

A Chat with
Esther Evans,
Knight of
Bahá'u'lláh
For the
Windward
Islands



The
Spiritual
Mother of
St. Lucia !

Question [1]:—Did you come by boat or plane?

Answer:—Lillian Middlemast and myself came by plane. We had to stop in Martinique for 3 days. We arrived here on the 13 of October, which was the deadline. We first stayed at the Villa Beach Hotel. We were there about a week or so when the woman who was pinch hitting for the woman who was running the hotel came and sat at our table. She started asking me questions about how I liked it here and where had I come from and so forth. We got talking, and we told her, but you know how it is, anything that you don't want to hear, your brain just doesn't take it in.

Question:—Then what happened?

Answer:—We met Howard Devaux's mother-in-law and she told us that after a day or two, she had been telling some of her friends about us and they were interested in knowing us and invited us to tea at their house. We accepted gladly. We went to her house and enjoyed it very much. That was Frances and Joe Knight. Then she invited us to Sunday dinner.

At Sunday dinner there were quite a few other people of her friends there. We got to know them and they asked us questions about who we were and but no one seemed to understand about the Bahá'í Faith. You know we were Bahá'í pioneers.

Question:— To your knowledge, in those early days, had anyone you spoken to ever heard of the Bahá'í Faith?

Answer:—No. Not to my knowledge. When people would ask the question, what is the Bahá'í Faith and so forth, they were always very agreeable. They'd listen, and then I would get such answers such as, "it all sounds very wonderful but of course, you know, I wouldn't want to belong to any religion that wasn't well established." Or, "well, of course we are so and so" and the thing was that everybody was satisfied with what they had." That was the reaction we got.

Question:—At that time, Esther, you were just meeting people in the middle and upper classes?

Answer:—Well, you gravitate towards the people you know. You feel at home with them and so forth. Never having lived among colored people in my whole life I didn't know how to approach them and that sort of thing. I was trying to tell the people that I felt I had something in common with, what the Bahá'í Faith was about. All in all, the reaction was okay, at least they were willing to be friends. Once in a great while someone who was having a little difficulty, would come to me and say, "I must belong to your Faith or get interested in your Faith because..." but what they wanted was solace, and it never materialized for them joining the Faith. But this is what we Bahá'ís do. What I was just doing was trying to live the Bahá'í life. Be careful of my actions. Be friendly with everybody. Do what ever I could if I could help here and there.

I was asked to help with young women who were going to Canada to work as servants. They were really teachers and secretaries and so forth. But they had this chance, to get to Canada if they worked as a servant for a year and then they would go to do what they wanted to do, you know, the real thing they were going to Canada for. Then they asked me, if I would help with teaching this class. I think it was Moses Henry's cousin. She was a St. Lucian and she was teaching these young women how to cook so they could go and take these jobs. I did that sort of thing. Helped here and there, you know, with whatever little project came up. Still, any time I had the chance to tell anybody about the Bahá'í Faith, I did, but no one seemed to really be interested. In other words, nothing in their life was hurting. Everything was going the way they wanted and they didn't feel the need to make any changes.

QUESTION:—When you first came here, you were not concerned about establishing a Bahá'í community?

ANSWER:—The thought didn't come to mind about establishing anything like that because we were just coming to tell the people about the Bahá'í Faith, that a new Prophet of God had come once again to earth. You should know him! The Teachings are marvelous! No pie in the sky. No guessing! The thing is plain talk. You understand what you never understood before, and you can't help but believe.

QUESTION:—Who was the first St. Lucian to become a Bahá'í? Do you recall when that was?

ANSWER:—I think it was a long time before anyone became a Bahá'í, but I was telling everyone about it. I lived in La Toc then, and all these friends were entertaining me, but you know, they didn't want to become infected, but they were tolerant. I couldn't push.

The only thing I kept thinking was, "I'll try to be the best kind of Bahá'í I can be, and that's all I can seem to do".

QUESTION:—Did you sometimes feel very lonely as a Bahá'í, very cut off?

ANSWER:—No, I didn't feel lonely because everyone was so friendly to me. They welcomed me with open arms, and the place!! I thought I was coming to a jumping off place and I was worried that I might never see my people again as I had very little money to travel back and forth. But that concern was all wiped out because everything was so marvelous here. I kept running to the window when we finally got a place to live. I couldn't get enough of the view, and the weather was gorgeous.

