

Mother's Stories

and

Stories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

as told by

Mother *

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as told by Mother

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Part one
Mother's stories

Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall

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Introduction

These stories were recorded by my mother, Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall,¹ in the late 60's. They are her personal recollections of events related, in most part, by those directly involved.

Mother met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912, when she was 15 years old. He told her that she would grow like a tree and have many branches. Years later she realized, as so often happens, the meaning of this prediction. It was twenty years before she declared her belief in Bahá'u'lláh, and she has observed many times 'it takes a tree 20 years to mature'. She had four children, fifteen grandchildren, and a couple of dozen great grandchildren.

In the early 30s Mother, who was divorced from her first husband, Theodore Obrig, married the Reverend Reginald G. Barrow. The wedding ceremony was performed by her father Howard Colby Ives. It is family history that they spent their wedding night on a park bench, as they could not obtain a room in a hotel in Boston. Bishop Barrow was a man of color who was born in the West Indies.

Rev. Barrow was a Bishop of the African Orthodox Church. He had been ordained an Anglican Priest on Barbados, and when he learned, upon coming to the United States, that the Episcopal Church was segregated, he ultimately decided to work with the African Orthodox Church. The African Orthodox Church had similar origins to the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches. Dad retired as the Archbishop of the African Orthodox Church for North America.

In addition to raising her children, mother was an active Bahá'í. She served on assemblies, lived in a cooperative house with other believers, was a homefront pioneer in Santa Fe, New Mexico, pioneered to Madera for several years; and practiced her faith in her daily life.

As you will see, these stories are, in most cases, her recollections of events which the participants related to her. There are slightly different

¹ Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall (1897–1984). Her parents were Howard Colby Ives and Elizabeth Church Hoyt.

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versions of some of them published elsewhere. We are not offering these as alternatives to other versions, but as what one person, Mother, remembered in her early seventies.

What we feel is important in these stories is the message and feelings they bring, not the historical facts. We will leave the facts to researchers and historians. We offer the images and emotions which shaped the path for one Friend of God and which may point out a direction to others.

While we have changed the spelling of some names to conform to the current Bahá'í Dictionary, we have not edited the stories, as we are presenting Mother's Stories for you to savor as she wrote them.

Reginald Grand Barrow Jr. Shawnigan Lake, BC March 1998

O Thou help me ...

It was in 1912 that Dr Ali Kuli Khan—preparing for the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Washington—began to consider the questions he would ask Him upon His arrival. And, thinking it over, Dr Khan realized that the one thing he wanted most to know was some prayer he might utter quickly and from deep within his heart, when the moment came when, as the representative of his country (then Persia) in Washington he must make some instant diplomatic decision. When these moments came, as they did frequently—Dr Khan felt that while he always sincerely did his best, his wisdom was very limited and finite. If only he might have a prayer that would draw to him a greater wisdom. Ah, if he only might have such a prayer.

So the day came when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to arrive and Dr Khan, accompanied by the Washington believers, drove to the station to meet Him. The greeting was warm and deeply moving, and Khan's heart was still filled with this one question he wanted most to ask the Master. And they were perhaps halfway back, driving up Pennsylvania Avenue, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá suddenly told Khan this story:

It had happened when Bahá'u'lláh had been gone from Baghdad for some two years. At that time no one knew where He was and all hearts were sick with the fear that they never would see Him again. At this time 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a small boy, and the continued absence of His Beloved Father had become unendurable. So, one night, all night long, the little boy (whom, even then, Bahá'u'lláh referred to as The Master) paced restlessly up and down saying, shouting, beseeching, Yá Alláhu'l-Mustagháth! Yá Alláhu'l-Mustagháth! all night long. And in the morning, when dawn was breaking, a messenger came to the door to say that a stranger was at the city gate and had sent word to the Family that He wished them to bring to Him fresh raiment and water to bathe in So 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew His beloved Father had returned.

And Dr Khan knew the cry that he, too, might utter in his moments of need: Yá Alláhu'l-Mustagháth (which I am told means Oh, Thou help me in my extremity!).

This was told me by Ali Kuli Khan
at Green-Acre in 1933 MIBN

I am doing ...

In the early days (1901 to '05), 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent to the United States the beloved and most radiant Abu'l-Faḍl. The purpose was to travel and teach and Ali Kuli Khan was asked to accompany Abu'l-Faḍl as interpreter. This was arranged and the two gentlemen started off. The trip was a wonderful success. It was during the period when teachers (Hindu, Zoroastrian or Buddhist) were greeted eagerly all over the country and these Bahá'í teachers shared the wave of popularity. It was in one of the middle western cities that this experience occurred.

The local Opera House had been rented for Abu'l-Faḍl's talks and it was packed. Probably more than a thousand people had come. And, before this crowd Abu'l-Faḍl rose to speak. For a moment, he stood there, his eyes roving over all the lifted, waiting faces, and suddenly he thought 'This trip is proving very successful! I am doing very well, this is a cause for great pride and satisfaction and when I return to Acca the Master will be well pleased with me. Truly I am doing well.' And, with this thought, the mind of Abu'l-Faḍl went completely blank. He did not know who he was or why he was standing on this platform with all these people looking at him or what he was supposed to say. Then, instantly he realized what had happened. He had taken it upon himself to feel that it was HE who had accomplished this success; it was HIS words that would reach the hearts; it was HE—HE—HE—who had been proud. And, as he realized this he turned, in abject shame, to Bahá'u'lláh, imploring His forgiveness and begging Him to fill his heart once more with His Light to move his lips again with His Word. And immediately Abu'l-Faḍl's prayer was answered, and the talk went forward.

Later, Abu'l-Faḍl asked Dr Khan how long it had been that he stood there tongue-tied and blank—for it had seemed to Abu'l-Faḍl that he must have disgraced himself before that great audience. But Khan assured him that it had been no time at all—that there had been no break in the discourse.

But it is to be noted that—many years afterward—'Abdu'l-Bahá

particularly praised Abu'l-Faḍl for being one of the very rare souls who never used the pronouns 'I' or 'me' or 'mine'.

This was told to me by Ali Kuli Khan
in New York City c. 1934

What really happens ...

It was at the end of this same teaching trip that, one day, Dr Khan reminded Abu'l-Faḍl that, day after day, he had offered service to the best of his ability and, in view of this, would Abu'l-Faḍl answer just one question: What really happened to the soul after death? Abu'l-Faḍl looked at Khan very thoughtfully—and changed the subject.

A few days later, as they were nearing Washington, Dr Khan repeated his question—“Please tell me—what does happen to the soul after death?” Abu'l-Faḍl glanced at Khan and changed the subject.

Finally they reached Washington and the day before Abu'l-Faḍl was to return to Acca. Dr Khan asked the question for the third time. Abu'l-Faḍl smiled and went away.

Two or three years went by and one day Khan was sitting on a beach, looking at the sea. On the horizon was a ship, and as first the hull and then the sails slipped out of sight—suddenly, gloriously, Khan knew what happened to the soul after death. For, to those on board that ship nothing had happened—they were still on their familiar ship sailing the same sea.

So, sometime later when Ali Kuli Khan met Abu'l-Faḍl in Acca he told him of this experience and added—“Why was it you refused, when I first asked you, to answer my question? Abu'l-Faḍl said, lovingly, “If, my dear friend, you would have been able to understand my answer, you would never have asked the question.”

Told to me by Ali Kuli Khan
in New York City c. 1934

Tea in Paris

In the very early days Loulie Mathews came into the Faith while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was yet imprisoned in Acca. She came in very quickly, immediately, really, upon hearing of it, and she came in aflame with enthusiasm. She had been told that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had expressed the wish that the Faith might be growing more rapidly in Paris, so, to Paris Loulie went. She made speedy and elaborate preparations for this expedition and when she had installed herself in a luxurious suite, she made further preparations, buying herself elaborate tea gowns that floated elegantly and had long fringe that swung as she moved. She also furnished herself with a silver tea service and many delicate cups and saucers. Then, she considered that she was prepared to teach the Faith she loved so well—and she sent out many invitations to tea.

