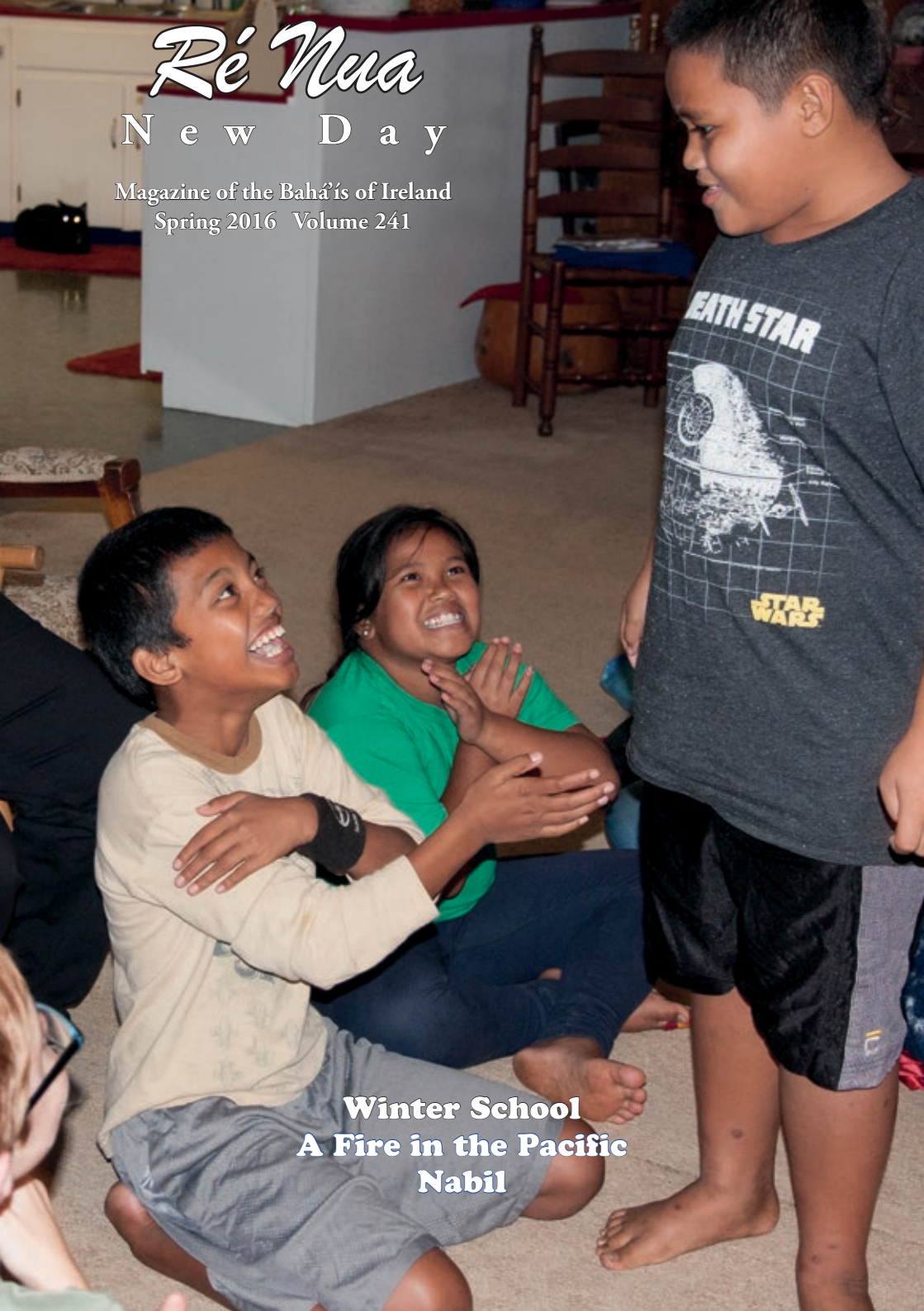


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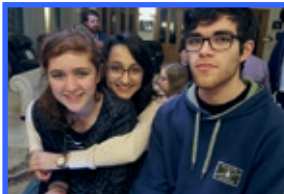
**Winter School
A Fire in the Pacific
Nabil**

IN THIS ISSUE

WINTER SCHOOL	4
Winter School.....	4
The Dawnbreakers at Winter School.....	5
CORE ACTIVITIES	6
Children's Classes.....	6
The Story of Churchill.....	6
Junior Youth	7
Thinking About Numbers makes you THINK!	7
A most interesting evening.....	9
Learning about growth in Europe	10
Book 4 in Galway	11
NATIONAL ACTIVITIES	13
Townshend Cluster Activities.....	13
Cork	14
Kilkenny	15
THE YARAN	16
Jamaloddin Khanjani	16
A TEACHING STORY.....	18
IN THE HOLY LAND	22
The Encounter	22
INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í NEWS.....	24
After catastrophe, youth lead reconstruction in Vanuatu	24
A Fire in the Pacific.....	27
BAHÁ'Í HISTORY	32
Life of Nabil	32
OBITUARY.....	35
Fire on the Hill: Remembering Peter Kay.....	35
RUHI BOOKS.....	37
Provision of English Language Ruhi Books	37
CONTACTS AND INFORMATION.....	39



