

PILOT INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECT REPORT

by

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Inception

This pilot international youth project began with a suggestion to Arthur Dahl from Loyce Lawrence, secretary of the National Teaching Committee of Norway, that perhaps some of his sons might be able to visit Norway during a summer. It happened that two of us-- Roger and myself-- were able and willing to take such a trip, and with this the planning commenced. I was able to reserve a seat on a charter flight arranged by Harvard Student Agencies, which was a considerable saving, though this set the duration of our trip at two months. Loyce was anxious that we spend a large proportion of our time in Norway, and spaces were reserved for us at the Finnish and joint Scandinavian summer schools. However, the Bodes, in Holland, wrote to express their desire that we visit their summer school as well, so this was also arranged. All the other details of our travels were left until our arrival in Norway, when we would have a chance to consult with Loyce and to determine the most advantageous itinerary.

June 21st to July 18th-- Norway

Roger and I met, after some confusion, in London, on June 20th. On the 21st we flew to Oslo, where Loyce had been waiting to meet us. We were greeted at the airport by a number of the Norwegian friends at 11:15 P.M.; by 2:00 A.M. we were rolling into bed, just as the birds started chirping to announce the new day.

For five days Roger and I stayed in Oslo, where we had a chance to arrange our itinerary, purchase tickets, etc. The Bahá'ís were most kind, showing us around the city and taking us on trips and excursions, a sailboat ride on the fjord on Midsummer Eve, visits to the museums and to their homes, etc. This gave us a chance to meet the friends and speak with them informally about the progress of the Faith in America, about the new youth activities in this country, and about the problems and difficulties of the Norwegian Bahá'í community. The Feast of Raḥmat fell during our stay in Oslo, which gave us an opportunity to meet with the Oslo friends as a group. Twelve were able to attend, which we understood was an unusually large number. We were asked to tell of the California Victory Campaign and of the youth projects, (on which I was privileged to participate last year, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Conyers, Georgia), and following that I was asked to sing some of the new American Bahá'í songs. (I took my guitar on the trip in order the better to present some of these songs.) All was much appreciated by the friends-- the songs, I think, particularly.

On the 27th we took the train to Bergen, where we stayed two days, as guests of Auxiliary Board Member Modesta Hvida and

the local community. We went sightseeing during the days, met with the friends in the evenings, and spent the nights in Modesta's home. Again we told of American activities and sang songs, and here we had a chance to play some of the new William Sears study class tapes for those who understood English well enough. (We had brought a little battery tape recorder and a number of tapes.)

On June 29th we took the night train to Oslo, where we had some business with the travel agent, and then proceeded north by train to Dombås to meet Loyce. Staying with her there that night, we continued our journey north the next day with her in her car. The next evening was spent in Trondheim, where we had a lovely fireside with the friends and some contacts in the home of Dr. Ra'fat and his wife. From Trondheim, it took us three days of continuous driving, a night spent camping in the car for lack of accommodations, and two ferryboat rides, to reach Svolvær, where we were to stay with Loyce for two weeks.

Our time in Svolvær, Lofoten Islands, was spent in rest and recuperation, study of the Writings, meditation and prayer, and in activities with the local Bahá'ís. The length of our stay gave us time to come to know the Bahá'ís living in this isolated, difficult community, and also gave me a chance to learn many of the Bahá'í songs which I had not had time to learn during the year, and to practice them in preparation for the summer schools. Loyce had scheduled a long stay for us in Svolvær because she felt it was not the sort of community where visitors could come and go quickly and still have a deep

effect. The pace of life is slow, the people are reticent to accept the Faith and slow to accept visitors, and so our stay had to be correspondingly relaxed. It is not possible for us, in retrospect, to evaluate the success of our visit to Lofoten; such an evaluation must needs be done by someone more intimately familiar with the people and culture of the area. We can say, however, that we felt warm and strong bonds of love and fellowship with these valiant warriors of Bahá'u'lláh in far off Lofoten, and when we left we came to realize how strong these bonds had become.

July 18th to July 22nd-- Sweden

On the night of July 17th, the boat carried us to Narvik, where we caught a morning train bound for the Swedish border and Stockholm. In the evening we changed trains in Boden, arriving in Stockholm on the morning of the 19th. We took a look at the city during the day, and went to the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds in the evening, where we were to stay the night. The young Bahá'í presently living there, Solveig Erogman, had a non-Bahá'í friend over for the evening, and we had a good fireside before retiring.

The next morning we caught a train to Järna, where we were to meet a Norwegian youth, Harald Thiis, who was working there at a home for psychotic boys run by the Anthroposophists. We stayed with him at the school that evening, after meeting some of the faculty, having a good fireside, singing some songs, and going to a little party. The next morning we walked over to the Anthroposophist Youth Seminarium, and later left again for

Stockholm. That evening we boarded the night boat for Turku/Åbo.