Several weeks went by. Loulie continued to give her teas, but her success was not marked. Guests came, chattered, listened a moment, nibbled her delicious cakes, drank the delicate tea, and left. Then, one afternoon a man came, robed in soft gray with a turban on his head and he introduced himself by saying that he had come from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. So Loulie welcomed him warmly and gave him tea. But, as he reached out to accept the cup, his sleeve fell back and exposed deeply bitten scars on his wrists. Loulie gasped, "Oh! You have been hurt." The man smiled radiantly, "But these are the scars from the chains put upon me when I was in prison with my Lord." "Oh", said Loulie glancing at her own delicate wrists, "How you must have suffered!" The man looked at her, astonishment and a kind of radiant amusement in his eyes. "Suffer? When I was in prison with my Lord? Oh, but every moment was a blissful joy."

After the man had gone, Loulie meditated long and gravely upon these things he had said and she concluded—looking at her chiffon tea gowns and the silver service—that, apparently, there were things about this Faith of which she knew little. So she wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá telling him this and adding that she was going to return to New York and study and learn, if she could, some of the things she evidently needed to learn. This letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá was put, with other out-going mail, on a small table to be

picked up. And while it was still lying there, waiting to go out, a Tablet came from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He said, He was most happy to know of her decision to go home and study, but she must not be discouraged, for the time would come when she would be a 'lion roaring through the Cause of God.'—and of course that time did come and she was that lion.

Told to many of us by Loulie Mathews
at Temerity c. 1946.

Pamphlets ...

In the days when steamships, such as the *Mauritania* and *Franconia*, made round-the-world trips, Loulie went several times for the sole purpose of stopping at each port-of-call to make whatever contacts she might to proclaim the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. The Captains of these ships always proved most cooperative, making every possible effort to be of assistance. So one time when the ship was approaching Manila he came to her very disturbed. It seemed that because of various delays the stop at Manila would be very much shortened. In fact, they would dock there only for an hour.

Loulie, who had planned for at least a day or two, at once began to pray for guidance. What, in her precious hour, could she do that would reach some hungry seeking soul in this city? Finally, when the ship docked, Loulie rushed to a library, but when she asked permission to place books on the shelves she was refused. There was no place in that library for a new and strange religion. So, in despair—time was passing so swiftly—she begged that she might go into the shelves and tuck a few pamphlets here and there. This was, reluctantly, granted her—so back she went to tuck her pamphlets.

Time passed and Loulie returned to New York. Then months later came a letter from Manila—her pamphlets had been discovered; the man who found them had interested friends and where could he get more literature? Loulie, delighted, sent him more—and more. Then came the war and these new believers were scattered and, Loulie feared, lost. But no—when Peace came, they found each other, they got in touch with Loulie again and, once more the Bahá'í Community of Manila was thriving. All because Loulie had tucked pamphlets in a library during one precious hour of pioneering.

Told to us at Temerity
by Loulie Mathews c. 1946

Teach, teach, teach ...

Dear Elizabeth Cheney—tiny, plump, copper haired—was one of the first to answer the call to pioneer in South America. Dedicated and radiant, she went forth to plant the standard of Bahá'u'lláh, and from the first she was beset by difficulties. Everything in the world seemed to happen to her. She was ill, funds she had counted on failed to materialize, the various methods of transportation that were scheduled were either detoured or failed entirely—but nothing daunted her. With determination and great courage, she continued to press on. Finally, she reached the last leg of her journey—a river boat that was to take her to her destination. With relief and joy, she boarded the boat, only to be awakened close to midnight—the boat had struck submerged rocks and was sinking. Elizabeth had only time to get out of her stateroom, run on deck and, with the water rising nearly to her waist, plunge over the rail and into the river. It was pitch dark, moon less, and no stars. The water was cold. Elizabeth floundered, went under, rose, prayer on her lips and in her heart—and grasped a log that was floating. A moment later she realized she was not alone grasping the log—another woman spoke to her out of the darkness. And there, with muddy river water smacking against her face, thick darkness pressing around her, the wrecked boat sinking lower and lower and the cries of the drowning echoing around her, Elizabeth gave the Message that she had come pioneering to give—and at the other end of the log her first contact listened.

Told to me by Elizabeth Cheney
during the 1944 Convention at the Temple in Wilmette.

Interactive guidance I

When Elizabeth Cheney finally reached the end of her journey, further disaster awaited her. She had been given letters of introduction to various people—political leaders, editors, and so on—who, it was hoped, might be of assistance to her. But, during the course of this delayed journey, there had been a revolution—and all of the men to whom Elizabeth carried her letters were either in prison or in exile or hiding. She met with nothing but shrugs and smiles and closed lips. No doors were open to her; she was blocked at every turn. So, once again, she retired to pray and to meditate.

Then, knowing that prayer must be followed by action, she went out to walk the streets, praying as she walked for guidance. Her steps were slow and hesitant in order that, when guidance came, she might not be distracted by her own haste. At last—still with no answer to her prayers that might guide her—she found herself away from the heart of the city and in a broad avenue lined with spacious lawns and gardens surrounding beautiful homes. Here her steps slowed and she became aware of her own sharpened attention as if the time had come for her to listen carefully. And finally her steps stopped completely. There was no further urge to go on.

She stood quite still and looked around her. She was standing beside a tall wrought-iron fence, and beyond the fence, beyond a low hedge, there was a man, kneeling beside a bed of flowers. Elizabeth—not knowing what else to do—stood quietly and watched him. She saw him start, as he realized he was being watched, then he stood up, dusted his knees and walked toward her. And in her halting Spanish Elizabeth heard herself mentioning the name of one of the men to whom she'd been given a letter. The man showed great surprise, but Elizabeth went on talking, telling him why she had come—giving him the Message. Finally, bowing and smiting he left her—and Elizabeth waited. In a few moments the man returned to open the gates and usher her into the house, where the man to whom her letter was addressed was in careful hiding and was waiting to receive her. This was the turning point for Elizabeth—from then on her way was easier and her teaching successful.

Told to me by Elizabeth Cheney
during the 1944 Convention at Wilmette.

Interactive guidance II

Many years ago, Mable Rice-Wray Ives lived in Baltimore. It was in the far away days of streetcars, and in order to reach the down-town shopping district, Mable had to ride the streetcar for a long way from the residential part of the city where she lived. Part of this journey was down a very long hill that, treeless and drab, was lined with small shops and poor houses.

For years, as a growing girl, Mable had been taking this trip and then, one spring, she began to be aware of a strange impulse to get off the trolley car when it was half way down the long hill. This was, of course, ridiculous. Why would she want to get off the car? There were no cross-streets; she knew no one in the neighborhood, why would she get off and what would she do if she did get off? So—trip after trip she reasoned with herself, talking herself out of it and feeling really very foolish. The feeling persisted—she should stop the car half way down the hill and get off. Finally, after this had been going on for many weeks, she lost patience. All right—she would stop the car and get off! So, the next time she had occasion to go shopping she did just that. And, as she stood on the curb watching the trolley car slide down the rest of the hill out of sight, she felt very silly. So now what she supposed to do? She turned from the curb and found herself facing a small shop that sold newspapers and magazines and stationary with, maybe, penny candy. Mable, not knowing what else to do, went over to the shop and walked in.

Behind the counter, there was an older woman with a gentle face and beautiful eyes. She asked Mable if she might help her. Mable said, helplessly, “I don’t know. I don’t know what I want. I don’t know what I came for”—and then she found herself telling the woman all about the curious experience she’d had for so long as she came down the hill on a trolley car. When Mable had finished the woman smiled: “I can tell you what you came for,” she said. “Come into my sitting room with me, and I’ll tell you the whole wonderful story.” And that was how Mable Ives received the first word she’d ever heard of the wonderful Cause to which, for so many years and with such selfless courage, she gave her life.

Told to me by Mable at
Green Acre, Summer, 1933.

Character development ...