The Story of Churchill
Page 6



Book 4 in Galway
Page 11



Fire in the Pacific
Page 27

IN THE HOLY LAND

The Encounter

By Duanne L. Herrmann

The man entered the room from outside. He was surprised to see how simply it was decorated, almost barren, really, but not quite. The floor was richly carpeted with ornate designs: flowers, leaves and tendrils. He could see through the interior doors to the other rooms that were similarly carpeted.

The walls were unadorned light, pale yellow, almost white. Exterior doors and windows were covered with obviously thick, dark curtains with elegant edging that did not distract. He was sure they would muffle any outside sounds, as would the two-foot-thick stone walls. The original structure was somewhat fortress-like, but with too many doors and windows for that.

The most interior wall, the one he was facing as he entered, was adorned with three items. Centered on each side were large, framed texts. He could not read them from his distance, but he could recognize that one was in a script he could not read. In the center of the wall, just below the ceiling, was another framed inscription in the same script which he could not read.

In each of the two corners he was facing were plant stands with lamps with large globes which were lit from within so they cast a soft, warm light. Their light was inconsequential compared to the chandelier hanging in the center of the room. None of these lights compared with the lights in the center room directly in

front of him and the center of the square building. That room was open to the others with a large archway which opened the center half of the wall.

This center room was separated from the rooms surrounding it by a light, filigree lace, transparent curtain and its raised floor. The most noticeable difference from it and the outer rooms were the contents. Whereas the outer, surrounding rooms were empty, the center room was filled with lights. It was light upon light: multiple candelabras, chandeliers and candles. No one walked in that room. And, many of the lights had cut glass to reflect the light: light upon light. This was an obvious effort to bestow in death light upon One who was denied even a single candle in His prison cell on dark, freezing winter nights.

The man stood, just to the side of the door, and watched others come in, singly, after him, slowly, reverently. Nearly all would pause midway into the room, as if to catch their breath and possibly to say a brief, silent prayer. Then they would approach the center room but with a slower, even more reverent, pace.

Upon reaching the threshold to the central room they would, invariably, kneel on the soft carpet, then bow their heads to the threshold in respect and tribute to the One buried there. Some would touch the threshold, some would not.

The threshold, in front of the filigree curtain, was marked off with a thin cloth of dark green, the green in respect for the descendancy of the One buried within from the Prophet Muhammad. Down the center of this cloth were carefully scattered

rose petals and on each side stood a vase of fresh roses. The man now identified the scent of roses which greeted him upon entering the room. It was powerful, but not unpleasant.

The people who knelt would generally not remain there for long. They would get up reverently, back themselves away, then side over often to an empty space along a side wall of the room or in the back, though some would find a spot in the larger space of the room, and sit on the carpet in whatever manner felt comfortable to them. Some would close their eyes in prayer, others would read silently from a prayer book. There were several available from a small chest upon entering the portico surrounding the building. Upon entering that surrounding space everyone took off their shoes in respect.

The man decided to go forward to the threshold also. It seemed the most reasonable thing to do, and kneeling also.

At first he placed his forehead on the cloth on the threshold as he had seen others do, but this did not feel "right." He then lowered his head to the side of the threshold. This felt much more appropriate, though he did not understand why. Before he could begin to wonder about this, he began to feel as if he was a small child pushing his head against the knees of a person sitting before him. He wanted to join with that person and become part of the One greater than himself. He pushed his head more firmly against the knees. He inexplicably wanted to be as close to this person as possible.

Suddenly, in the midst of this powerful desire, he "felt" arms reach out above him to extend over his head, but not touching him. Before he could more than begin to wonder about this, he felt loved.

He felt love of such power that

surprised him, love that was deep and intense, love that he had never before experienced in his life. No one had ever loved him like this. No one. The power of this love could not even be compared to the love he had received from his parents, grandparents, wife or children. He could not think, He could not reason – he felt suspended in space and time. Then he sobbed. His body shook and tears flowed. He could not stop, he could only cry.

Gradually the sensation ceased, as did his sobbing. He pulled himself up, looked furtively around to see the reactions of the others in the room. This was not his typical response to anything! There was no indication from any of the others in the room that anything unusual had occurred. He backed away, as he had seen the others do, and found a spot where he could lean against a side wall. He was drained of emotion and astonished that such an experience could actually happen, and happen to him!!

What had just happened?

He did not know.

