

BAHAI'S VISIT OHRID July 2019

We visited Macedonia between the 6th and 20th of July 2019 on a Teaching Trip to span two weeks.

Myself [Steve Day] my wife Shohreh Azarkadeh, her daughter and three members of the Female Baha'i Trio Illumine, Sama, Shada and Isis. For the first 3 days Shohreh's brother Chahbaz came with us then for about four days Lou came from Wellingborough as well.

So this is a report from my point of view of contacts, conversations and events that took place over the entire trip.

I will list the contacts in order of how momentous I judged the meetings to be together with details about conversations, follow up meetings and events.

Dragan

This was quite a phenomenal exchange. We had encountered Dragan [Dragan means Beloved!] on our previous trip to Ohrid, exactly a year ago, when he stood very much as an opposer to our activities. Last year with help from Niki [Ohrid Bahai] and Deni [Bitola Bahai] we created an exhibition which we placed outside Pippa's [Ohrid Bahai] Dwelling place at 40 Tsar Samoil opposite the Holy Mother Bolnichka Church. I stood in the street and played guitar and we spoke to passers by about the Faith and invited them to a musical presentation at the Hotel Garden.

Dragon who lived two blocks down from us kept angrily appearing and telling us we must stop playing music and take our display inside, he is trying to sleep. He threatened to report us to the police.

After this happened a few times last year, we took it upon ourselves to visit the police station and tell them what we were doing and presented them with leaflets in Macedonian on the Faith. They told us to take no notice we were perfectly lawful in our activities. Further to

this they advised us to inform the Government Offices, Cultural centre just so they are also aware of our activities.

When we did this we struck up an immediate friendship with a man at the cultural centre called Mexcoo. He has stayed a valuable contact along with his wife and daughter and our encounter with him is set out below. Last year we were delighted that Dragon's opposition had lead us to such vital contacts.

However, the story doesn't finish there.

This year on our arrival at Pippa's we immediately set about establishing the presentation outside her dwelling place at 40 Tsar Samoil and started to play music and attract people again.

Dragon appeared again and angrily told us we must stop or he will call the police. I said we had visited the police station last year and also the Cultural centre and we had permission to carry out our activities. He angrily said "We will see about that I am phoning the police!". A police man duly arrived and seemed quite pleasant, we explained what we were doing and he just kept saying there is one person who is not happy with it. We agreed after some friendly consultation with the police man that we would go to a different location for the time being just to not escalate the situation. It was then that we moved to the beach where we met Leonardo, detailed below.

The next day, undeterred, we went to Pippa's again and played music outside and spoke to people. Dragon appeared a few times and angrily stared at me. It seemed we had reached a stalemate. I was not willing to be intimidated and moved on by this man and he wouldn't let it go. To me it was valuable to involve Pippa and her abode in our activities. She has pioneered to Macedonia and is 83 and a wonderful Bahai who has worked hard to create a display in and around her home.

Well, the next day I went to visit Pippa at about 2pm as I did every day before setting out on a stroll around town with my guitar. As I

exited her house and walked down Tsar Samoil I could see Dragon walking towards me. I felt the Spirit of Baha'u'llah. I walked straight toward Dragon with my arms extended in a gesture of friendship and said "Can we be friends?" Dragon put out his hands and said "Get away from me! I don't want to be your friend, I will never be your friend, don't you come near me!"

I repeatedly said "We have come here to spread friendship and unity and peace, I don't want to be your enemy." He said "I am not your friend and I will never back down!" I said "Neither will I, so I think we must talk and come to an agreement and not be enemies, I don't want you as an enemy I want you as a friend!"

At this point he came close to me and removed his dark sunglasses. He looked into my eyes. I was deeply touched because for the first time I noticed he had lovely deep blue and compassionate eyes.

He said "All I want from you is for you to respect me, it is not about your religion, I have to put ear plugs in my ears because you play music so loud... "

(I must admit on occasion I did play the Beatles quite loudly and got people in the street singing along with me! So I could see his point.)

"...I can show you my ear plugs!" He said.

At this stage I said "look I am sorry, I will respect you from now on, how would it be if I just played quiet music inside Pipp's house and only came out to talk to people in the street ? Can we be friends?"

"Yes" he said "I don't want to be your enemy, if we have an agreement then we can be friends" he smiled at me and we shook hands heartily and agreed to have an evening out together soon.

