

Baha'i Paul Baha



This is the story of how Baha'i Paul Baha acquired his unique name.

Paul (surname not mentioned out of respect¹) entered the Baha'i community when the United States was experiencing massive social upheaval during the mid-to-latter 1960s. Protest against the Vietnam War, rise of the Black Power movement, demonstrations by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), college campus sit-ins, social implications of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Poor Peoples Campaign (1968), the March on Washington (1963), and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy (1963), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), and Robert F. Kennedy (1968) are only a few of many difficulties racking US society during this period.

Out of this morass and into the Washington, DC Baha'i community steps Paul (c. 1967). He enters the Baha'i community at a time when some women still wore hats and were adorned with white gloves and a purse. Beards and long hair for men were anathema and setting on the floor considered uncivilized. The recently acquired Baha'i Center was located on 16th Street in the upper North West section of the city, an area more often referred to locally as the "Gold Coast", being upper class and filled with stately mansions. The ensuing external social chaos, to a degree, finds its way into the Baha'i community to pressure many who strain mightily to retain long standing conservative religious and social leanings born of what was then considered proper, i.e., "the Baha'i way" of doing things. Paul, by being his natural self, immediately poses an internal challenge for those few race-centered and class-conscious individuals forcing them to face their inner demons. Baha'i communities nation-wide would not long remain untouched by the strong force of social transition as many more people like Paul would soon enter the Baha'i fold. "Entry by troops" may have been discussed, even anticipated, but not planned for in any meaningful way, and Baha'i communities nationwide would remain totally unprepared for such an onslaught.

Paul had a rough life and never shied away from making it known. Unpretentious, gifted and talented, he remained undeterred by forces that might threaten to remove him from his center. He is well grounded and survives life's challenges due to strong will power, personal decision-making qualities, copious mother wit, deep spiritual insight, and manifest intuition.

At one point Paul requested to meet with the local Baha'i administrative body to discuss a matter of great importance to him, that he would officially have his name changed to "Baha'i Paul", in effect, eliminating his given middle and surname. His reason for doing so was to have a name that more aptly reflects his spiritual perspective now that he was Baha'i. This caused a great deal of anxiety among some of the assembled members who thought the idea bordered on sacrilege, possibly defaming the sanctity of the word 'Baha'. Not knowing exactly what to do or how to respond, decision was made to delay a response and refer the matter to the national Baha'i administrative body.

¹ Many may recall the name change difficulties faced by Mohammad Ali, the world-renowned professional boxer, who struggled mightily to have the public accept his then newly acquired official name.

The response received from the NSA stated that there was neither rule against nor harm if an individual choose to use “Baha’i” or “Baha” as a personal name. Paul, a very happy man, then took action to have his name changed, thereafter known officially and socially as “Baha’i Paul”. However, his quest did not stop there because perhaps 1-2 years later he informed the local Baha’i administrative body that he would once again officially undergo a name change, this time to include “Baha” as a third addition, and thereby became known as “Baha’i Paul Baha”.

For several years Baha’i Paul Baha was instrumental in conveying principals of the Baha’i Faith over the airways in Washington, DC through two radio programs he operated. Using music based programing and philosophical leanings, he challenged his audience to acquire a better understanding of the importance and spiritual significance of the period of time in which humanity currently exist.

Baha’i Paul Baha with his three sons.



(l/r): Malik (holding a framed picture of Shoghi Effendi), Baha’i Paul Baha, Dominic (forefront), and Omar.

I took this photo during July 2000 at the Coley home located at 6402 16th St., NW, Washington, DC. I arrived in Washington from the Philippines in June 2000 and asked Francis Coley if there was room at her home where I could stay for a few months while I finalized travel arrangements to kick-start my Africa Development Research Project, my first stop being Asmara, Eritrea. I rented a room for approximately three months, completed all passport and visa requirements, and then in September departed the United States for Eritrea by airline via Frankfurt, Germany and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.