Mable Ives, after she married Howard Colby Ives (my father) became known to many who loved her as Rizwanae.¹ For very many years, after they were married, my father and Rizwanae traveled and taught the Faith. It was their entire life. They traveled through the New England states, through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, New York and many many more—always teaching, always leaving an established Assembly behind them. It was a gypsy life. It meant that never once, during all the years, did they really have a home; no place where they might be surrounded by their own things, where they might put down roots. Always they lived surrounded by strange and alien furniture, by the bare wall and arid atmosphere of barren hotels, boarding houses, and cubbyholes where they might sleep while, during their waking hours, they earned their living and taught their beloved Faith.

At last, after many years, with her health failing, Rizwanae felt she could endure no more. She had come to the end. She must have a home. She needed it with every atom of her being—needed it as a bird needs to make a nest in the springtime or as anyone, weary and spent, needs to rest in the sun. At this time, they—she and my father—were living in a particularly difficult situation. It was a furnished room and the landlady was constantly complaining of everything they did. They used too many lights, they took too many showers using up too much water, and the clacking of Father's typewriter was driving her crazy. So, one morning, Rizwanae told Father how she felt: She had come to the end; she could endure no more; she was unable to go one step farther. They had a long period of consultation, and at the end, Father told her that, of course, he would do as she wished, but would she, in turn, do one thing for him? Would she wait just one more day before making a truly final decision—and would she spend this day in prayer? She agreed. So after Father had left her to go out and attend to his business details, she kept her promise. She began to pray. And as she prayed, it came to her just what, in its depth and beauty, submission, detachment, and servitude really meant. And it came to her that submission—true and complete submission to the Will of God—was the first basic step. So she began to pray for submission—she prayed and prayed, and finally, submission came to her—but with it came the

¹ Riḍwáníya or Persian, Riḍwáníyya, "satisfaction".

realization that submission was not enough.

Well, then, what was enough? What should she pray for now? And she remembered that Bahá'u'lláh had written that we must be grateful for the circumstances to which we were submitting. Grateful? Grateful for this horrid little room? Grateful for the beastly, complaining landlady?

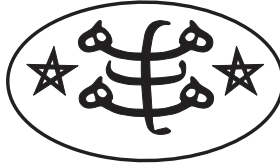
Well, all right—if Bahá'u'lláh said so she, Rizwanaea, would be grateful. But it wasn't easy. She was pacing the room, thinking, praying, fighting and now she went to the window to stare out into the street. Teach me to be grateful! Teach me to be submissive! I will be grateful! I will be submissive! She clenched her small fists. She fought and she suffered. And, finally, the first warm touch and then the warmer flow of submissive gratitude surged over her. But, the next moment, she realized that even this was not enough. Not enough? When she'd fought so hard and she was so tired. What then was left? What should she pray for next?

And it came to her that now she must pray for love, love for her nerve-racking circumstances; love for her harsh landlady; love for the whole situation that had led to the crisis—the blessed crisis that had forced her to learn this lesson. So, now, Rizwanaea prayed that she might love that she might be filled with love that she might be able to pour out this love.

And her prayers were answered. When Father returned to her, it was to meet a radiant woman—a woman filled with the glory of complete submission to the Will of God—a woman rich with the glory of gratitude for tests—a woman overflowing with the clear crystal waters of the love of God.

And, for many years more, she poured out these waters for the glory of the Cause she loved so well.

Told to me by both Rizwanaea
and Howard Colby Ives c. 1936



Gift ...

Elizabeth Greenleaf was a tall, aristocratic and very lovely lady who, for very many summers, occupied the cottage at Green Acre that was known as the tea house. It was in the living room of this cottage that she told this story. It seems that for a great many years she had longed for a white Bahá'í ring-stone. She had never mentioned this to anyone nor had she mentioned it in her prayers, since it would not have occurred to her to pray for anything so material as a ring-stone, but the wish had been in her heart always. One day, she had occasion to open an old trunk in her attic that had, for a long time, been closed and locked. And there, lying on the very top—the first thing to catch her eye as she lifted the lid—was her white-ring stone. She had no idea how it had gotten there—she had never seen it before, nor, upon inquiry, had anyone else, but she had it set and wore it on her slim finger all the rest of her life.

Told to me by Elizabeth Greenleaf
Summer c. 1933

Service ...

There are many stories about beloved Grace Robarts Ober who, for so very many years, dedicated every moment of her life to the service of our glorious Cause. And this experience, she felt, was the 'first small step'—to use her words, that set her feet on the path.

Grace had been introduced to the Cause by that early dedicated soul, Lua Getzinger, and Grace had, at once, recognized Bahá'u'lláh and become a Bahá'í. Not long afterward, Lua came to Grace and told her that very soon 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to arrive in New York and she, Lua, had been asked by Him to go to Chicago and prepare a place there in which he might stay when he arrived in that city. Would Grace like to go to Chicago with Lua and help with this preparation? Of course Grace would! So, together, they went to Chicago from Los Angeles, found a suitable apartment, prepared it and, eventually, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to live in it.

When His stay in Chicago was nearly over, suddenly one morning Grace realized what it would mean to go back to the dead stuffiness of her former life and leave this clear and radiant glory in which she'd been living while she helped Lua keep house for the Master. So she went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and begged that, when he returned to New York, she might help with that household too, as she had been privileged to do in Chicago. 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at her very searchingly and said, "Greece (His loving nickname for Grace) Greece, are you SURE you wish to serve ME?" Grace said, with great enthusiasm, "Oh, YES! More than anything else in the world!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá made no answer but walked away. The next morning this scene was repeated. On the third morning, Grace, frantic at the realization that this was the last morning before He was leaving to go farther West, went to Him a third time—and this time He became very stern. Are you VERY SURE you wish to SERVE ME? Grace was startled at the sternness but she didn't waver. "YES I am VERY SURE." So then he nodded. "Very well go, settle up your affairs, and we will meet in New York." Jubilant and radiant, Grace settled up her 'affairs'—which consisted of subletting a cottage she had taken at Greenacre for the summer and doing a few other things. Then, with wings on her feet, she went to New York. Lua was already there and together they prepared for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's return. The day came. Many Bahá'ís had gone to meet Him, though Lua and Grace had remained at the house to welcome

Him. The door opened, He came in. He welcomed Lua warmly, glanced at Grace as at a complete stranger, and turned away. Grace was appalled, shocked. Hadn't He recognized her? Had He forgotten her? Had she misunderstood the permission to come to New York? Or had she displeased Him and was this punishment?

Whatever it was, it continued with no let-up. During all the days that followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá never showed by word or glance that He recognized her in any way—except to put her to work. Whenever she relaxed at all throughout any day, word would come at once, through Lua, setting her to work harder at some new task. She worked in that household until long after midnight—cleaning, cooking, scrubbing, and then she would rise at five in the morning to begin all over again. She worked as she had never worked before in all her life and 'Abdu'l-Bahá ignored her completely. If they ever chanced to meet he would draw aside His robe for her to pass and his glance would go through her as if she were not there.

At last came the day when the movies of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were to be taken over in Brooklyn at the home of Howard MacNutt. And Grace thought, wearily, "at least I will be included in THIS since EVERYONE in the household is to go." But, an hour before the several carloads of people were scheduled to leave, Lua came to Grace to say that 'Abdu'l-Bahá felt that someone should remain at the house to welcome two ladies who were expected that morning, and Grace was to be the one to stay behind. So when the cars left—Grace stood at the top of the flight of brownstone steps and watched them all roll away. Then, she turned and went into the empty house. For a moment she stood there, fighting the feeling of desolation and abandonment and loneliness, and then she thought of the white roses that had been delivered that morning, as they were daily, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room. The one bright spot in these dreadful days for Grace had been that she was the one to arrange these roses each morning. So, with the long florists' box in her arms, she climbed up to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room at the top of the house, where He had wished to be. She reached the top of the third flight—and found the door not only closed, but locked against her. And always before it had stood wide open! This, for Grace, was the last straw. Overwhelmed by all the hurt and bewilderment of all these days, she sank down on the floor and wept with the fallen roses scattered around her. At

last, the sobs faded, her tears spent themselves, and, exhausted, she gathered up the roses and went back downstairs.

