restaurant to emerge from the chrysalis of London, a graduate butterfly in a suit and tie and to my mother's great delight, properly shaved. The puissance and grandeur of Westminster was a little overpowering. My office felt imposing at first, and I had no training for the task at hand. I was charged with organising a series of lectures on UN reform and global governance in Parliament. I longed for the comforting stability of mopping the restaurant floor.

After a month or so, I got my first break. Brigadier Michael Harbottle, a senior army officer, former commander of the UN forces in Cyprus and a world expert on peacekeeping agreed to give a speech. A date was set; it was to be 30th November 1994. A venue in the Lords was found and a prominent Peer agreed to chair. Now I needed an audience.

My boss gave me a list of groups to invite; the UNA, the Quakers, Amnesty International, "Oh, and invite the Bahá'ís" he said, "Give Philip Hainsworth a call". I knew the name "Bahá'í" but didn't understand what it stood for. I did, however, know Philip Hainsworth. He was a gritty, urbane Yorkshireman, well respected in the internationalist organisations that I worked with. I knew that he was also a senior member of the Bahá'í community and had served his faith at national level. On the phone Phillip was very positive, "The Bahá'ís would love to come. How many do you want - a hundred?" It was my first big event - I wanted as many as possible.

The night of the 30th came. The Brigadier and his wife arrived and were introduced to the chairman. An audience began to form in dribs and drabs. Several MPs, a few students from the LSE, a couple of UNA members. The cavernous committee room I had optimistically booked looked sparsely populated. The last few minutes were ticking before the beginning of the meeting. With a slight feeling of desperation rising inside me I paced down to the public entrance to round up stragglers. Approaching the security checkpoint I recognised Phillip, clad in a heavy brown raincoat, shaking down an umbrella. I was mid way through greeting him when I noticed the cause of the hum of movement behind him. It was a mass of people !

Through the door of St Stephen's Gate came a thronging crowd of Bahá'ís ! I hazarded a guess at there being at least thirty. They were still coming, that must make forty, or fifty. Yet more poured through the door. The besieged security staff did their best to regulate the tidal wave of bags, brollies and briefcases that streamed through the x-ray machines. The Bahá'í deluge continued and with Phillip at their head, looking like a latter-day Moses, no fewer than one hundred individuals entered Parliament smiling and chatting. I was fascinated by the diversity of these strange people. There were young and old, male and female in equal proportions and from every race and hue of humanity. Phillip facilitated a production line of introductions. "These were the so and so's from Zimbabwe, Mr blah blah from Iran, the whatname family from Ealing, Miss X visiting from Canada and Mr Y on a study exchange from Poland."

In they came and with them came something else; a spirit or sensation of some kind. I was immediately struck by the demeanor of these people. They were possessed of an energy, a sense of excitement that was almost childlike and at the time a sense of great purpose. Something else struck me instantly their conduct to one another. They greeted and embraced one another in a fashion of unaffected and joyous love. Feelings of immense curiosity and attraction ran through me. In all my life I was quite sure I had never encountered a group of people like these.

The meeting was a great success, hardly a seat was left unfilled. After it was over I had the opportunity to meet more of the audience, including the legions of Bahá'ís Phillip had faithfully delivered. Without seeking to proselytise, they acquainted me with some of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í faith; the oneness of God, the essential unity of all religions, the need for equality between human beings of different race, gender and class. I was quietly intrigued. A distinguished elderly lady with a kind face invited me to tea at her house in West London the following month. I keenly accepted.

Two years on, after considerable study and reflection I took the important decision to declare my faith in Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í faith. I see my old friend Philip at many Bahá'í gatherings around the country and even now six years on I am still fascinated and drawn to the energizing love that bonds Bahá'ís to one another and to the faith they serve.

Dan Wheatley



Alexandra Walker, Guilda Walker, Peter Luff MP, Dan Wheatley and Cheryl Gillan MP at the reception for the launch of the All Party Parliamentary Friends of the Bahá'ís held in March this year.