July 22nd to July 27th-- Finland

We were met in Turku by Mildred Clark, who took us to the hostel where we were to spend the night. After a much needed nap, we were met by another American, Fred Perry, and shown some of the city. In the evening we met with the friends in the home of Auxiliary Board Member Osmo Päivinen, and again we had songs. The next day we visited some gypsy friends of Fred Perry, which sparked a good fireside, (mostly in Finnish). In the afternoon Osmo drove us to the summer school in Tampere.

Here we spent a lovely three days (four nights) with the friends, who numbered about thirty during most of our stay, including visitors from several different countries. Some of the American songs helped to enliven the sessions, and one of them, "Passing Through", became a particular favorite. A good example of the teaching effectiveness of this song may be cited: some of us youth went in the evening, after the evening session, to a place in the country by a lake and near a little hotel, to have a party. Two Persian youth among us began to sing some spirited Persian songs, and one of the Finnish Bahá'ís was dancing a Persian dance. This activity attracted the attention of various other parties nearby, who came to watch and listen, and eventually a group of 17 German youths, with guitars, joined us. They sang some songs, and then I was called upon to play "Passing Through" for them. They were much taken with the song, (one gave me his address, and requested that I send him the words), and though they had to meet their curfew at that

time, they expressed interest and enthusiasm in the song and they heard of the Faith. Several other people nearby were also attracted and asked about the Faith. This is only a small example, but it shows that a fine spirit of fellowship can be generated with contacts through Bahá'í singing, and some good teaching opportunities can result.

July 29th to August 5th-- Holland

Early in the morning of the 27th we left Tampere on our way, by boat and train, to Holland. We had one day, between connections, in Copenhagen, for which we were very thankful, and which we spent mostly in the Tivoli Gardens. In the morning of July 29th we arrived in the outskirts of Rotterdam, after a horrible night of ferries, pass-controls, etc. With much trouble, and after about six hours, we finally connected successfully with the Bodes, were picked up, and taken to their apartment. Adib Taherzadeh from Dublin, and his daughter, also arrived that night, and we all stayed in the Bodes' living room. The next morning Dr. Rosey Pool arrived, and together we set out for the summer school in Oud Loostrecht.

This, we feel, was the most successful of the three European summer schools we were privileged to attend, (though we are only able to judge on the basis of our brief stay at each). With an average attendance of about 60, a spirit of unity was generated which was unusual even for Bahá'í summer schools. There was a relatively large number of youth, and these, along with many adults, were eager and quick in learning the Bahá'í songs, so of course we had much singing. One evening

was devoted to a presentation of slides and materials of the American youth projects; Roger counted the largest attendance of any session of the school up 'til then. The next evening, and our last, was a public meeting, at which Dr. Pool spoke about Negro poetry. After refreshments, we had an informal singing fest which was highly spirited, and evidently impressed some of the visitors quite favorably.

The only difficulty encountered during our wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten stay in Holland was over the Bahá'í music, strangely enough. After hearing the songs, our beloved Hand of the Cause Mr. Ferraby commented to me that it was his feeling that the song "Passing Through" was not in good taste, because it put words in the mouths of the Manifestations of God. He recalled the injunction of Shoghi Effendi that plays were not to include the Manifestations as characters. This song, however, being the most musical and most well-constructed Bahá'í song among those which I know, was the mainstay of my presentation of songs-- the one really good song, technically, among a large number of mediocre or less captivating songs. Unable to sing "Passing Through", I experienced great difficulty in making the songs "go over" successfully, until the friends had learned the others and could sing along. This instance points up the need for some authoritative decision on the standards to be followed by the Bahá'ís of the world in the composing and singing of songs about the Faith.

On August 5th, early in the morning, we departed by train for Denmark, leaving behind many new and dear friends, and the

loving atmosphere of the Dutch Bahá'í summer school. The day on the train might very well have been sad had it not been for a long fireside we had with a Welshman and an American in our compartment, with whom we parted the best of friends.

August 5th to August 10th-- Denmark

We stayed in Copenhagen one night, meeting Loyce the next day, and driving with her and Johanna Hóeg to the summer school, near Slagelse. Here we rejoined many of our friends from Norway and the other northern countries; this school had the largest attendance of the three, (I think some 130 were expected, all together, from 14 different countries), and perhaps for this reason the atmosphere of true unity and oneness had not been established, to the degree we found it in Holland, by the time we left, (after three days). Unfortunately, I became a little ill on the second day there, along with some others, and had to absent myself. The program was quite full without us, and we may not have been able to contribute very much anyway. Some of the Bahá'í songs were mimeographed here so the friends could learn them; however, we discovered that Danish people in general do not sing much, and so there was not too much progress in this direction during the two days I was able to sing the songs for them.

