

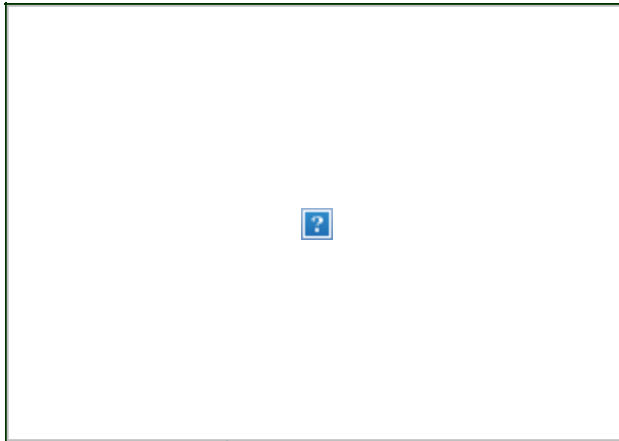
# Bahá'í Journal UK

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Fifty Years in Malta 

## Fifty Years in Malta



Ta' Braxia Cemetery - Olga's grave can be seen below the tree in the centre of the picture.

WHENEVER I move to a new place (rather too often I fear), I always find myself looking for the spot I might be buried if I should die in the locality - perhaps this is an unhealthy obsession, but there it is. In any case, right now I am living in Malta where neither the land nor, specifically, the cemeteries are quite what I had in mind for my last resting place - I don't find the prospect of a Maltese grave very attractive at all. Indeed, given my love for the green of northern climes, I don't think it much of a prospect for anyone, and it was with this feeling in mind that I was musing a few days ago

on the fifty-year anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in Malta, and on one who has been either on or in the island for all of them.

While it's no secret, not everyone knows that the territory of Malta had three Knights of Bahá'u'lláh - Olga Mills was the third to come, the one who stayed, and the one who died here. The last she did when my wife June and I were first pioneers to the island in 1974, when we were rather young and I hadn't taken up the obsession I have mentioned. I was away in Scotland when Olga died, so I wasn't present at her funeral. I know, of course, where her grave is situated, have visited it a few times, and pass it quite often on the bus. The graveyard, like the rest of the island, is crowded and not very tidy, dominated by the local limestone, and dry and dusty in the late summer heat. That it is not a place where I would like to lie forever was the essence of my musings the last time I passed by.

June confidently asserts that my concern with prospective burial sites is not obsessive, so maybe it's just a bit silly. Whatever of that, and notwithstanding the obvious sacrifice that Olga made in living on the island of Malta for nearly all of twenty-one years, my mind was telling that the greater sacrifice was to offer her bones to the thin dry soil, and to the land still quite barren after so long. We speak often and easily of planting seeds, but those which Olga left have been mighty hard in the cultivation - surely fruits have come, but rather too many of them have fallen prematurely and withered on the hard and sparsely watered ground.

For much of the time she had the friendship of the late Jean Campbell and, having enjoyed that bounty myself (albeit briefly), I know something of its value. New believers joined these two and the first assembly was formed in 1973 - one of its members is found here

yet. For my part, and even though the Malta we experienced in '74 was closer to hers, I am still at a loss to imagine what it would have been like to live alone in this country through the years that Olga did, to fade away in hospital with more strangers than friends to visit, and all the while having the prospect of that Maltese grave before her.

Now twenty-nine and a half years after Olga's death we latter-day pioneers enjoy a more

...or less efficient postal service, relatively inexpensive telephone calls, cable and satellite television, BBC Radio 4 via the internet, and supermarkets selling goods with which we are familiar. We might have the company of a spouse or other family members, and it is even comparatively cheap to fly "home" now and then to meet those not here, to experience rain that doesn't fall in lumps on the odd occasion that it falls at all, or later in the year to eat the russet apples that don't make their way to these further flung corners. I have these, and yet I can still contrive sometimes to feel lonely and depressed, commonly on receiving a small setback to test my confidence or on waking from a dream that has June die and me living out my days here to be near her earthly remains. Whether Olga was more or less likely to slip into despair without them, in a country which used to claim to be more Catholic than the Pope and whose people still show stark resistance to the new Messenger and His message, I don't know, but I imagine that she must sometimes have contemplated her lonely grave.

So it is, with these notions and my little silliness or obsession, that last Thursday on the bus I came to the conclusion that Olga's real sacrifice was not in life but in death, in consenting to lie without family and close friends nearby, to be visited only infrequently by those who mostly did not know her, and this one who has not yet found courage like hers to stay. At this anniversary time, it turns out to be my fate that concerns me.

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