The day we arrived there was a rainbow in the sky. I took this as a good omen. I didn't have a car, but I was roaming all around the island. People would talk to me and I would say I was here as a Bahá'í Pioneer and tell them about the Bahá'í Faith. But that was about as much as we could do, just sow the seeds in other words, and create good will towards the Faith.

QUESTION:—Earlier in life did you ever have any fantasies about moving to a distant country, or being of service, perhaps as a missionary in your Christian days?

ANSWER:—No, but I did have the feeling that when my family was grown up and I was free, I was going to get into some worthy cause where I could dedicate myself to that.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the United States, in New York, I was wakened from my sleep and there was Jesus, in the air, you know. Well, I was Catholic then and I thought it was because I wanted to be a nun someday, you see. I didn't know anything about Bahá'u'lláh at that time. But it was while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in New York. I didn't know anything about it at the time. But that was it. It was while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in New York. I didn't know anything about it at the time, but it used to pop into my head from time to time and I would wonder what was the meaning of it.

And when Grandma, my husband Paul's mother, used to have that dream where she saw herself on top of a large hill...she was Methodist and a very good woman, very religious...she used to dream she was sitting on top of a hill and could look out all over the country, a great big spreading tree with branches, and she was sitting there feeling very, very good and very happy. She used to wonder what that meant. It would come to her every now and then. When she became a Bahá'í she said, "Now I know what that meant."

QUESTION:--This was you husband's mother?

ANSWER:—Yes. Now he became a Bahá'í for a short time. He was never really sincere. What he loved were the girls. That was his undoing. He was smart. He was a photographer and had a sixth sense. Eastman Kodak made him one of their representatives and gave him the Chicago territory. So he knew his work.

QUESTION:—Back to your decision to come to St. Lucia.

ANSWER:—When we were asked to go places that needed Bahá'í teachers, we were asked to go places where there were no Bahá'ís. We weren't told, those of us that volunteered to go, that they were going to be called "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh." That was a big surprise. The first thing I thought when I heard was, "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh! Lord, that's something and I'm not one who should get a title like that." Then they wanted us to write to Shoghi Effendi. But I thought the man is so busy as it is, why bother him with that sort of petty thing.

QUESTION:—Why did you choose St. Lucia?

ANSWER:—Well, it was because it was a Catholic country and I had been a Catholic and I knew I'd be able to cope with what was going to come.

QUESTION:—You came here in 1953. When did you move to Cap Estate?

ANSWER:—In 1962 or 1963 I think, about the first of the year.

QUESTION:—So, the first several years you were on your own here?

ANSWER:—Yes, and at one time I was so discouraged. I didn't think I was making any progress. I wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly and I said, "I think this place is a spiritual desert. I'd better go somewhere else." They wrote back right away, "Stick to your post!" So I did. It wasn't hurting me to stick to my post because I loved it here. It was lovely.

QUESTION:—So it was about 10 years before you with someone else went to different places to tell people about the Faith?

ANSWER:—Yes, then we started going places to teach the Faith. I went back to the bush with them, back through the rivers, to many areas.

...QUESTION:—Who were the first pioneers who came to St. Lucia after you?

ANSWER:—As far as I can remember it was the Henrietta and Phil Trutza. It was after I moved here to Cap Estate. Phil was working down where the boats come in. He was building down there, and he had workers. He was talking about the Bahá'í Faith. Then we started to have meetings, getting the people who worked with him, to come up here. We used to have picnics and everyone would bring a little something. We would have games. I had shuffleboard and croquet, and we'd go to the beach and come back and have lunch. We'd have a jolly time and talk about the Bahá'í Faith.

QUESTION:—What was your biggest test here, do you think, in your first years here? Or maybe you didn't have any.

ANSWER:—I don't think I did. It was glorious.

QUESTION:—You worked here for a while. Can you tell us about it?

ANSWER:—That's probably part of what occupied my time. After I was at La Toc for a while, I told Bill and Lillian Eaton, who lived next door, about the Faith. They'd listen to me talk about the Faith and the reaction was always nice. I said to her one time, "I don't seem to be very successful in what I'm trying to do here. I think that what I'd better do is stay the winter down here, then go back to the States and work. I was doing cost work them working for Birdseye in Rochester, doing bookkeeping.

Bill then said to me, "Well Esther, rather than do that why don't you come and work for us at Peter and Company? We won't be able to give you the salary that you could earn in the United States, but we can give you fringe benefits that maybe would make it up, like every three years you'll get a paid trip home and you could either fly or go by boat. You could get discounts on what you buy from the company. And maybe in that way it makes up for a better salary."

