

1945

(Ella Roberts papers Box 7)

C O P Y

*By a Baha'i Wae
from Washington, D.C.*

Jan. 15, 1945.
Cairo, Egypt

Please return!

Dearest:

Now to begin writing of my trip to Haifa, Palestine. It all started in a city called Cairo. Dorothy Clark, my roommate and I were in the PX, better known as the United States Army Post Exchange, and we thought we would meander over to the booking office for air transportation, and just for fun see if it were possible to obtain some kind of plane to Haifa or nearby. At first it was "no", but with a little bit of flirting we managed to find out that a Headquarters flight would leave for Tel Aviv 8 A.M. the next morning and we could go along, "No charge."

Pardon me, I failed to mention that this all began January 5th. Dottie and I were so excited it was 3:30 P.M. and we did not have any visas, nor had we approached our bosses for leave from our work. Well I found my boss and he gave his approval for time off (this was really a miracle as he always refused me before), but to make a long story short it took me until 8 P.M. to obtain visas. I had to get the Egyptian Officer in charge to return to his office at 7:30 P.M. as he had already left his office. He was very nice about everything and it seemed so unusual for anyone to be so obliging, but later on I found that he spent several years in Washington, D.C. and had become rather fond of Americans. After keeping a taxi for three hours, I managed to get enough visas to make the trip.

Madly I returned home to pack and at twelve we were in bed only to have to get up the next morning at 5:30 without an alarm clock. But we managed this somehow and arrived at the airport in plenty of time before the take off. We certainly traveled in style and Karl Hubbell and other members of the baseball league were the guests of honor on this trip.

Arriving in Tel Aviv we grabbed a bus for Haifa, Pardon me, back to the plane, we flew over the Suez Canal and several ships were passing through at this time. It was a very beautiful sight and certainly a wonderful piece of work.

The trip to Haifa was very beautiful, many hills and wide open spaces. Upon arriving I immediately telephoned Ruhyyih Khanoum's residence and she immediately invited Dorothy to come along with me. We arrived at the House of Abbas Effendi where Shoghi Effendi resides and there we met Ruhyyih Khanoum who was in the living room. Well I was very shy and when I met her my first impression was very confused, and I was not at all sure how Dottie was taking everything. She did not use make-up and wore a white shawl over her head. She escorted Dorothy and me over to the Pilgrim House for westerners, this is located across from the house of Shoghi Effendi. We were taken to our rooms by Baha'i servants. I was given the room of Mrs. Maxwell and Dorothy was put in Ruhyyih's ex-room. As it was very cold, Dorothy and I were furnished heat.

Dot and I decided to sleep together as we were both rather shy. This was around 6 P.M. and it was getting dark and I had just gone to the bath when Ruhyyih Khanoum came for me to see Shoghi Effendi. Madly I dressed, and was I afraid--scared to death. Over to the big house again and I was left in the living room waiting to see Shoghi Effendi. Well, I did not know what to say or do when I saw Him, but somehow He knew this and he took my hand and welcomed me so warmly. He told me to sit in the big chair which is so much like a princess chair in order that he could talk with me. Then he started discussing our Faith, and then I was assured that this was the Faith I always would believe in and love. Maringello has the same tone of voice as Shoghi Effendi. My heart was so happy and I loved Shoghi Effendi with all my heart. He is so kind, stern, sincere and so completely balanced in every way, dress, manner, approach, ideas, etc.

He stayed and talked with me about fifteen minutes and then He left. Ruhyyih Khanoum walked back with me and no longer was I afraid. She is such a lovely sweet person, so real and sincere.

I had previously met her father and I liked him instantly. I would judge him to be about 75 or 80 years old. I also met Shoghi Effendi's Brother Riaz, who appeared to be very quiet and so different from Shoghi Effendi.

We had dinner in the Western Pilgrim House, the four of us. The food was delicious. That night I learned how we as Baha'is should be. Ruhyyih Khanoum is very pretty and I enjoyed being with her so very much.

