

... description: 1920, Sylvia Parmalee  
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### Rex and Sylvia Parmalee

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#### September 1, 1920

Beginning Sept 1, 1920 for 7 or 8 days Sylvia was a child of 11 years, arrived by train in late afternoon, greeted by Bahá'ís piled into the Master's car, Fujita came on train to help with baggage brought presents from American friends with Cora Gray, Genevieve Coy met Master the next day was at house next to the Shrine of the Báb sat in front of Shrine with other men believers, sat in semi-circle four or five chairs reserved for pilgrims next to 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'he walked with a great deal of energy and he was radiant and loving and smiling'

‘As he talked, he looked out across the bay of Haifa — you could see Akká in the distance — and His eyes just seemed to penetrate into that distance. His eyes were very expressive. . .’ after talk, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá greeted each pilgrim individually with a handshake, except for Sylvia, who, because she was a child, He hugged.

‘I was a shy and rather self-conscious child and I felt very much on my best behaviour because here I was having gone months to get there. . . We left Illinois on the first of July and it took us until the first of September to get there. . . Here we were with all of these delays and difficulties in travel. . . and I knew that it was something very important and that I was supposed to be very much impressed, but I wasn't quite sure how and what. But I was self-conscious and afraid that I would do the wrong thing at the wrong time as a child is likely to feel in such circumstances. My memory is that there was an instant in which, when the Master greeted me, for just an instant that all that feeling of self-conscious left me. I felt, I can't say a force of power, but it was as though these artificial things which come from a child's insecurity were gone. Just for that moment. I was not a person who rushed up and hugged people. . . but with Him I did and I didn't know why. For just an instant, it took that self-consciousness away from me. . . I have a very strong memory of that entered Shrine of the Báb father was not a Bahá'í who allowed his wife to go but couldn't understand why. At a large sacrifice, he helped his wife and

daughter go, but did not go himself. Wife thought she might be spoiling the family unity by going, but felt that she had to go. Permission was given, but not by father (head of Dept of Electrical Engineering at the Univ of Illinois). Mother accepted the Faith in 1915.

Mother had individual interview with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Was in tears about any disruption and unhappiness she may have caused to her husband who had sacrificed so much to raise money for the trip. Her husband had not been permitted to come by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but could not understand why. He would have preferred for the family to all have gone together.

Sylvia’s visit was brief. One of the daughters in the Holy Household suggested that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá give Sylvia a name. When she came into His presence, she had the impression of light and radiance and happiness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá paced up and down the floor and gave her the name of Badiéh. Sylvia said very little, but her mother asked how she could serve the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that as long as she aimed to serve the Faith, then it was good. Ladies of the Household had a naming celebration afterwards for Sylvia with rock candy and tea.

One day, Sylvia was walking through Haifa with one of the grandchildren of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when she thought to herself that wouldn’t it be interesting that just as they were casually strolling along the street they should meet the Master. And suddenly, there He was, just as though it was an answer to her thoughts.

On the last night after dinner, pilgrims gathered for their last meeting with the Master. When He saw Sylvia, He laughed and called her name in English. Sylvia remembered the quality of His voice, which was nothing like she had ever heard, and thought that she really wanted to carry the memory of that voice with her when she left. She remembered the strength and vibrance of the voice and its rich musical, beautiful quality of His voice.

Greatest Holy Leaf spoke to them about their experiences coming to ‘Akká. Remembered her as strong, gentle and loving. Sylvia sat next to her and the Greatest Holy Leaf would stroke her hands rode in 3-seat horse carriage. Went to Cave of Elijah and though Haifa trip to ‘Akká went by horse carriage with Isfandíyár, 7 or 8 went started at 7 with lunch with Shoghi Effendi’s mother and some of her other children drove along the beach

‘We came to the gate and one of the horses had something wrong with its shoe. There was someone there outside the gate. . . and the shoe was repaired. I remember particularly a train of camels. . . and I think some donkeys, too, who had arrived in ‘Akká from someplace and they were waiting to have work done on the camels’ feet by a blacksmith. . . I, as a child, was very impressed to see a train of camels waiting to get into the gate in ‘Akká. We went in to this rather narrow gate and in the streets. ‘Akká seemed thousands of years older than Haifa, though Haifa just seemed like an old Arab town, but ‘Akká had far more antiquity — the cobble-stoned streets, rough and everything very dirty. We went first to the Barracks where the Friends were first imprisoned when they first went. . . We went into a long room. . . with open arches which

led out on this court. The Barracks were built around the court. . . in which was a pool of rather stagnant water. . . I was very impressed. . . that seventy people or so all crowded into this room. We had been told by members of the family and by the Greatest Holy Leaf what it was like. The soldiers took us around the Barracks [to] lots of rooms that we weren't terribly interested in.

What made an impression on me was this great, long Barracks room. . . it was just a great, long, dark place. . . and I thought how in the world did these people ever manage with just that dirty water out there. They told us about how terrible water the water was and it was all they had to drink. The Greatest Holy Leaf. . . said she used her handkerchief to strain the water before she drank. It was August and they were so thirsty and hot and they weren't given any food at all. Then the next day they were given some dirty bread. . . I do remember sitting on a porch and eating melons. . . this may have been the House of Abbúd. . . Families were living there and it was a dwelling place. . .

We drove around the streets of 'Akká. . . then we went with the carriage out to the Riḍván Garden which was very, very beautiful. That made an impression on me because of the running water and the little fountain and a blind mule which went around and around pulling this rope which made the fountain run. And the mulberry trees and the benches. We sat on the benches and had a picnic lunch and took little naps under the mulberry trees. . .

The last stop was past Bahjí to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. We never entered Bahjí because it was not in the hands of the Bahá'ís, but they never told us this. They just said that is where He lived. They never emphasized these negative things at all.

We went into the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and that made a tremendous impression on me because I realised that this was probably the most Holy place I would ever be in and here was an opportunity to get closer to Bahá'u'lláh and to get more understanding of God and whatever part I might have to play in this Faith. It was about 4 o'clock and we went in. . . The remarkable thing to me was that we were there all by ourselves. We knelt at the Threshold then they open the door and we all went in, clear in to the very place. . . I remember praying and thinking that, in my rather childish way, whatever we prayed for in all sincerity at that spot would be granted.'

They returned to Haifa by road and arrived in time for dinner with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. After dinner, 'Abdu'l-Bahá got up and went to a basin and pitcher at the side of the room and washed His hands and face, after which He was given a towel. Then He said to the pilgrims, 'Go and rest' and then He left.