I laughingly said "Would you like me to play you a song now?", he laughed and said "No Steve don't you dare play me song, we have an agreement!" We walked away from each other smiling and laughing and waving. We have met a few times subsequently and he has been a loving friend with a wonderful smile.

I can't explain the deep love I felt for this man who was once an enemy and now a dear friend. This is the Spirit of Baha'u'llah and such a confirmation!

This entire encounter appeared to me as a vivid dream some decades before the actual event.

Leonardo

I met Leonardo whilst strolling along a popular beach swimming area of the lake. He is from Italy or Spain and is a great guitarist. We struck up an immediate friendship and met later in cafes and he attended two of our Musical Presentations of the Faith at The Hotel Garden. A lovely sensitive man who loves music and although he spoke just a little English we communicated well and he accompanied us on many walks and outings. We exchanged what's app details and promised to keep in touch and meet up again our next visit. He brought a friend with him to the last session at the Hotel Garden.

Kosta and Slavitsa

We met Kosta and Slavitsa briefly last year, however, this year the friendship deepened. I sat with Slavitsa one evening and spoke to her about my plans to possibly move to Ohrid. She said she would teach me to speak Macedonian. I gave her a leaflet on the Faith in Macedonian and she interpreted all the writings on the leaflet for me. At the end of this she said I really like this may I keep it. Of course I said it is yours. I invited them both to the presentation at the Hotel Garden, but as they ran their shop till very late they are unable to attend. So Slavitsa asked me if I would come and give a performance at their shop one evening. This I did a few days later. So Kosta and Slavitsa are now great friends and contacts.

Katerina

Katerina works as a Project Manager and fundraiser for NGOs. She is an old friend of Pippa's and Shohreh has met her on previous occasions. Me and Pippa and Katrina had a meeting one evening and discussed the possibility of establishing a Bahai Centre in Ohrid and/or a Pioneer Centre.

Katrina stated quite strongly that the centre of the town where Pippa's residence is would be a dangerous place to establish concentrated and overt Bahai Activities, as it is an area right in the centre of the Eastern Orthodox stronghold. "Unless you are intent on having you and the house burnt down, I would strongly advise against it!" She said. She advised us to set up a centre of Bahai activities in a part of town called Biljanini Izvori. It is an area where new settlements are being built and houses a lot of foreign settlers. Me and Shohreh cycled out to see the area the next day and it is very beautiful and well connected.

Isa and Zumrod

Isa is a Muslim Imam we met them last year when we were looking at the possibilities of building a house on Shohreh's land in Racha in Ohrid. I had has discussions about the Qoran with Isa, in particular the meaning of the Night Journey and my understanding of the Seven heavens.

This year Isa and his wife Zumrod were very busy manning a small cafe and ice cream parlour they had acquired and we stopped to speak with them on several occasions, but due to their heavy work load they were unable to join us in any events.

Mescoot, Normanda and Saria

Mescoot works in the Government Offices in the Cultural department. We befriended him last year due to the opposition of Dragan. His daughter Saria and his wife Normanda had been to our apartment a few times this year. Later on in our stay Mescoot invited us all to his Home where we had a lovely evening playing music with the girls and eating Wonderful bread and melon. Mescoot's wife Normanda attended one of our musical presentations at the Hotel Garden

John Barrow (Saxophone Fine Young Canibals) and wife Kim [Leicester]

I stood by the lake one day and overheard a couple sitting at a cafe table speak in English. I approached and said "Excuse me are you from England?". Yes they said so I sat with them and we exchanged stories. When I told them I was a musician giving performances here,

John was very interested and said he is also a musician, a saxophonist who had recorded with some big bands, he mentioned Fine Young Cannibals amongst others. When I informed them of the Bahai Faith they were very interested and loved the principles. They were on tight schedule and couldn't make any of the performances, however, we heartily exchanged contact details and agreed to meet up in England. They live in Leicester. The whole group met them the next day and shared a coffee and fun discussions.

Rob and Machiko (Rob is Bahai)

Rob was on holiday in Ohrid with his wife and family. He was athletic the lake when he heard Shohreh mentioning the Bahai Faith to some one. Rob went over and said excuse me are you Bahai, Shohreh said yes and Rob said so am I!