The expected ladies had not arrived, nor did they ever arrive. But Grace—it was now past noon—was hungry. So, she went down to the kitchen to get something to eat. And in that house that fed, each day, so many dozens of people, there was nothing to eat but one egg and a small piece of leftover bread in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s bread-box. (This bread was especially baked for Him by a Persian believer who had begged to come on this journey just so he might cook ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s food). So Grace boiled her one egg and put her small portion of bread on a plate. Putting the egg in an egg cup, she chipped the shell—and the egg, as bad as an egg can get, exploded in her face. She cleaned up the mess and returned to her bit of leftover bread. And, as she crumbled the bread, eating it crumb by crumb she realized, suddenly, exactly what she was doing—she was, blessedly, eating the crumbs of the bread of life from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s table. She began to eat even more slowly as the spirit of prayer came to possess her.

Not long after this the household returned from Brooklyn—and that evening Lua came to Grace and said, “The Master has asked me to tell you that He knows you wept.” And this was the first time it had occurred to Grace that all this dreadful experience might have a reason, a pattern. And—if this were true she must find out what the reason could be. So she went up to her room to pray about it. To pray for illumination and wisdom, and the selflessness to understand. And as she prayed she heard a small voice saying ‘Are you as happy scrubbing the garbage pails as you are arranging the roses?’ And she suddenly realized what the spirit of true service was. It was to rise to selfless joy in offering the service, no matter what form that service might take.

And as this truth swept over her, suffusing her, illuminating her, the door opened, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked into the room. His arms were outstretched; His dear face was glorified. “Welcome!” He cried to Grace, “Welcome to the Kingdom!” And he held her close, embracing her deeply. And never did He withdraw Himself from her again.

Told to me by Grace Robarts Ober at Green Acre c. 1933

Grace Ober is the aunt of Hand of the Cause of God John Robarts.

Marriage ...

It was not long after this that Lua came to Grace and told her that it was the wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that she marry Harlan Ober.¹ Grace was shocked. "Why I don't really know that man! I've only met him a few times and that very casually. Besides—I'm almost engaged to someone else. He's asked me and I'm—I'm making up my mind. How could I think of marrying Harlan Ober?" Lua smiled, "I'm only repeating 'Abdu'l-Bahá's request," she said gently. So Grace quickly put the idea out of her mind. The next morning Lua came the second time to deliver the same message. Again Grace dismissed it all as being utterly fantastic. The third morning when Lua came she added her own remarks to the message. "You'd better really consider this, Grace 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not make suggestions lightly." Grace, this time, realized how serious this was. "But what does He want me to do? Write to Harlan Ober, whom I scarcely know—and propose to him? How could I? Oh, Lua I do want to be obedient but how on earth can I?" Lua hugged her and patted her consolingly. "I'll do it," she said. "I know Harlan very well—it was through me he came into the Faith. I can do this easily." So Lua wrote to Harlan—and Harlan, radiant at the thought that he was obeying a suggestion of his beloved Master, took the next train to New York from Boston where he lived. He came at once to see Grace and together they went walking through Central Park where he proposed and Grace, still dazed and uncertain, accepted—because it was the will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The next morning they were called into 'Abdu'l-Bahá's bedroom. And 'Abdu'l-Bahá was there, with one or two others, waiting to perform the marriage ceremony. Grace remembered, afterward, entering the room. She remembered the look of warm love on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's face; she remembered the bands of sunlight on the floor and the bowls of roses on the tables—and the next thing she was aware of was lying on a couch with Harlan bending above her asking if she felt better. She then discovered that the marriage had been performed—a marriage that, with no faltering, she had gone through with Harlan at her side—then, when it was over, she had

¹ Harlan Foster Ober (1881–1962) and Grace Roberts Ober (1869–1938) were married on 16 July 1912.

swayed a little and they had suggested she lie down. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, smiling and serene, was watching her with great love knowing perfectly well how overcome with the spiritual force of these great moments she had been [through] and knowing that the whole experience only proved her great spiritual susceptibility and capacity.

So were Grace Robarts and Harlan Ober married by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Later that same day they were married again by the laws of New York when Howard Colby Ives performed the legal ceremony.

This was told to me by Grace Ober
at Green Acre c. 1933

Wheelchair pioneer ...

Five years after Grace told me these stories she went on an extensive teaching trip through the near-southern states. For three of these five years she had been very ill—most of the time very close to the Open Door. Finally, when she was beginning to convalesce, she was sent, by a generous and devoted sister-Bahá'í, to a large convalescent home. This was at the time of our beloved Guardian's first call for pioneers to South America—a call that Grace, until this time, had been too ill to comprehend. But now she did comprehend, and all the way to the convalescent home she prayed from the depths of her hungry soul that she might, in some way, be able to respond to the Guardian's call.

She arrived at the home and discovered that, that very evening, a masquerade was planned to celebrate Valentine's Day. Grace at once began to plan a costume for herself. She was very ingenious and clever about such things, and she was delighted that, so soon, she might have an opportunity of meeting her fellow guests—and maybe giving the Message—who knew? Eagerly she began to dress. She was powdering her nose in the bathroom when she fell. Whether she slipped or whether she fainted she herself was not sure. But when they found her she was lying unconscious—and unable to walk. She was put to bed and there was no party for her that night. And the next day when she finally went down stairs to meet people she met them from a wheelchair. And the people she met were from Chile and Argentina and Peru and Brazil! All the countries she had so longed to pioneer in—all the countries her beloved Guardian had said should be given the Message. So Grace being Grace, saw the beautiful joke that had been played on her—and she began to laugh. And all the people said, "Why, Mrs. Ober, how can you laugh when this dreadful thing has happened to you?" And Grace said, "Because I am a Bahá'í—do you know what that means?" Of course they didn't—so she told them. And from her wheelchair she did her pioneering in South America—and these people from Chile and Argentina and Peru and Brazil, took the Message home with them together with all the literature Grace gave them.

Told to me by Grace Ober at
the Kinney home in New York City, winter 1937

To the light ...

It was a short time after Grace told me this story that she went on the teaching trip through the near-southern states that I mentioned above. The teaching trip ended in time for her to reach Wilmette and attend the Convention in the spring of 1938. It was a very radiant Convention and the report Grace gave of her teaching trip was one of the high points of it because Grace herself was so radiant and filled with the glory of the great privilege of teaching. She stood there, before the crowded hall in the foundation of the temple, filled with the great glory that shone from her and, closing her report, she uttered a tremendous clarion call for pioneers and for teachers. Then she walked down to resume her seat amongst the delegates. But on her way she paused beside Harlan, who had just been re-elected to our National Spiritual Assembly. "I want to congratulate you now" she whispered, "I may not have time later." They smiled at each other with the perfect understanding that had always existed between them. Then Grace slipped into her own seat. As she sat down her head drooped slightly and those glancing at her assumed she was lost in prayer. But when she made no movement for many moments someone touched her someone realized something was wrong. Edris Rice-Wray and Katherine True both moved forward—and Grace was gone—gone through her Open Door—gone on her beautiful journey to the arms of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (Both Edris Rice-Wray and Katherine True are doctors).

Told to me by Edris Rice-Wrays, MD, c. 1944

O SON OF THE SUPREME!

I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?¹

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 32.

Unstated invitation ...

Harry Randall, the brother of Loulie Mathews, was a man of wealth and affairs. He had been a classmate of Harlan Ober at Harvard and so, when Harlan learned of the Faith and became a Bahá'í, he very soon gave the Message to Harry, only to discover that, busy and occupied as he was with his manifold affairs, Harry Randall's interest went no farther than a polite and courteous response, which was far from satisfactory to Harlan. He persisted in trying to interest Harry further and when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to come to Boston, Harlan grew more and more pressing: Harry must go to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá speak; Harry must meet Him; Harry really owed it to himself not to miss this wonderful opportunity. Finally, Harry, still uninterested, but courteously anxious to please this eager friend of his, agreed to go with Harlan to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Ruth, Harry's wife, would not be able to go with him since she was a semi-invalid, in and out of sanatoriums for tuberculosis a great part of the time. Just then she had come home from one of these hospitals but she was far too frail to do anything but rest quietly at home.