QUESTION:—Have any of those contacts that you made during those years, or their children or grand children ever become Bahá'ís?

ANSWER:—Well, they've come and gone. We've had a lot of that you know. In the beginning people would become Bahá'ís, oh yes. They'd be with Phil and Henrietta Trutza. Any number of people from down in the valleys, in the sugar valleys, in the sugar factories down in the country, we used to be all over there, and out in the country other places. And still those people who became Bahá'ís, so called at that time, and after a while, they faded away. They may have been pressured, I don't know. But you find that going on right now, too. I think it's fear. It's a Catholic island. Most of the people are of Catholic background. And that fear is deep in them.

When I read in the Bahá'í Writings about the fear of God, I wonder, are we supposed to be afraid of God? What is the meaning of that? But I think that is superstition. The man who runs the Archaeological Society, he used to walk with me. He told me that superstition is rampant still here. Like for instance, a whole group of people will go out on a Saturday night in the sticks somewhere, them and they will put on their outfits and they will dance like mad until they are exhausted and they fall over in a faint from exertion and they'll lie there until first light. Then they will fix themselves up a bit and come down in time for mass. It's going on just like in the days of old, still.

QUESTION:—It sounds like your social contacts gave you a chance to really become well settled here and well known. And you had a job for two years. You mentioned that Archaeological Society. Were there other groups which you affiliated yourself with in the early days?

ANSWER:—No, because I kept pretty busy with my home. I had a girl to help me when I was working, but I had a lot of things I had to do on my own. I didn't have that kind of people, not like you have today with this group and that group. There wasn't that kind of social work going on that I knew anyway. Of course, we had a lot of English people here, it was a colony then, and they had their own society, and they weren't too friendly to the Americans. Sometimes when there was a group of us together, and some little incident had happened in the Mediterranean, Someone would say like, "Oh, those rich Americans caused

that, you know!" Then they'd realize that I was there and they'd say, "Oh, I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

QUESTION:—It appears that you've made some very good friends among the St. Lucians. The person who comes to mind is the gentleman who did so much work for you around here, Smith. I was going to first ask you who might have been the first St. Lucian to help you?

ANSWER:—It was Smith. He first came to me when I lived at La Toc and we had to remodel the house and all.

QUESTION:—You hadn't known him before?

ANSWER:—No, he'd been working for me a couple of weeks or so. He'd brought something up to me, some kind of toy or something, that I had brought back and he had put it together. And so he said to me, "Since you don't have any man..." Smith had the English language, but he couldn't read or write at that time, "Since you don't have a any man, I will do your maintenance work," that's what he said, "...as long as you are here." And he did! Well, I had many opportunities. One time, oh, I told him about the Faith. He'd say, "You know a fellow says..." and then he'd bring some problem up. Well I'd give him the Bahá'í reaction to that. So one day when I was up here he said to me, "You know, you've told me so much about the Bahá'í Faith, by this time I ought a be a Baha'í." And I said to him, "Smith, you're right. If you had any intention of ever wanting to be a Bahá'í, you'd be one by now." Well, he never brought it up again, but he would still try to get the problems, when people would bring him problems, he'd want to get my reaction.

That was the first one. Then there was Mr. Charles Alfred, the painter. Smith brought him when I needed a painter. He was a friend of Smith's. And they were my very good friends. Now the man who did all the iron work, Mr. Paul, is another one. I've known him ever since I've been here. These were friends. And then other friends of the black race too, gradually, since we're having meetings here and get-togethers. Phil Trutza would bring all the people he knew from Castries. We did a lot of Bahá'í work, going out into the country, after a while. It took a long time.

QUESTION:—This integration which the Bahá'ís were trying to practice, was this frowned upon in the beginning by a large part of the population or not? Was it ever a major problem?

ANSWER:—No. Well, I told you that I tried to get Bahá'í books put in the library. I contacted Newman who was the librarian then. She was the wife of the man who's got his picture up on the wall. She said, well, she couldn't give her permission, that there would have to be a Board meeting, and they would have to make that decision. So I said, "When will that be?" Well, she said she couldn't tell me, that there was no set time. They just met now and then. Well, each time I met her I would keep asking if there had been a meeting yet. About 4 months passed and so I said, "Well, my goodness, they don't have meetings very often, do they?"

The next time I met her she said, "Well we've had a meeting and the answer is NO. You know this thing isn't even Christian. And besides that, this island is 98% Christian, and this thing isn't even Christian." So I said, "Let me tell you something. If you would read the Bahá'í Faith, just go through the book you'd find, to your delight, that this Bahá'í Faith is more Christian than Christianity. And furthermore, what about the other 2%? Are they to be denied?" She didn't answer.