I later met Rob and we went to his apartment and met his lovely daughters and his wife. We had some great discussions about The Name of God, which Rob was making a study of. Unfortunately Rob was unable to attend any events due to family commitments. His wife Machiko is not Bahai.

We exchanged contact details and promised to keep in touch and meet again soon in Ohrid.

Billiyana, Boyana and Mother

Billiyana was the Landlady of what was our apartment for the first week. Shohreh had discussions with her and she seemed extremely open and receptive to the Faith. She came to one of our musical presentations. It was agreed that we would stay in contact with her.

Her sister, Boyana was a delight. She didn't attend any of the performances but she visited us on a few occasions in our apartment, and wrote Shohreh and myself lovely postcards to take home with us. She was a wonderful character and I am sure we will meet again. She seemed very interested in Chabaz Shohreh's lovely brother.

Dali

Dali is a street musician who spoke very little English but every time I met him I stopped and played music with him and he would play Frank Sinatra songs and his favourite every time he saw men was "When the saints come marching in!" A lovely smiling man of 72.

Kousman (Shop owner and electric Motorbike)

Kousman owns a shop in the indoor shopping Mal in Ohrid Centre. He showed me his electric motor scooter and made me a coffee. I shared the Faith with him, presenting a wonderful broacher in Macedonian that Pippa had given me several copies of. I returned to see him several times but his Wife was always manning the Store and I didn't get to see him again.

Ermal (15 yr old Muslim billiard hall lives in Skopje)

I was walking around quite late one evening (Ohrid never sleeps) and I found myself walking into a darkened billiard room where three young men were playing pool. I smiled and they beckoned me in. I asked if they spoke English and the evident leader said "Of course we all speak English."

I sat down, two of them continued to play pool whilst I spoke to the leader. He said his name is Ermal but nobody can pronounce it properly. We began by talking about music and I invited him to a performance at Hotel Garden. He said he would love to learn to play guitar. Then I told him about the Faith. He was very excited and said he was very interested in religion. We spoke about the Faith's principles. However real was obviously a Muslim and quite an erudite one at that. I told him I was making another study of the Quran. He began to explain his understanding of some issues. He seemed particularly to want to talk about the creation of Angels and Jinn. After what must have been the best part off an hours discussion I bade him farewell. I was surprised when he told me he was only 15, he had a lot of knowledge of certain interpretations of the Quran. Unfortunately he couldn't make the performance, but , I met him again whilst walking back from the Hotel Garden with Shohreh and Leonardo, and we had a brief discussion and promised to stay in touch. He lives part of the year in Skopje and part in Ohrid.

Kliment

I have met Kliment on two previous trips as well as this one. He is a street musician who lives in an abandoned house. He is an extraordinary person, extremely sensitive and compassionate and wise. He has on previous occasions attended many Devotionals and Firesides and Musical Presentations. He has become pretty much a fixture as well as a musical collaborator of our visits. Always a delight to see this lovely old friend.

Stephan

I had met Stephan last year. He owns a shop at the end of the street where we have stayed twice now. He specialises in musical instruments and radios and antiques so I am naturally attracted to his shop. A lovely man who loves music, especially blues and guitar. He will often see me passing and call me over to listen to a nice piece of guitar music he has found on You Tube.

NAME OMITTED

One of the strangest and possibly most dangerous encounters of any visit to Ohrid.

I was out strolling around late one night again and I wandered into a Jazz and Blues Club. I asked the Manager, Velimir, if they ever had live musicians, he said yes all the time, I enquired about a possible performance in the club he said yes but come back after 12 (midnight) and talk to the Owner, Ravel.

I returned after 12pm with Shohreh by my side. I asked Velimir if the owner was here yet, he said no but he will be here soon. As we stood in the club looking around we both noticed a man sitting in one corner of the room looking extremely assured and important and smoking the biggest cigar I have ever seen. How he got it in his mouth is a mystery. He just looked at us with a strange knowing look. I walked around and found some musicians to talk to. By about 12:15 I had had enough and went to the Manager Velimir and said I will go now and maybe come back to see the owner another day. At that moment a young girl touched my shoulder. Shohreh had just left the building.

The young girl said “The man in the corner wishes you to play a song for him!”