Harlan and Harry Randall went to the meeting together and after it was over, Harlan insisted upon taking Harry to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Harr, still uninterested but always courteous, did as Harlan wished, and what was his astonishment when 'Abdu'l-Bahá warmly accepted an invitation to have tea the following afternoon at Harry's home! An invitation Harry had in no way extended. Appalled, Harry asked Harlan what on earth he should do about it? Harlan said, "Give a tea for Him what else can you do?" "But how can I? Ruth is ill. I'm busy. How on earth—?" Harlan laughed, "You don't know 'Abdu'l-Bahá or you'd know there's some sort of reason for this, and it'll get done. You have a houseful of servants—let them brew a cup of tea for the Master and invite a few friends in to share it." So this is what Harry did and the next afternoon when 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived at the lovely suburban home he found quite a group of people assembled on a wide verandah to receive Him. Ruth Randall, delicate and lovely, was also there, seated in a far corner where she might be safe from any draft. And it was to her, ignoring all the others, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá strode, His white aba

billowing with the swiftness of His tread; His beautiful eyes filled with light and love. Reaching her He bent above her, murmuring “My daughter—My dear daughter”, and lovingly He rested His hands on her shoulders. Then He turned and, smilingly, met all the other guests.

The following day, Ruth had an appointment with her doctor, who had examined her the previous week and had said that it might be necessary for her to return to the sanatorium for further treatment. He would be sure after he had seen her again. Ruth went to this appointment fearfully—she was so longing to remain at home, so very reluctant to be sent again to the hospital. The doctor examined her—and was amazed. What had she been doing? What could have happened to her? She was healed. There was not the least trace left of the tuberculosis. Of course, this was an experience that neither Harry nor Ruth could ignore, so it was the beginning of their long and glorious life-time of teaching and serving the Cause they came to love so well.

Told to me by Harlan Ober
at Green Acre Summer 1934

Interactive guidance III

Harry Randall, once he had leaped the hurdle and become a Bahá'í was a very enthusiastic one. When Harlan told him about 'guidance'—what a mystery it was, and how earnestly Harlan himself was trying to understand and live under it—Harry, too, began to try to apply it. One afternoon he started out to take a walk and, in an effort to understand this guidance that Harlan talked about, Harry paused at each cross street and corner praying that he might be urged in whatever direction it might be that God wished him to take. He walked and walked, the city streets gave way to country roads and still he walked. At some corners he was moved to turn; at some he went straight ahead. But he felt no urge to stop—he felt strongly that he should keep going. Finally, at the end of the afternoon, he came to a small white house surrounded by a picket fence—and here, with his hand on the gate, he knew this was the house he had been led to; this was the end of his walk. So he opened the gate, went up the short path and knocked at the door. A woman opened the door and, giving him one look, called back over her shoulder, 'John, John—he's come!'

It seems that the night before, this woman had had a dream in which she had gone to open her door to one who knocked—a man who had come into her house and told her something that was so exciting and wonderful that when she woke up—though she couldn't remember what the exciting and wonderful thing had been—she was still so excited she'd told her husband about it. And then Harry had knocked—Harry had come into her house and Harry had told her about Bahá'u'lláh and given her the wonderful Message for the New Day.

Told to me by Harlan Ober
at Green Acre, summer 1934

If poverty ...

Harry Randall, for all the years of his life, was a devoted servant of the Cause, giving generously of his great wealth, and giving as much time as he was able to, with his tremendous duties and responsibilities connected with his world of finance and business. Then came the Wall Street Crash in 1929—and Harry's wealth was largely swept away. But Harry, struggling to rise above this tidal wave and to recoup his fortune from the ruin was still very busy with his affairs. Then, a few years later, he became paralyzed and was confined to a wheelchair. And now, stripped of his wealth and all forms of activity, Harry Randall became entirely a man of soul and spirit. The last summer he spent at Green Acre was a summer of light and radiance and glory. He sat on the wide verandah radiating all the illumination with which he was filled, and to those privileged to be there that summer, the mere sight of Harry Randall was a bounty indeed. It was, as Grace Ober said, "An unforgettable experience—it was like looking at the pure spirit of all the Prophets." It was the beautiful preparation for his death which came not long after.

Told to me by Grace Ober
Green Acre, summer 1936

O SON OF BEING!

*If poverty overtake thee, be not sad; for in time the Lord of wealth shall visit thee. Fear not abasement, for glory shall one day rest on thee.*¹

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 53.

Green Acre ...

The story of Green Acre itself is intensely interesting. The beautiful property—the rolling meadows, the dear wide-verandahed Inn and, now, all the cottages surrounding it, together with the Tea House at the entrance leading from the highway and, farther down the road, the gracious Fellowship House—rises above the Piscataqua River, the “River of Light”. And it was originally owned by Miss Sarah J. Farmer who was present at the Chicago Exposition in 1893 when, as we all know, the first mention of the Bahá'í Revelation was made at the Congress of Religions. Miss Farmer became deeply interested in this matter of comparative religions and from that time was inspired to establish a summer school on this property of hers, which became later our beloved Green Acre. In the summer of 1904 the brilliant and deeply loved Persian teacher, Abu'l Faql, taught there and, of course, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was there for some time during the summer of 1912.

But before this, before the property became definitely [a] Bahá'í property, there had been a good deal of contention and difficulty. Miss Farmer, after a few years spent in listening to the various speakers she brought to her summer school, realized that what the world longed for and what all peoples needed was One Universal Faith—and the Bahá'í Revelation was the only answer to this problem. So, radiantly and with great certainty, she became a Bahá'í. And this was all very well until she announced that she had made her will leaving her property to the Bahá'ís. Then her family rose in outrage and fury. They demanded that she change her will in their favor. She refused. At which they declared her insane and clapped her into an insane asylum.

When the Bahá'ís heard of this, there was great consternation and horror and grief. That such a dreadful thing could happen to this great and wonderful woman was simply past all belief. But it had happened and something, certainly, must be done about it. They tried to have her released—but her family had consigned her, and only her family could release her, and this they refused to do. Then, an appeal was made to have

Miss Farmer examined by atieniate¹ to establish her sanity but this, too, could not be done. Other attempts were made—but there was no step that was not balked at by the Farmer family. Finally, in desperation, three Bahá'ís (Harlan Ober and Montfort Mills were two of them) engineered a most dramatic rescue involving a ladder that took them over the high wall surrounding the insane asylum where Miss Farmer was incarcerated and then another tall ladder leading to her room. She had been told what to expect and she was waiting to be carried down and away.

In the Ober home, Grace also was waiting for the return of the rescuers and the rescued. In the dark hours of the early morning they all arrived and there was great rejoicing.

Eventually, of course, there was great hubbub and fury raised by the Farmer family and finally, they dragged the Bahá'ís into court to have the matter legally settled. The case was brought by John Mitchell who was a most brilliant lawyer and who, at that point, had never lost a case. The Bahá'ís were represented by Montfort Mills, and the Bahá'ís won. They won the freedom and safety of their radiant and devoted sister Sarah Farmer and they won Green Acre.

Told to me by Grace Ober
as Green Acre, summer 1933

¹ “Atieniate” should be “an alienist”, an obsolete term from Latin for a psychiatrist who specializes in the legal aspects of mental illness.

Deserving boots ...

It was at the home of the Kinneys that 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed the second time he came to New York and it was from this home that He left to return to Haifa. The day before He was to take ship to leave, He asked Mr Kinney if there was something amongst His belongings that He might offer as a gift of farewell. At first, Mr Kinney was reluctant to choose, but finally he admitted that—well, might he be given a pair of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's boots? Those boots that had sheltered the feet that walked with such serene certainty upon the Path of God? Mr. Kinney would cherish these above all else.