That night I was too excited to sleep and wondered what tomorrow would bring. We had breakfast in the den at 10:30 and then Mr. Maxwell took Dot and me to the Baha'i gardens. No words of mine could ever express the beauty of these gardens. But I will try.

The Baha'i community owns the center of Mt. Carmel from the bottom to the top. We entered the lower gardens on the inside or on this side of the highway. Never have I seen such gigantic cypress trees, they encircle the gardens. The paths are of white stones, and the many steps of white marble with gorgeous marble vases. We saw the Foreign Pilgrim Houses which are on the inside of the gardens. We looked across the Mediterranean Sea from the shrine of the Bab and 'Abdul'-Baha to the shrine of Baha'u'llah. (How I longed to go to Akka). The gardens are open to all faiths and on the Sundays of each faith you find the people here in the Gardens. I finally arrived at the Shrine of the Bab, removed my shoes to center. Sadness at once touched me, and at that time I wished that I had been alone. Never have I seen a more beautiful, peaceful place. Everything was clean, beautiful, dignified and most of all so touching and sad. I said a few prayers and left to see the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Baha next door. One does not feel so depressed there.

We continued to explore the gardens and saw the beautiful monuments of the Greatest Holy Leaf and other members of 'Abdu'l-Baha's family. Their bodies were placed here by Shoghi Effendi. He has done all the landscaping i.e., the planning -- if only you could see this lovely place. Shoghi Effendi is working very hard and he has so much to do. So much to accomplish and has so little time to do it. Sometimes I wonder why we as Baha'is trouble him with such petty personal troubles. Although he is so proud of the Baha'is in America he is disappointed that we involve ourselves in petty gossip. He wants us to be above such things and he is against any gossip among believers.

Mr. Maxwell, Dot and I returned to the house, we were so tired. We had lunch and went to bed. Later on Dot and I visited the town which is very clean and so very progressive. The Jews and other races here are just wonderful people. Shoghi Effendi sent for me while I was exploring the town and of course I was very disappointed that I did not get to see him but of course I did not think he would see me again. Haifa at night is so beautiful and Mt. Carmel is flooded with lights.

After dinner the four of us talked and talked. Many questions were answered. Mr. Maxwell is such a fine man and a wonderful architect. He has assisted Shoghi Effendi in so many many ways. The model of the Temple to be erected on Mt. Carmel is exquisite.

The next morning Riaz took me to the archives while Dot visited the monastery on top of Mt. Carmel. We did not feel as Dorothy would wish to visit the archives and therefore she was not asked.

As we entered the archives I could not help but admire the dignity and cleanliness of the place. There I saw the pictures of Baha'u'llah and the Bab, and of course many pictures of 'Abdu'l-Baha. How can one even dare try to describe

Baha'u'llah or the Bab. I will only say a very few words. The Bab was so delicate and I loved his frailness, but Baha'u'llah is so different. He appeared to me to be fearless, firm, and his eyes were like someone who could read your very soul. His purpose is in his face and that is "to bring peace to mankind."

Saw all the personal belongings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Riaz and I returned to the Shrines and this time my heart was so heavy; in some small way I felt the sadness of the Bab and the power of Baha'u'llah. All I could do in the Shrine of the Bab was to sob and sob and Riaz chanted the prayer of the Tablet of Ahmed. I didn't even have a hanky so I used my coat. Riaz explained everything to me with all details and he is so very nice. Shoghi Effendi arranged a trip for us to Nazareth. Ruhyyih Khanoum, Mr. Maxwell, Dot and I were on our way. It is a lovely drive from Haifa, about 40 minutes, and when one sees Nazareth at a distance it is very lovely, but upon arriving you see filth, people so poor and sick. We entered a church which was the most filthy place I have ever entered. It was near the well where the Virgin Mary obtained water. The people attending services were dirty, the church was dirty and I was so glad to leave the place. We saw the church of the Annunciation where Joseph's carpenter shop was supposed to have been. Since these were caves I have my doubts. I was glad to have seen Nazareth but happier to leave. Ruhyyih was such a darling on this trip. Upon arriving home we had tea and I saw Shoghi Effendi again. I am so very lucky.