August 10th to 12th-- England

Early in the morning of the 10th I got out of sick bed, Roger packed for me, and Loyce drove us in to the Copenhagen airport. Arriving in London before lunch, we were met by

Marion Hofman, who took us in to London to eat lunch with her daughter May, then out to the airport again to try to get a ticket back to the U.S. for Roger, (the strike had fouled his reservations), and finally to her home in Oxford, where she had invited us to stay. That evening a number of the friends from around Oxford, particularly youth, came, and we were pleased that Mrs. Faizi and her daughter May came from as far away as Birmingham, and Brigitte Ferraby from Cambridge. We talked about the American youth projects and other teaching efforts. The next morning we youth had a good consultative session on the problems of youth organization and teaching in Britain, and some of the youth activities and their administration in the United States. Roger and Brigitte had to leave that afternoon, so Marion very kindly drove them in to London, returning in the evening to take Mark, May Faizi and myself to a play in Oxford. The next morning we four drove to London, I to leave for America, Mark for Haifa, and May for Birmingham. Thus ended a memorable and we think fruitful trip, not only for us, but also for those we visited. Truly these words of Bahá'u'lláh have found realization in this and other such teaching trips: "The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world."

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECTS

A.) Youth projects in general should be arranged by sponsoring NSAs and/or LSAs, rather than by individuals, when this is possible, (even though they be individuals in key places). Sometimes individuals do most or all of the organizing, and then the youth may find a lack of general enthusiasm among the Bahá'ís when they arrive. As much ground work as possible should be laid before the actual arrival of the youth, so that the receiving country or community expects, anticipates, and participates wholeheartedly in the activities of the visitors.

B.) Roger proposes the idea that one or more youth from the host country could participate fully and equally in the youth project, along with the foreign youth. This has the advantages of providing a native-speaker and translator for the project, of establishing closer ties between the youth of different countries, of demonstrating the international character of our Faith, and in many intangible ways of benefiting the youth from both countries involved, as a result of their close association with a foreigner. One difficulty in this sort of arrangement might lie in insuring the unity of action, purpose, and spirit of the international team, so essential to the success of a project. Preferably, this could be achieved if the youth from all participating nations attended the same training session-- as, for instance, if youth were to come to the United States for a project. In other countries, it might be possible to overcome this problem in other ways. (If the youth are suffi-

ciently dedicated to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, this problem fades or vanishes. It should nevertheless be given consideration.)

C.) Mrs. Dahl has contributed the interesting idea that youth in a given country might be able to financially sponsor a project to or from their country. Two or three youth taking summer jobs-- available in national parks, etc., as well as in their home communities-- could pay for the expenses of one youth on an international project. A feeling of direct participation would be created, and the youth would be fulfilling the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh to "appoint him who will" "arise and promote" the Faith of God, if they themselves are unable to do so.

The details of this suggestion, and all of the possible problems and difficulties, would have to be considered carefully, if the proposal is thought to be at all possible.

D.) In many countries where there are American pioneers, it might often be convenient or easy for the youth projects originating in the United States to be handled by or through these Americans, since they are most in touch with American activities and approaches to teaching, and since they are often capable organizers. However, it is our feeling that the greatest results will accrue, and the closest international harmony be established, if natives of the host country, or at least the administrative institutions of that country, take the leading role in the guidance and realization of the youth project, (under the supervision of whatever international authority

or committee is directing worldwide youth travel at that time.)

American youth on projects in other countries should nevertheless be prepared to spend some of their time abroad with Americans, though their own desire be to see more of the country to which they have gone, and less of the Americans in that country; for these meetings are beneficial for, and much treasured by, those stalward American pioneers who have ventured forth throughout the world to establish the Cause of God in remote and distant places. Such contact with these heroic souls cannot fail to reflect on the visiting youth as well, who in many cases will never before have witnessed such dedication, such patience in the face of difficulties, or such enduring fortitude.

SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING THE FUTURE ADMINISTRATION
OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECTS

It would seem to me that it will be necessary during the coming years to have an American-based, or a fully international, youth projects coordinating committee to handle the planning and coordinating of future international youth projects, if such projects become a possibility. This committee, it would seem evident, would need to fulfill at least the following three requirements:

1) It must have a working knowledge of the conditions in and the capacities of the nations involved in international youth projects, in order to be able to knowledgeably advise these countries concerning their plans for projects, and to effectively visualize problems which might be avoided.

American-type youth projects, in many cases, will have to be considerably modified in order to suit the needs and resources of other countries, so the committee involved will have to have a full understanding of conditions in these countries. Personal knowledge of the people involved in the projects would undoubtedly be of great value as well.

2) It must have previous experience in the administration of youth projects, must understand the types of problems that can arise with the youth and with sponsoring communities, and must be effective in working with project participants in order to avoid repeating such problems. We have gained good experience in this country from three years of youth projects, and such

experience should be available to and should benefit other countries, which are only now or will soon be commencing similar activities.

3) It must have the time and the man-power to coordinate the projects, involving, undoubtedly, a large volume of correspondence in the laying of the foundations of a project, diligent personal selection of prospective youth participants, careful matching of individuals composing youth teams, thoughtful expenditure of limited funds, and continuous guidance and support during projects and in case of emergency.

Such a committee as that described above would certainly be extraordinary, but at the same time its contribution to the Bahá'í world community, I feel sure, would be immeasurable, and great forces would be released if well coordinated youth travel on more than a very small scale could ever be realized.