I used to have Bahá'í meetings at my house. Whenever the Bahá'ís would ask questions, I'd get them together. Especially when anyone from the outside would come, we'd have a meeting together and invite people I knew or had talked to. And so it was when Leroy Ioas's two sisters came and stayed with me for some days, as they had just come back from the Holy Land. They had some beautiful colored movies of the Holy Land. So I told them to come and see these two women as they have these beautiful colored movies and we'd like you to come and see them and know what it is about.

So they did. This man I used to talk to in M & C, he and several others came. When he came with one of the "powers-that-be" from the Catholic Church, I think he was a minister too. This man was like a guardian. He was standing over him. He came to see the pictures too. And all the time this man, he used to work where they sold men's suits and things, smelt like a saloon, he was wreaking of alcohol, he wouldn't let this man who used to ask me questions. Poor fellow was so frightened that he kept quoting the Bible all the time the pictures were being shown. But everybody enjoyed them. After it was all over we discovered that there were a lot of people looking through the windows watching the pictures. They were people we hadn't invited and they were standing on the road watching the pictures. But when everyone left, those two sisters said to me, "You know, I'd be frightened to death to have to invite them! That man acted vicious, the minister, you know, to have to put up with anything like that."

QUESTION:—Esther, I appreciate all the time that you've spent talking with me over the last few days and the things you've shared on tape are just really some highlights of things you have told me. Is there anything else that you'd like to say now before we reach the end of the tape??

ANSWER:—Not really.

QUESTION:—Anything at all about the Faith here in St. Lucia and about your life here.

ANSWER:—Well, it's a beautiful life. As I said, I thought I was just coming to a "jumping off place" and I was hoping and praying that I'd be able to stick it out. But I discovered I came to paradise. And everything has been, I haven't had financial problems, everything has unfolded beautifully and gone along in the most wonderful way.

My only regret is that I have only been able to plant the Bahá'í seeds. When I was working at the hotel, I had been able to tell people who were passing through, and would come and chat with me at the shop, and we'd discuss about different things and about the Bahá'í Faith; and they would tell me, when they go home, they're going to investigate it.

They had never heard of it before. But, that was really about as far as I've gotten with interesting people to become Bahá'ís.

QUESTION:—Thank you Esther, thank you very much.

ANSWER:—You're welcome

PHOTOS TO FOLLOW >>>>



L to R: Pat Paccassi, Counsellor Ruth Pringle, ____, Barbara Hudson, Hand of the Cause of God D. Khadem, Esther Evans at National Convention, 1983



L to R: Barbara Hudson, Counsellor Ruth Pringle, ____, Hand of the Cause of God, D. Khadem, Esther Evans, Barwiz Bahbahani, Negar Bahbahani, 1983



L to R: Esther Evans, Moses Henry, Wayne Carey, Janet Lang, Andrea Clarke, Angela Clarke, Judith Paccassi, Frank Paccassi, Marjorie Clarke, circa 1983



Esther Evans, seventh from the right. Circa 1984
 Standing L-R: Shirley Yarbrough, Val Jn. Pierre w/child Ramat, Moses Henry, Martin DeVaux, __. __, __, Patricia Paccassi, __, __, Marjorie Clarke, __, __, __, __, __,
 __,
 __, __, Esther Evans, __, __, __, __.
 On porch: 3 unknown boys.
 Seated L-R: 6 children, man, Angela Clarke, Andrea Clarke, __.



L to R: Hand of the Cause of God, Collis Featherstone, Esther Evans, Wayne Carey,
 At the site of the first property for the National Centre on the Morne. 1983



National Convention 1985:

1st row: L to R: Nancy Cole, Andrea Clarke. __, __, Janet Lang, __, __

2nd row: L to R: Hushniyyih (Mama) Baha'I, Moses Henry, Esther Evans, Barbara Hudson,

Negar Babahani, Luther Ghajadar,

3rd row: __, Marjorie Clarke, Larry Clarke, Florius Lubin, Cadosia DuBoulay, __,

___, ___,

Back row: Wayne Carey, Angela Clarke, __, Barwiz Babahani, Conrad Dos Santos

[1] Note, this "chat" is a composite made by Pat Paccassi of three interviews with Mrs. Evans by Barbara Hudson, 7 November 1986, Sheila Banani, 23 July 1976 and Pat Paccassi., 1986

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