Again we talked very late and retired around 11 P.M. Dorothy by this time was longing to meet Shoghi Effendi and loving everything.

The next morning the great desire of mine to go to Akka was to be fulfilled. Riaz, Dot and I left for Akka in the afternoon. Then I realized that the prophecy of Baha'u'llah that Haifa and Akka will be one is being fulfilled, as the homes are extending around the port and soon they will meet. This is a 30 minute ride from Haifa. Akka is dirty, poor and the house that Baha'u'llah lived in for 17 years is very depressing. Also saw here the prison where He was imprisoned. Baha'u'llah's room is kept clean and is locked, i.e., the room in the house. We traveled for fifteen minutes more and then one sees in the distance a gorgeous building standing alone. Beautiful, well kept gardens, and the next to this home a building which appears to be a hothouse. There are acres and acres of land that is next to this house. Which an orchard of olives and only an artist dares describe such beauty. This is the Mansion where Baha'u'llah spent his last days. First I entered the place which appeared to be a flower house and there is the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. The beauty of this place is breathtaking. The Shrine so suited His personality. So powerful. There I did not feel sad but only childish and so very happy and secure. I prayed that my dear friends and others could experience the joy I had the past few days.

Then we entered the Mansion of Baha'u'llah. This is now an archive for all the accomplishments of the Baha'is, i.e., books, models, pictures, and each room is beautifully furnished so that one enjoys reading and seeing all the many things of the Baha'is. Saw the room where Baha'u'llah died. It is just as he left it and so very rich and peaceful. Prof. Browne on his interview with Baha'u'llah uses the very wording as he expressed himself that one feels when they enter this room. I wrote several letters from one of the many rooms in the Mansion. I returned to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and prayed for someone I so wanted to find happiness. Had tea in the Mansion and then returned to Haifa.

Shoghi Effendi called for me again and this was the night before I was to leave, how I hated to leave. I was given a photo of the beautiful Baha'i Gardens from Shoghi Effendi, and before leaving he advised me on many things concerning the Cause. Here I cannot write many things but only to my dear friend Hannah who has been the most perfect friend a girl ever had. In Haifa I learned to appreciate the good of such a wonderful Baha'i.

We stayed up late again and poor Dottie did not get to see Shoghi Effendi. Mr. Maxwell gave me several photos and Riaz gave me a picture of 'Abdu'l-Baha when He was young and Ruhiiyyih gave me some lovely rosary and prayer books. I was so sorry but maybe I will be able to return again.

Dot and I left Sunday morning at 9:30 A.M. and arrived in Jerusalem at 1:00 P.M. We immediately went to the Holy Sepulchre. It is impossible to describe such filthy places and people we had to see before arriving. The first question we were asked "Are you Christians". Of course this made Dorothy furious as the Holy Sepulchre is not open to Jews. Dot asked the priest if the Jews didn't have as much right to Jesus as the rest of us, and of course being a Baha'i they did not know what I was. Anyway this left me very disappointed as I believe so different. This place is very materialistic. One statue alone has \$8,000,000 worth of jewelry, and of course I feel as if the Virgin Mary would prefer this money to be used for those dirty, poor people we saw. There are many things of interest here, but I did not have too much time to continue my visit, but I will return again. Before leaving we saw the Wailing Wall and I couldn't believe my eyes. It is impossible to believe that any human being in this day could act as these people are doing. Most of them unclean. The more one sees these things, the more one realizes the necessity of Religious unity. All our past wars have been because of lack of religious unity. One sees selfishness here. When I left this place I thanked God that I learned of the Baha'i Faith.

Dot and I spent the night at Tel Aviv and returned to Cairo the following morning.

(This letter has been extracted from one to my friend Hannah and I do hope I have not missed anything here)