

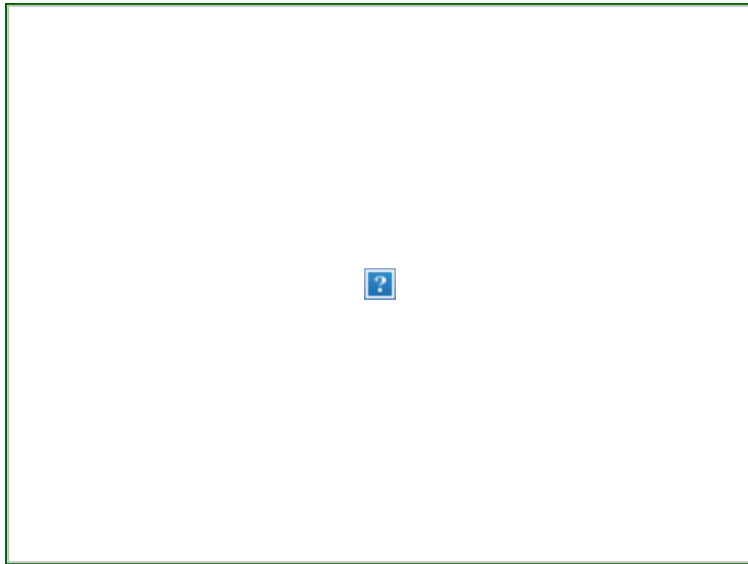


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A Letter from Haifa

I WROTE my first article in the Holy Land in October 2002, just one month after arriving here for my 12 months of service. Many things have changed in this short span of time – myself as a person, the Bahá'í World Centre and the very earth we live on has seen dramatic events unfold. It's now July and after eight months of serving in the Holy Land I would recommend any Bahá'í, whether young or old, to serve this Blessed Cause in Israel. Adaptation to the Jewish/Arab culture is very easy, lesson one is “Shalom” and “Marhaba”, that's pretty much all you need to know.



Some of the security guards serving at World Centre. From left to right: Leila Gates, Argentina; Sina Vahedi, India; Bishnu Ghimire, Nepal; Henry Lape, Papua New Guinea and Thenna Abbas from the UK

For those of you who don't know me I'm working in the security department in the Haifa area. I'm sure none of you need me to explain the importance of security in this country at the present time. The closest we came to the troubles was a few months back when a bus was exploded at the summit of this holy mount. Fortunately all the Bahá'ís were safely on the Arc of God for a Holy Day celebration.

The other major event while I have been serving here was the whole upheaval of the Middle East, in particular Iraq. Staff members who had been serving here since the Gulf War reminded us about the Iraqi missile attacks, which destroyed a mall in Haifa. Even though the general population of Israel carried on with their lives everyone was more cautious than normal – in most homes there was a safe area with supply of water, gas masks and food etc. Many prayers were said in the Shrines in Haifa and Bahjí and it really brought everyone together.

Even though this country has been through very dark days, for people who visit and live here it is really another world compared to that which is shown on the news daily. Israel is surprisingly a very culturally diverse country with over one million Russians, thousands of Philipinos and many other nationalities. In the Bahá'í World Centre the total number of countries that staff originates from is over 80 – a true example of unity in diversity.

It is only after serving here that I really understand and appreciate the work of the Institutions of this Faith and how vitally important are contributions to the Fund.

All of the 700 or so youth who dedicate their lives to serve the Cause of God, whether cleaning the lamps on the terraces or standing at a gate checking IDs owe immense

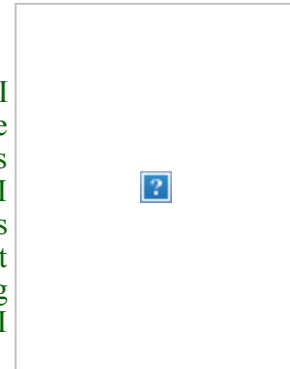
...gratitude to the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre. The Bahá'í World Centre is in a constantly evolving state, where no two days are ever the same. From the excitement of the election of the Universal House of Justice to the departure of the Nakhjavani family, everyone serving here knows they are part of something very special. Again I would encourage anyone willing enough to offer their services in the Holy Land at this special time to apply: you won't regret it!

Thenna Abbas

An unforgettable year in Swindon ...

Would you like one?

AFTER I LEFT school and finished my civil service in Germany, I didn't feel ready to start university just yet. A year of service was the answer, but where? I wrote two emails to enquire about possibilities and one of them mysteriously arrived in Swindon. A month later I found myself at Swindon's train station being invited for two weeks to experience the community atmosphere. I landed right in the heart of Swindon's Bahá'í activities and a couple of days after being shown around, having consultations and a little work experience, I knew that Swindon was the place to do my year of service.



Many Bahá'ís in Germany had heard about Swindon before but I hadn't. I was surprised at what a great community I'd found. The Swindon Bahá'í Community run many well known projects such as the Tranquillity Zone, the Swindon Youth Empowerment Project and a spirituality course at the local college, integrating all of these with the three Core Activities (Study Circles, Devotional Meetings and Children's Classes). My work was very flexible and diverse. I spent most of the time at the Bahá'í Projects Office, located in the town centre. My responsibilities as the Community Development Coordinator included managing and co-ordinating community affairs. My work also included creating the official Swindon website (www.swindon-bahais.org) and a very imaginative video production describing the local projects run by the Bahá'ís. Not only did the friends in the community view the video, but also outside agencies in the town, including representatives of the Borough Council have watched this video, called: Spirit of Swindon is Spirit of Service. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to help out with children's classes, organising the local winter school, and participating in many exciting firesides and deepenings.

The amazing part is that I had almost no experience in any of the tasks I had been given. Through constant help and guidance however, I gained extraordinary insights into a very professionally organised community. I was able to learn and acquire new skills and understand the importance of systematic plans. I also believe that learning and working in Swindon has given me a deeper understanding of practical challenges which face a larger community and the organisation it takes to keep community life running. The time I spent in Swindon was invaluable and I often feel that I gained more from this year in Swindon than I was able to give.

I will never forget the love and care I received from every single member of the Swindon Bahá'í community. I have gained so many new friends and found another place that I can call home. Sadly my year finished in July. The good news for you is that my current position will become available. The Swindon Spiritual Assembly is now looking for someone who is interested in doing a year of service and who will be able to take over my current tasks. If you are interested in finding out more about this position or know someone that is looking for a year of service place, please feel free to enquire at: projects@swindonbahais.org or write to me personally at: tismartin00@hotmail.com.

Martin Kümmel

