

“Remembering the Master” Stories about Abdu’l-Baha

by Rhonda Palmer

2012

Originally conceived and written by Rhonda Palmer, with additions by Anne Perry and (in this version) edits by Amanda Sevak and Valarie Atwood.

A flexible script, it can be performed by one or two actors representing the fictional character(s). The stories are based on actual people and events and can be edited or expanded; PowerPoint slides can enhance the piece. See other versions of this script at bahai-library.com/palmer_perry_remembering_master, including one with slides.

MC: In 2012 Bahá’ís will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to America. The Son of Prophet-Founder Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was given many names and titles—the Perfect Exemplar, the Center of the Covenant, the Mystery of God. The Bahá’ís themselves often lovingly refer to Him as “The Master.” The impact of Abdu’l-Baha on people—rich and poor, old and young, famous and ordinary, Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í, was extraordinary. Let’s imagine it is the year 1932. Things were quite different back then. It’s wonderful to see how far we have come in some ways, and yet, how far we still have yet to go. Here to tell us some stories of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s time in America and how he changed the lives of various individuals are two fictitious characters, **Miss Emmeline White and her niece, Mrs. Olivia Hamilton**, who are looking back twenty years to the year 1912 and the visit of the Master to America.

Emmeline: Oh, we have so much to tell you about the visit of the Beloved Master to America, I am not sure where to begin.

Olivia: Why don’t you show them your photo album, Auntie?

Emmeline: What a good idea. (*Pointing to photo*) That's me. My name is Miss Emmeline White. I was 28 in 1912, and I taught English to ninth grade girls in Brooklyn. Olivia was just a little girl.

Olivia: But I still remember it.

Emmeline: Yes, of course you do, and that is a blessing. There were so many of us who were touched by the Master's presence when he came to the United States. I went to one of the meetings in New York with a friend, who said, "My dear, you must see this wonderful Man!" We went to the Church of the Ascension at Fifth and Tenth in New York City and heard him speak. (*Pointing in the album*) Look, here it is. Then we followed Him to hear him speak again. Can you imagine such a small old man with such strength and power that he could speak so often and in so many places? Well, I just simply fell in love with Him. We all did, really. We talked about Him incessantly. We loved to hear stories about Him and to tell others the stories we had heard. (*Pointing to photo*) Here's a photo of dear Juliet Thompson. She is here, too, and she'll tell you some stories from her own diary, I'm sure.

Olivia: I was only nine when the Master came to America, but I remember vividly how everyone reacted to the news He was coming, and how excited I felt. He was so kind to each of us, even those of us who were children, and though there was often a crowd around Him, He would still make each of us feel important. (*Takes out letter*) My aunt's good friend Bertha Clark wrote to us about her meeting with the Master. I kept her letter. She said "At the Kinney home there were between three and four hundred souls waiting to receive His blessing. He came to each one of us and took our hands in His with a loving greeting and a few words I did not understand. However I felt an electric shock that went from my head to my feet. This was a day I am sure that no one that was present will ever forget. Whenever the Master spoke, in homes or churches, hall or societies, I went almost at the cost of my position which I had held for many years. (*Ward, 239 Days: Abdu'l-Baha's Journey in America, p. 206*) But I didn't care if I lost my job, as long as I could see His face again."

Emmeline: How can I begin to explain the kind of light that He brought into our darkness? So many things we had no way of understanding until He arrived, and then He didn't merely tell us, Oh NO, He patiently showed us how God truly worked in our lives, how much He loved us, and how little we knew of the little we knew. He really turned our world upside down. Things we thought of as having the greatest importance He showed us were as insignificant as dust. Little things we never noticed were given great glory and honor. How could we ever take it all in?

Olivia: (*Pointing to photo*) O Auntie, look at this one. Do you remember the story of the poor man who sent the gift to the Master?

Emmeline: Oh, yes. Well, the Friends would do anything for the Master, and tried to give Him money and cars and clothing. He always refused and said that these things should be used to help the poor.