So, with smiling love, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a pair of His boots to Edward Kinney. Reverently and joyfully, Mr Kinney laid them in a bureau drawer in his bedroom, carefully wrapped in a nest of tissue paper. Very rarely—since the boots were such an intimate and precious thing, were they shown to anyone, though Mr Kinney touched them frequently as he prayed.

Then one day, he did wish to show them to someone. He went to the bureau, pulled out the drawer—and the boots were gone—completely gone. No sign of them in the tissue paper, no sign of them in any other drawer, no sign of them in any part of the room which was searched carefully. There simply were no boots anywhere.

So Dad Kinney (he became "Dad" to all the hundreds who loved him) began to pray—and he prayed, shaken, from the depths of his troubled soul. Why had the beloved boots been taken from him? Where had they gone? What could have happened? Was he—had he become—unworthy to possess them? And, at last, he knew this was it. He was no longer worthy to hold the precious boots. Then—why was he no longer worthy? What had he done between the time when he had last held the boots in his hands and the moment when he had discovered their absence?

It had been, he estimated, some two, possibly three weeks. So—in deepest meditation, he went back, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment over this period. He remembered his actions; he analysed his motives; he reviewed his thoughts. And suddenly, in a blaze of illumination, he knew what it was. Deep, selfish materialism; clouded

hypocritical motives; unjust actions. He had been guilty of all these. But he had deluded himself by calling them such fair and pretty names. No wonder the boots had been taken away. In all justice he had proved himself in no way worthy to hold such treasure. Humbled and ashamed, he prayed abjectly for forgiveness—and then, mournfully, he went to the bureau drawer—just to touch the tissue paper that once had protected the boots. And lo! The boots had returned. They were there, real and tangible; the leather soft beneath his fingertips, the well-worn soles smooth to his touch. They were there, but the warning was never forgotten—the lesson was well learned.

Told to me by Edward Kinney
in New York 1937

May waits for Thomas ...

One of the most beautiful stories we have is the one of May Maxwell (the mother of Rúhíyyih Khánúm) and Thomas Breakwell. This was in the very early days, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was still a prisoner in Acca and May Maxwell was a young girl—probably (judging by the dates available to me) 1905. The story was told to me by my father and by May Maxwell herself, but in this account, I am paraphrasing May Maxwell's own words to be found in the *Star of the West*.¹

She herself is not certain of the exact date—though she will never forget the details. It happened in the spring when May's mother and brother were planning to leave Paris for Brittany and of course they wished May to accompany them. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá had requested that she remain in Paris so, upon her mother's insistence, she wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for His permission to leave. This was refused. He wished her to remain in Paris. So, finally May's mother and brother left without her and she went to stay with a friend.

It was not long after this that a Mrs Milner, who had just arrived from America, brought a young man whom she had met on shipboard to meet May. In May's own words:

“I shall never forget opening the door and seeing him standing there. It was like looking at a veiled light. I saw at once his pure heart, his burning spirit, his thirsty soul, and overall was cast the veil which is over every soul until it is rent asunder by the power of God in this day.”

Mrs Milner introduced him as a young man interested in spiritual things, who was at the moment a Theosophist. They stayed only a short time, but as he was leaving, he said that Mrs Milner had mentioned some teaching that May was interested in and might he call again to hear about it? He returned the next morning and May, realizing his great capacity, gave him the full Message—which he accepted completely and instantly. Three days later he wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá saying with great simplicity, “My Lord! I believe; forgive me. Thy servant, Thomas Breakwell.”

¹ *Star of the West*, 5:19, 2 March 1915, pp. 297–8.

“That evening,” writes May, “I went to the Rue du Bac to get my mail and found a cablegram which had just arrived saying, ‘You may leave Paris’, and signed Abbas.”

May continues, “I could write you pages about the beloved Thomas Breakwell; of the fire of love burning in his heart when he returned from Acca; of the penetrating spiritual power in our midst; of the light of servitude and sacrifice which burned so brilliantly in his soul—I only want to add that his kindness and love to my mother—produced a great effect on her—before she understood the glory of this Cause.”

And, in the same issue of *Star of the West*, is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tablet to Breakwell¹ which follows:

“Do not lament over the departure of my dearly-beloved Breakwell. For verily, he has ascended to the Luminous Rose-Garden of the ABHA Kingdom, near the mercy of his Lord, the Almighty, and is crying out with the loudest voice, O thee my people know how my Lord hath forgiven me, and made me one of those who have attained the meeting of God!”

“O Breakwell! my beloved! Where is thy beautiful countenance and where is thy eloquent tongue? Where is thy radiant brow and where thy brilliant face?”

“O Breakwell! my beloved! Where is thy enkindlement with the Fire of the love of God, and where is thy attraction to the Fragrances of God? Where is thy utterance for the glorification of God, and where is thy rising in the service of God?”

“O my dear! O Breakwell! Verily thou hast abandoned this transitory world, and soared upward to the Kingdom, hast attained to the Grace of the Invisible Realm, and sacrificed thyself to the Threshold of the Lord of Might!

“O my adored one! O Breakwell! Verily thou hast left behind this physical lamp, this human glass, these earthly elements and this worldly enjoyment.”

¹ The Tablet to Breakwell is in *Star of the West*, 5:19, 2 March 1915, pp. 296–7; & *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 187–9.

“O my adored one! O Breakwell! Then thou hast ignited a light in the Glass of the Supreme Concourse, hast entered into the Paradise of ABHA; art protected under the shade of the Blessed Tree, and hast attained to the meeting (of the True One) in the abode of Paradise.

“O my dearly-beloved! O Breakwell! Thou hast been a divine bird, and forsaking thy earthly nests thou hast soared toward the Holy Rose-Gardens of the Divine Kingdom and obtained a Luminous Station there!”

“O my dearly-beloved! O Breakwell! Verily thy Lord has chosen thee for His love, guided thee to the Court of His Holiness; caused thee to enter into the Rizwan of His Association and granted thee to behold His Beauty!”

“O my beloved! O Breakwell! Verily thou hast attained to the Eternal Life, never-ending bounty, beautiful bliss and immeasurable Providence!”

“O my beloved! O Breakwell! Thou hast become a star in the Most Exalted Horizon, a lamp among the angels of heaven, a living spirit in the Supreme World and art established on the throne of immortality!”

“O my adored one! O my Breakwell! I supplicate God to increase thy nearness and communication, to make thee enjoy thy prosperity and union (with Him), to add to thy light and beauty and to bestow upon thee Glory and Majesty.”

“O my adored one! O my Breakwell! I mention thy name continually, I never forget thee, I pray for thee day and night, and I see thee clearly and manifestly O my adored one! O Breakwell!”

(signed) 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás

Copied from *Star of the West*, Vol. V, No. 19, pp. 296–8.

(Note: I was not able to find the date of the passing of Thomas Breakwell from this world of limitation to the next world of God, but I was told his health was far from robust and his years of illuminated service were not many.)¹

¹ Thomas Breakwell, born 1 May 1872, Woking, United Kingdom. Died 13 June 1902, Paris, France.

The meeting ...

Howard Colby Ives (my father) first heard of the Faith through Clarence Moore (the father of Emily Kalantar)¹ and, from the very first mention, he was sceptically reluctant to put such faith in this wonderful Message. For years he had put his faith in various things and in the end, found that faith betrayed. In his search, he had become a Unitarian minister and was, at the time of his meeting with Clarence Moore, becoming, as he had before with other beliefs, disillusioned and unhappy within the confinement of a dogma. So he was not about to pin this tattered hope of his to any new masthead only to have it torn down once more. He and Clarence had many hours of discussion, but Father, longing so desperately to find the Truth that would, for all eternity, prove itself to be unflawed and real, refused to be moved from his stand of doubt and fearfulness.