I walked toward the man with the huge cigar and introduced myself. He shook my hand and beckoned me to sit. I asked who he was. He said his name was [omitted]. Shohreh returned and sat down. He reached in to his man bag on the table and placed a Fifty Euro note in my hand. I immediately said no I don't need his money. He kept insisting I take it, I said I haven't even played you anything yet. I placed the Fifty Euro note on the table and left it there. I then played an instrumental piece on my guitar. He nodded in assent. I asked what he did for a living he said many things. I asked him if he owned this place, he said who knows I may do. By now both myself and Shohreh were pretty much convinced that this was a man we would be better off distancing our selves from. He gave me his card with his name on saying he was the CEO of a Building Company. I thanked him for his time and said we would be going now. I shook his hand and as he grabbed my hand he gripped harder and harder. I returned the hard grip and we ended up almost having an arm wrestle which turned into a huge man hug as we parted smiling at each other. I think we had drummed up some kind of macho mutual respect. I liked something about him but also felt a strong inclination to be wary of this man.

Over the next few days I mentioned this encounter to Niki, a Bahai in Ohrid. Niki said he knows him and every body in the club is frightened of him. Katerina told me he is a member of the Uber Mafiosi and they all have building companies.

Trust me to go and have an arm wrestle with a Mafia man. :-)

Mariana, (Violin) Martha (Cello). [Ukrain]

Probably not likely to see these two lovely ladies again, I met them as they played Cello and Violin beautifully in the High Street. I spoke to them and told them about our Mission and the Performance later that night at the Hotel Garden. They said they would come. They were from the Ukraine and spoke very little English. We played a song or two together. I was so pleasantly surprid]sed when later that evening

they turned up at the Hotel. They performed with us and did two classical pieces on heir own. They were extremely accomplished musicians. Its they left to continue their tour across countries I gave them more details on the Faith and they asked for my contact details as well.

SKOPJE

Lois and David's Sinnada

We traveled by bus to Skopje to give a musical Fireside/Devotional at the home of our Dear Friends and collaborators Lois and David Lambert.

At the fireside were many contacts. Also present was Anka a wonderful Bahai, and a contact who has been staying with Lois and David called Sinnada. After the presentation and Music I found myself in the kitchen with Sinnada and we had a long discussion about Islam.

She is of Muslim persuasion and we talked at length about progressive revelation and the Station of Muhammad as the Last Prophet. I felt I was able to explain to Sinnada the concept of Muhammad being the last Nabil and not the last Messenger (Rasul) and the Last to Prophecy concerning the coming of the Great Day of God, and that now that day has arrived with the Revelations of The Bab and Baha'u'llah.

She seemed to grasp this concept and agreed it was an amazing time to be living. I am sure we will meet again and she is in contact with Lois and David continually.

KOSOVO Pristina

Zarin Webber [Bahai] Arta [Bahai] Sam [Bahai] Blerrim [Bahai]
Lola and Meggina [Contacts]

The next day myself and shohreh said goodbye to Lois and David and caught a bus to Kosovo. On arriving in Pristina we caught

another bus to our apartment and then went straight to the Musical Devotional at the Home of Baha'i Zarrin Webber.

We were joined for dinner by Bahais area and Sam and later Blerrim.

Two contacts Lola and Meggina arrived after dinner. We sang devotional songs and read prayers together. Later on we played some contempt stop songs and then had discussions about the Faith.

Lola in particular was a very energetic speaker and shared her views on not accepting the Jesus is God. We explained that a Messenger of God both is and isn't God.

It was lovely night with a lot of fun, music and discussion.

Vesna, Louey, Ivor, Costa

We returned to Ohrid for our last of three presentation evenings at the Hotel Garden.

It was well attended with local Baha'i Niki bringing three contacts, two of which I had met earlier in the week, Louey and Ivor and a third Costa.

Also a Bahai lady Vesna, who has settled 10 Kilometres outside of Ohrid, contacted us a few days before the presentation and she blessed us with her presence. We exchanged details and promised to get in touch the moment we know when we are returning to Ohrid.

A lovely evening also the lovely Leonardo our friend and guitarist attended and bought a friend.

There were many other meetings and names not mentioned here. Some just brief encounters where details of our mission were explained and invites and leaflets on the Faith given out. These above, however, constitute for me the ones worthy of mention and the

exchanges in which a firm foundation for friendship and a lasting connection was made.

Steve Day July 2019