Olivia: But there was one gift that He did accept. You see, 'Abdu'l-Baha had been invited to a very lavish dinner, and the table was full of delicious food and everyone sat down to enjoy a great feast. 'Abdu'l-Baha was passing around the plates piled high with good things to eat. Then one of the friends gave 'Abdu'l-Baha a present. It had been sent by a very poor man who lived far away, who gave the only thing he could give—

Emmeline: His dinner! It was wrapped up in a clean cotton handkerchief. Inside was a shriveled apple and a piece of dry, black bread.

Olivia: 'Abdu'l-Baha looked at the present and was very happy. He pushed His plate of food away and ate the old apple and the hard bread. He even broke bits off to share with the friends. Think of it!

Emmeline: He accepted the only gift this poor man had to offer.

Olivia: Something that I remember is that the Master loved laughter. He loved to hear it among the friends, and he would often laugh loudly and beautifully. Be happy, He would tell us. Be happy, be full of joy. He often told funny stories. You see, even His humor taught us valuable lessons about ourselves. Everything He did was a lesson, and He wanted OUR lives to be like His. Could we ever change enough?

Emmeline: Now, I need to tell you that we were not always comfortable with what the Master told us. Each of us had our own hard burdens to bear and it seemed that He knew each of us better than we knew ourselves.

Olivia: What was your burden, Auntie?

Emmeline: Well, I had never really seen a coloured person before He came. And you know, every time I went to see ‘Abdu’l-Baha speak, I would end up standing next to a coloured person. The first few times it happened I felt distressed, but by and by the beauty of the Master’s face would take over my soul and I would forget about everything else.

Olivia: I still can’t believe how you reacted when you first got news of the upcoming wedding of Louisa Mathews and Louis Gregory. *(Points to photo)* Here’s their photo!

Emmeline: It was like telling me that I could walk on the moon, or that the president was a woman, it was that impossible. I kept asking my friend Bertha if she was absolutely sure.

Olivia: Yes, she was sure.

Emmeline: But where will they live? I asked. Who will talk with them? Where will they sleep? What if they get arrested? Did they know that in 25 of these United States it was ILLEGAL for them to be married? She was a little calmer than

I was, and more sure of the Master's command. She told me that He had actually instructed them to marry, and that he said, "I wish the white and the colored people to marry." Now, Mr. Gregory was very intelligent, I mean he was a lawyer, and Miss Mathews was English and you know how they are, but still.....Well it just shook me through and through. And most of the Bahá'ís were stunned. I mean it is one thing to SAY that color doesn't matter, but to expect us to see **all** people as equals, well, I just didn't know what to do.

Olivia: But then there is the story of the street urchins—you know, when you decided that the Master's teachings on racial unity were important after all.

Emmeline: Yes, well, one evening I was sitting at the Kinney home, hoping for just a glimpse of His face, or perhaps a word or two. A Unitarian minister, Mr. Howard Colby Ives, (*points to album*) ahhhh...here he is....well, he was there also, as were many others. Suddenly a large group of **street** urchins came in the door and do you know? They had been invited by Mrs. Kinney, to see the Master! They probably hadn't seen the inside of a bath in their lives, but Mrs. Kinney invited them in as though they were little princes from the Orient. And the Master! Well, He hugged them for all they were worth, and held their hands, and smiled and laughed so you could almost think he was a boy himself! The last of these urchins to come in the door was a colored lad, and he hung back a little. When the Master saw him you would have thought the King of England had come in! He raised His hand and said that "Here was a black rose." The smile and the tears on that boy's face almost broke my heart. Suddenly I saw how much suffering that child had endured just because of the color of his skin, and I saw the joy in his little heart at being seen, really seen. That joy was enough to light up a whole city.

Olivia: (*Points to photo*) I love that photo....The Master then began giving the boys some expensive chocolates that had been placed in His room. They were pretty happy to have sweets, you can be sure. But suddenly He took a very black chocolate and laid it on the cheek of the little black boy. Then he looked around the room at everyone with such a look of good will and love ...and humor!

Emmeline: All of us, the boys and His followers, we all saw what He meant, without a word being spoken. Here was the sweet in the room, He was telling us, and if we tasted this sweetness we would find it good. That boy's eyes never left the Master. That's when I decided that I would change all of my thoughts and feelings about the colored race and just DO what the Master said to do. It wasn't easy, as even the Bahá'ís had a hard time with it and had separate meetings for a long time after His visit to the United States. But thank goodness that changed. (*Looks in album*) Now, darling, tell the story of that rascal, Fred Mortensen. You see him here?