“It is a beautiful Message,” he told Clarence, “It is a beautiful dream. It is good that you and others are able to dream it. But I—I have dreamed too much and too often—and the awakening has always been too bitter. I cannot dream again and wake again.” It was too painful for him even to contemplate.

Then came the spring when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was arriving in New York. And, Clarence, radiant, said, “Howard, you must meet Him and I am sure all will be well with you.” Father refused. “What good would it do?” he asked. “We would be lost in a vast crowd of people. He would be wholly concerned with his audience—I would be lucky if I glimpsed the top of his turban. What would be the use? Now if I might meet Him face to face—if we might commune heart-to-heart—alone with no one to interrupt, Ah, then we might truly meet.” Father’s tone betrayed his hope—but Clarence sighed and shook his head. “No one meets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá alone—it is necessary that all His words be recorded; He is always accompanied by His secretaries and friends.”

But, in spite of this attitude of Father’s Clarence persisted, and finally he brought Montfort Mills to add his persuasion—and between them they finally managed to bring Father to the Hotel Ansonia, where at that time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying. And it was exactly as Father had imagined it to

¹ Emilie Moore married A. K. Kalantar, 21 September 1931.

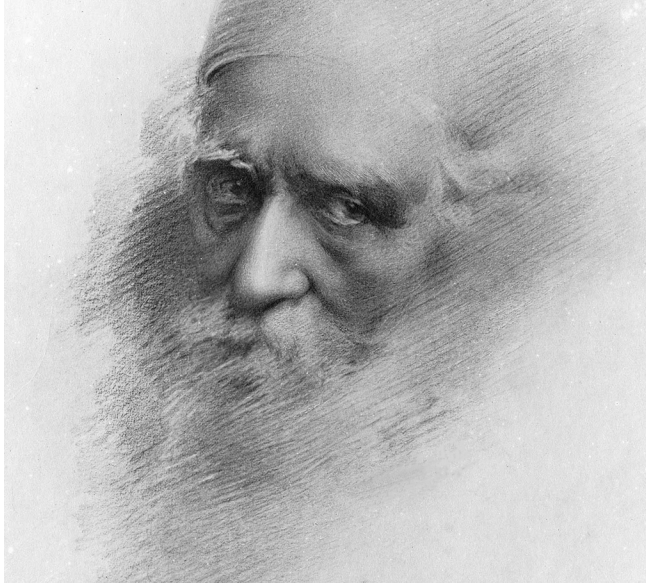
be. The living room of the suite was crowded, there was barely room to stand and the air was filled with chatter. Father, disgusted that he had permitted himself to be talked into such a hopeless hubbub and realizing afresh the absurdity of even thinking he'd discover any truth in all the confusion, walked over to a window and looked down on the Broadway traffic. It was then he heard a door open and turned. A door had opened and in the doorway stood a Persian who, as he caught Father's eye, beckoned to him. Father hesitated, this was not possible, the man was, of course, beckoning to someone else. But he beckoned again, unmistakably, and Father moved across the room and entered the doorway.

It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's bedroom that he stepped into and, as Father crossed the threshold, everyone in the room left by another door, Father and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were alone. For a moment they stood and looked at each other, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá opened his arms and Father walked into them, "My son my very dear son"—murmured 'Abdu'l-Bahá and embraced him deeply. Then He motioned to a chair and Father sat down. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sat down close by. Nothing at all was said. The moments flowed by. Occasionally 'Abdu'l-Bahá reached out and patted Father's knee, gently and lovingly. And Father sat there. Later he said, "I knew then that I had found all and more than I was seeking—I had found a Man for the first time in my life who was truly possessed of the Pearl of Great Price, I had found flowing all around me and pouring through me, the infinite peace of which I had dreamed for all my life long." In that long sweet silence in the presence of the Master my Father had been given the bounty of deep, unshakable, unquestioning, everlasting Faith.

And for all the remaining years of his life he dedicated every breath he drew to sharing this Faith with everyone he met.

Told to me by Father first in 1912
and countless times later.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá



Part two
Stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
as told by Mother

Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall

Introduction

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in appearance, was a man of medium height—[a]though to all who met Him, He gave the impression of such majesty that He seemed much taller. His beard was flowing and white; His head covering, whether a turban or tarboosh,¹ was white also. But, meeting Him, none of these details were even noticed. It was only the spirit one felt and the outpouring love. Love filled Him and flowed out from Him to bathe and encompass everyone in His presence.

He was, as we all know, the Mystery of God. His Station is unique. There has been no one like Him in any past religious era, nor will there ever be such in the future. Bahá’u’lláh had bestowed upon Him the assurance of God’s guidance in His explanations of anything in the Teachings that needed clarifying for the believers and, when He was but ten years old, His Father, Bahá’u’lláh, addressed Him and referred to Him as ‘the Master’.

He was the perfect Exemplar of the Bahá’í Teachings: He lived by prayer and wished only to be known as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the servant of the servants. He made no mistakes.

Yet, with all this, He needed, as we all need, the constant attitude of prayer to renew and revivify Him, and, urging us ever upward. His constant adjuration was, “Do as I do. Be as I am.”

¹ Tarbúsh. tarboosh or fez.

Repetition

When He was here in America in 1912 He spoke in many places and, as we read these talks in the *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, it is very often noticeable how much He repeats Himself, approaching the point He wishes to make from many angles. One evening a woman, after telling Him how much she had enjoyed His Talk, complained of this. He smiled at her gently.

“And what is it I repeat?” He asked.

Of course she couldn’t tell Him.

Golden rain ...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was so filled with love and the reflected Glory of God, the heritage from His Father, Bahá’u’lláh, that it radiated from Him like light from a lighthouse. Sometimes this was visible. Nina Mattieson told this story that Lady Blomfield had told her. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was speaking from the pulpit of a church in London and Lady Blomfield, sitting toward the back of the congregation, clearly saw broad rays of golden light pouring from Him over the people. But she noticed a strange thing: The Golden Rain—as she thought of it afterward—avoided some people completely, while others it flooded in illumination.

Not yet known

At the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s second visit to Newark, He spoke in my Father’s Brotherhood Church in Jersey City. My father had begged Him to do this, and at once ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had consented, but He would set no date. Father was eager and anxious that a date be definitely set, partly because the Master was to leave New York again—this time for California, and partly because he knew from experience that to have a successful meeting required publicity and announcements and invitations, all of which took time. So he began pressing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the date. Each time the Master would

smile gently, pause a moment (to consult some inner knowledge?) then, shaking His head, would murmur “It is not yet known.” Father, a not-too-patient man, urged in every way he could but he got nothing more. And the date of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s departure was approaching. Suddenly, early in one week, He announced He would speak the following Sunday. Father was frantic. Only four or five days to publicize such an important event. But, to his astonishment, there was plenty of time. Doors opened swiftly, one after the other, and when that Sunday evening came the large hall that Father had rented for his Brotherhood Church was completely filled with the overflow standing along the back.

Of course “‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about brotherhood. True brotherhood that transcended national boundaries, religious customs and practices, and paid no heed to the unimportant surface differences of skin color. For of what importance were these when it was the Soul of a man that mattered in its relationship to the Spirit of God? And if this true brotherhood were practiced throughout the world, if each man truly loved his brother more than he loved himself, considering his brother’s welfare far more than his own, Mankind would truly become mature and the Kingdom of God on earth would become a fact. And wasn’t this the essence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message? Wasn’t this the reason why He had endured the persecutions, the exiles, and the imprisonments? To announce to mankind the dawning of this great New Day—the rolling up of the Old World Order and the glorious unrolling of this New World Order under the aegis of Bahá’u’lláh—the Glory of God?

Translation ...

And sometimes this great love and glory was strongly felt. There is the story of the coal miner in California who had walked many miles to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who, of course spoke that evening as He always did through an interpreter. The coal miner became more and more impatient. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, he leaned toward the man sitting next to him. “Why does that man continually interrupt the Master?” he asked. The man explained, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá is speaking in Persian—it must, be translated.” “Translated!” the coal miner was outraged. “Nothing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says needs translating—anybody can understand Him.”

