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**Bahá'í Journal UK**Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United
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Becoming a Bahá'í

A personal insight

I THINK LIFE for me had been a bit like being a seafarer but being totally at sea about which way the ship is heading! If you look at it in a positive way, sailing around a fair deal gives you a good idea about where you don't want to be, but it doesn't actually point you in any direction either.

It tends to be at this point that a lot of sailors just give up, head back in to port, moor on to something they feel safe with and never venture forth again. This is a great shame as they miss out on the most beautiful sunrise they will ever see.

You see, when people just go back, they never feel the wonder of revelation. I can understand why they do it, to cling to what you know is somehow more comforting and secure than jumping off a cliff into the unknown – but some of us take that jump. To me this was what it was like becoming a Bahá'í. Once I had jumped however, there was a difference to the feeling you would normally expect – I felt a range of feelings from being cherished and loved to pure exhilaration and joy.

I was brought up a Methodist and sang in the choir with my mother and grandmother. I went to Sunday school every week and always asked questions, usually with the same result – either a pat on the head or being taken to my poor mother because I was being a nuisance. As I got older and the questions still weren't being answered I moved on to other things. I tried several religions or variations on the same one but still felt lost. I suppose this is the point where I could have taken the easy way out and gone back to port. The problem was that I had sailed in so many directions I had no idea where port was!

This particular part of my life was difficult in the extreme, and having the added complication of a questing soul did not help. So I did the only thing I could do at the time and gave up. This didn't mean that I gave up on myself, God, the universe and everything – in fact I threw myself into learning about me and who I was. Sounds easy, yes? No, it was one of the hardest things I ever tried. I learnt to meditate, I learnt healing and not just in five minutes but in two years. I would spend long times on my own just observing nature and how beautiful it is. It was on one of these times that I realised that I was waiting – I looked around me and had the distinct impression that there were a lot more people doing the same thing. It was a very odd feeling. Life went on. I took massage and aromatherapy courses (and passed) and then went Salsa dancing. At the second class my dancing partner informed me he was a Bahá'í.

“Bahá'í? Excuse me, but what are you talking about?” Ignoring my totally blank look he carried on. “One God” ... (Of course there was... I was still trying to get my head around the word Bahá'í). He went on again: “One religion” ... (Now I was waiting for the “...and ours is the one” line. It never came). I became interested, wanted to know more, started to ask questions and haven't stopped.

I went to Ruhi classes along with a group of people I had never met before. It was a big step for me. My confidence at the time wasn't that good, although it was improving, and my life had been settling into a gentle rut when the word Bahá'í hit me between the eyeballs. I still had all my old questions that needed answers but as time went on I found that these were

being answered for me. I also read several books about the faith and did a lot of praying, which is something I had not done for a long time.

It was in May 2002 that I decided to become a Bahá'í and continue with my life which had been on hold for a long time. I can remember the day clearly, it was a sunny summer afternoon and I had been out for a walk, a long one. I can remember the same sense of anticipation as I had felt before but there was difference: a calmness as I realised there could only be one way forward, so I took it. I waited... I had just made the most important decision of my life ... I waited some more. Slowly I smiled to myself ... it felt good.

Back to school, that's how it felt. There was so much to learn, so much to read, so many new people to meet, so many places to go. It was like walking into water. Some people put their big toe in the shallow end and stay there for a while to get used to it, others waded in happily splashing about and get soaked. It has to be said I was the latter, rushing around enjoying myself almost to the point of exhaustion and loving every moment of it. Then you start to slow down and really start to learn. I think this is the point where I am now, I ask questions, I think about who I am and where I am in my life.

I have had the most enormous help and support from people but some things I have had to do on my own. Telling your family that you are a Bahá'í is different for everyone. For me ... well how does the phrase "I've just landed from Mars" sound? The look I received from both my mother and son when I first told them made me believe that I may as well have used that phrase for the reaction it got! After the first shock it got a little better. They thought it was wonderful that I was so happy and had found something that was so precious to me. The next question was the problem: "Tell me everything about it." I told them what I could but in the end I gave them a book to read.

You are never too old to learn, that's what I say, but sometimes your brain hurts. Understanding that part of what you knew was right actually was right, is wonderful, if sometimes confusing. Imagine that all of your spiritual life you were told that there was only one God but that He belonged only to your religion and no other. Every atom of your body told you that this was wrong but these were people who were supposed to know and often you were the odd one out to even think that God belonged to all. You often felt ill at ease at church and eventually stopped going. It happens to a lot of people, I am sure, and there are an awful lot searching. To become a Bahá'í, to me, is also to have to look back at your past with new eyes. When you do, you realise just how many people there are who are lost and how much work needs to be done.

I am still a very young Bahá'í and make many mistakes. I talk to friends and family about what it means to me to be Bahá'í and how it has changed my life and I have accosted the odd stranger and tried to explain to them who, and what, I am. But, the main thing I am trying to do is help deepen new Bahá'ís, as they need help. I was lucky in having good people around me and that has made me want to pass on what little I know.

Being a Bahá'í is not easy, nobody said it was – but it is the most important thing that has ever happened to me and I have met some wonderful people. Some have been great and an inspiration; others have been closer to home but without whose help and guidance I would trip and fall. To you all my heartfelt thanks.

Gill White