Olivia: Oh, yes... Well, everyone who saw the Master was transformed in one way or another by his very presence. Some of the transformations were small, others were earth shattering. There was one young man named Fred Mortenson and he had had one of the roughest of lives. He was, to put it bluntly and as my aunt calls him, a rascal and a thief. He ended up.....IN JAIL.....although I would not mention it if he himself did not tell the story himself. While there, he had a lawyer named Mr. Hall, who tried very hard to help poor Fred. Mr. Hall visited with him and told him stories of The Master. Fred listened, and thought he would like to meet 'Abdu'l-Baha, so Mr. Hall told him where to go and when he got out of jail Fred set off from Minneapolis for Green Acre—a resort hotel, a long ways away, in Eliot, Maine. Fred did not have any money, so he climbed on top of trains, and sometimes underneath, and traveled like that for many miles.

Emmeline: When he arrived he was dirty and tired. There were a lot of people there to meet 'Abdu'l-Baha, many of them fashionable society people, and Fred was told to sit down and wait. Fred sat down and thought that it would be a long time before The Master would want to see him.

Olivia: But soon someone came to announce that 'Abdu'l-Baha was waiting for *him*. Fred had a funny feeling inside him as he went up the stairs—he had made mistakes and had been very bad, and he wondered if 'Abdu'l-Baha would be harsh with him. The door opened and The Master smiled at Fred. He took his hands and said, “Welcome! Welcome! You are very welcome!” He asked Fred about his

journey, and though Fred wished to avoid answering the question, he told Him with his eyes on the floor that he had been traveling on the top and underneath of trains. Then he looked up. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s eyes shone, and He kissed Fred on both cheeks and gave him some fruit. Then he picked up Fred’s dirty hat and kissed that too! Fred stayed with the Master for a whole week, and you can be sure that he never did anything unworthy again! (Mehrabi, *Stories of ‘Abdul-Bahá*, p 40)

Emmeline: It’s amazing how some people were drawn to meet the Master. (*Turns photo album.*) Oh look! Miss Sarah Farmer, the founder of Green Acre! I heard the story of how she met the Master. In 1900 she was on a boat going to Egypt and ran into two old friends who were going to Akka to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. When they got to Egypt she cabled Him to see if she could join them, and of course He said yes. When she got to there, she had a whole list of questions to ask Him, but she left them in her room. Would you believe that He answered all of them without even being asked? And then she wrote in her diary that night: “Heart too full for speech. Received by my Lord.” She suffered terribly when she came back. Everyone thought she was betraying Green Acre when she embraced the Bahá’í Revelation—by choosing one religion instead of anything and everything—but she understood that this one religion encompassed all. Well, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá knew her sufferings and wrote 28 tablets to her. Can you imagine? He confirmed her vision for Green Acre and even said: “The Lord has blessed it and blessed its founder and . . . Far-reaching consequences shall result . . . from that spot.” And then He CAME to Green Acre and drove around with her and told her many things. Why the only photograph we have of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá kissing anyone (*points to album*) is this one with Sarah Farmer! Margaret Klebs wrote: “Never to be forgotten is the picture when the Beloved One held her in His arms driving slowly around the Greenacre fields. Blessed are we who could witness it.” Then He told Miss Farmer, “You will be revered above all American women one fine day, you will see.”

Olivia: (*Points to photo*) Oh, this was a sad day. When it was time for the Master to depart from these shores we were heart-broken, remember, Auntie? We cried so much. The light was leaving our eyes, and never more would most of us see that beautiful face alive in this world.

Emmeline: Yes. As Mr. Ives, has so movingly written, “I saw in Him the perfect man, and I would gladly have sacrificed all that I had, or ever could have, to approach that perfectness.” And that, dear friends was true for all of us who had the privilege of meeting the Master.

Oh, now we must have Miss Juliet Thompson, come up and share some of her memories.

MC: Thank you, Miss White and Mrs. Hamilton. (clap for them)