Dedication

Then there is the story about our dear Fujita¹—his wiry little Japanese-American body so radiating joy and love—his smile like a veritable explosion of the spirit. Fujita met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Cleveland, Ohio. At that time Fujita was a medical student—but the moment he met the Master he was one no longer. He dropped his studies, his former life, everything—to follow Him. He followed from Cleveland to Chicago and finally to California and eventually to New York—and Haifa where, for fifty years, he made and kept those beautiful gardens even more beautiful. First for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then for Shoghi Effendi. When I was there, in 1972, Fujita had been retired from active gardening and had been appointed as a one-man welcoming committee to the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He has now crossed the threshold into the next world of God, but I have the memory of him standing at that lovely wrought iron gate, smiling his explosive smile and waving us on our way.

At the zoo

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was first in Chicago it, was spring and He was eager to go to the zoo. He had never seen a large city zoo, and He was very merry over the prospect. Then it was explained to Him that, this being the spring of the year, most of the animal-mothers would be bearing litters and, at the first approach of a stranger, they'd rush their babies into safe hiding. This did not perturb 'Abdu'l-Bahá at all. He wanted to go anyhow. So a group of five or six of the friends took Him. He motioned to them to stay a little behind and He went forward all alone. And, as He approached each cage, the small animal-mother brought out all her babies to show Him, then hurried them back to safety and protection from the following friends.

Questions not asked ...

Once 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked His Father, Bahá'u'lláh why it was He had

¹ Saichirō Fujita, a native of Yamaguchi Prefecture, was the second Japanese to become a member of the Bahá'í Faith from Japan. Born 15 April 1886, Yanai, Yamaguchi, Japan. Died 7 May 1976, Haifa, Israel.

never clearly designated the language that was to become universal. And Bahá’u’lláh said, very simply, “Because no one ever asked Me.” This answer has always filled me with a sense of frustrated awe. To think that the opportunity was given mankind to learn the answers to questions that had puzzled him since the beginning of time to have the mysteries of the universe solved! If only he had asked the questions and known the right questions to ask.

Books

A Pilgrim once told me that she had asked the Guardian why so few of the books of Bahá’u’lláh had been translated into English. Shoghi Effendi smiled at her lovingly and said it would be many years before the books we of the West had would be truly and deeply studied—when that happened more would be given [to] us.

Study, study, study

Which brings to mind the story told me of a newly declared believer, radiant and eager to serve. He wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asking what he should do. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him to study the Teachings. Eighteen years later the man wrote again to the Master saying that for several hours each day for the eighteen years he had studied the Teachings—and what should he do now? Promptly ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote and told him to go and study the Teachings. This was an East Indian Bahá’í where, now, the Faith is truly roaring.

Sow the seeds ...

And there is another story concerning India. Once, in the early days, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent an eager believer there to ‘sow the seed, deliver the Message’. The man went, and two years later returned very discouraged. “I have sown the seed. I have delivered the Message through the length and breadth of India and they will not listen. Not one single soul has declared his belief in Bahá’u’lláh! What shall I do now?” And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said rather sternly, “Go back and sow the seeds. I did not tell you to gain believers. I told you to sow the seeds.”

A book

On one of His visits to New York He stayed with Juliet Thompson on West 10th Street not far from Fifth Avenue. Two or three doors away and across the street, the poet Khalil Gibran was staying with friends. He and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had met in Syria so now they met again. Gibran said that he believed in everything Bahá'u'lláh had taught, but that he would never declare himself as a Bahá'í because he had his own message to give to mankind and he wished this to remain clearly his. However, said Gibran, he would like to do something for 'Abdu'l-Bahá—so what might he do? “'Abdu'l-Bahá was pleased and said, very good—go write me a book and the famous *Jesus, Son of Man* by Khalil Gibran's was that book

This story was told to me by Hammideh Khan whose father, Ali Kuli Khan, had been told it by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Himself.

Obedience and trust

Everything He did or said taught someone something: but He warned, “Listen to and obey the first thing I say—for that is what is best for you. If, however, I find you reluctant, I soften and reduce My request till I arrive at a burden that you feel suits the strength of your shoulders. But My first request would not have been beyond your strength—if you had only trusted Me.” Shoghi Effendi repeated this and it seems the Universal House of Justice functions on the same principle.

Charity

With all of His spiritual knowledge and vision 'Abdu'l-Bahá was extremely practical. On His third visit to New York He stayed with the Kinneys at their home on West End Avenue. This was only one block from Riverside Drive, where, often, He would walk. One late afternoon He came back with his snowy 'abá' wrapped close around Him and He was laughing. It seemed that on the Drive, he had come across a poor man whose trousers were literally in rags. So 'Abdu'l-Bahá had taken him behind some thick shrubbery where quickly He had taken off his own trousers, stripped the rags from the man, and got him decently clothed. How amazed that poor

man must have been. And how amused ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who, with his ‘abá’ wrapped tight around him to hide his trouser less condition came home laughing.

Lover of truth

It was some years before this, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in Paris, that a group of men from Teheran came to Him deeply troubled. They had walked all the way from their homes in Persia—since traveling on foot was the only proper way to meet their Master—to make what they considered a most vital request. In a village, there was a Bahá’í who was causing a great deal of trouble because of the lies he told. He lied about everything with the result that misunderstandings, distrust and confusion reigned. This dreadful situation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would, they begged, have to do something about. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá agreed; indeed it was a most dreadful situation and certainly He would do something about it. He would write the man a letter. And the salutation at the heading of this letter was, “O thou great lover of Truth” (Sadly there is no record I have seen of the balance of this Epistle—which must have been priceless.)

Detachment

As an example of the methods of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching: My father was having difficulty understanding this matter of Detachment. Just what were we supposed to become detached from? We were taught not to become isolated and detached as were the monks in a monastery. It was also an obligation to work and support those dependent upon us. So where did detachment fit into this picture? One day Father asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about all this. They were walking up Broadway after a meeting and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made no answer. After walking a few blocks, Father repeated his question. Still no answer. They reached 76th Street, where the Kinneys lived and turned left to West End Avenue. As they mounted the outside steps, Father asked for the third time. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reached the front door, opened it, and started up the inner stair to His room, Father pattering along after. They reached the second floor, and turned on up to the third, Father following doggedly. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá entered His room with Father close on

His heels. And there the Master turned. "Mister Ives," He asked gently, "Are you interested in detachment?" Father, his face scarlet, was silent. He couldn't say he was and he wouldn't say he wasn't.

In His footsteps

There are many stories of Lua Getsinger. This one was told me by Grace Ober, who heard it from Lua herself. It happened on one of Lua's several visits to Acca and Haifa when she and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were walking together on the beach. Lua dropped behind slightly and began fitting her small feet, into His much larger foot prints. After a few moments the Master turned to ask what she was doing. "I am following in your footsteps," said Lua. He turned away and they walked on. A few moments later, He turned again, "Do you wish to follow in my footsteps?" He asked. "Oh, yes," said Lua. They walked on—and 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned again, "Lua! Do you wish to follow in my footsteps?" His tone was louder and stern. "Oh, yes," said Lua again. Then, the third time he stopped and faced her. "Lua!" it was almost a shout, "*Do you wish to follow in My footsteps?*" "Oh, yes!" said Lua for the third time—and with that, a great tarantula jumped out from a hillock of sand and bit her ankle. 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw this and paid no attention, turning away and again walking. Lua followed, still fitting her footsteps into His. Her ankle swelled, the pain became excruciating, till, finally, she sank down with the agony of it. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá picked her up and carried her to the ladies quarters, where the Greatest Holy Leaf put her to bed. The agony increased. Lua's temperature flamed; delirium set in. Finally, the Greatest Holy Leaf could stand it no longer and she implored 'Abdu'l-Bahá to heal her. He examined her carefully—then laid His hands gently on her forehead. The temperature drained away, her head cleared—she was healed. And it was only later that it was explained to her that she had been suffering from a strange and virulent condition of her blood which the bite of the tarantula had cured.