



Chapter 2: Puerto Rico: October 1965 - July 1966:

That quote from the Guardian hit me right away; accepting challenges was a way of life for me and from that quote came the conviction to pioneer! As for Frank, moving, especially for the Faith was no problem. We began the process of writing letters and sending out Frank's resumes all over the world. Unlike missionaries who are paid by their church, Bahá'í pioneers go and maintain themselves. This in itself helps one to be more a part of the new environment. So Frank's resumes went out and we waited and waited and waited.

I also began to have second thoughts. As a result of her early arrival on the planet, our youngest daughter, Judy, was in special education. What would happen to her education? My maternal Grandma Snyder came to live with us from Detroit, Michigan in 1964. She had become a Bahá'í here on her 80th birthday, but she was a lot younger than her years. She was active, lively, gregarious and with an inquiring mind. How would she react to living overseas? I had just started back to college to get my degree. Should I give this up, after all, education in the Bahá'í Faith is highly commendable. As we were actively teaching and working for the Faith in Sacramento, perhaps these reasons were enough to stay here. In addition, the Foreign Goals Committee who were responsible for sending pioneers to Bahá'í goal areas stressed that we should not go anywhere without a job! And no one had answered our letters.

One other consideration was that we had not specifically asked Grandma if she wanted to go. We offered to her that we would see that she was well cared for in the States if she didn't want to go with us, but she said she would like to go and things then began to fall into place for us.

A definitive answer came quickly and decisively one night after a fireside. Frank, who was normally easy going, and says things such

as "Whatever you want to do is OK with me" surprised me when he announced firmly "Tomorrow I am going into work, resign and we are going pioneering!" People who were there told me I went pale, I know I felt weak. But that was it. We were on our way. As Bahá'u'lláh says the best provision for ones journey is trust in God.

We finally decided to go to Puerto Rico. It had many industries and Frank with his engineering experience should be able to get work. Ignoring the fact that they spoke Spanish and we did not, we put our house on the market, packed up and shipped our goods to Puerto Rico.

On the 12 October 1965, we arrived in San Juan, Puerto Rico as pioneers. It was a year and a half after we had become Bahá'is. We were, Momma, Poppa, two young daughters, Lynn, age 11, and Judy, age 9, and my maternal Grandmother, Elsie Snyder, age 81, oh, and, a registered French Poodle named Robbie. Robbie had been a gift from a friend who said he would generate income for us as he was a pure-bred poodle.

We had picked Puerto Rico as a post after a prolonged consultation with Foreign Goals but they were not enthusiastic about our going anywhere without a job. Frank had a BS in Physics and had been working as an engineer in the Polaris Missile Program in California and there was a company in Puerto Rico which we thought would hire him. He had written everywhere else without any responses. We finally had to just go to this island which had been suggested by Foreign Goals. Then they realized that job or no job, we were going pioneering. The only thing left for us to do was to go and pray that it was the right thing to do!

We had originally planned to go pioneering with four other Bahá'í families, the Roths, Leeb, Fannings and the Mortensens. We were all Bahá'is in our Carmichael, California community and great friends. This however did not materialize, so we ended up going by ourselves the next year. All the other three families did become pioneers at a later time, just not in a clump.

We were picked up at the San Juan airport by another pioneer family, the Heaths. We didn't know who was going to meet us. As I watched people go by me, a stream of young, blonde, light coffee-coloured beautiful children and their mother passed by and I thought this is them! And sure enough it was! This was my first experience, but not the last with recognizing someone without ever having seen them before. They immediately put us a DC-3 plane to the other side of the island to a small town called Ponce. To give you an idea of size and comfort of the plane, we could hear Robbie, the dog, barking loudly in the luggage space all the way!

I can still remember our first night in Ponce. It was unbelievably hot and muggy, all six of us in a hotel room, trying to go to sleep, hearing people chatter in a language none of us knew, and me thinking of the old joke "What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this!"

We were staying in a hotel which was very close to an amazing old Fire House. I found out later it is now a Historic Registered Land Mark and is currently a Museum.

Parque de Bombas de Ponce

[U.S. National Register of Historic Places](#)



It didn't take long to know we had to get out of the hotel and find another place to live. After family consultation, it also was realized we were going to need a car of some kind. So after saying lots of prayers, off we went. Reality began to set in as lot after car lot was selling cars starting at eight or nine hundred dollars, way beyond our present means. We came to another lot, and heard the same story. So Frank asked if he didn't have anything cheaper. The man scratched his head, and said "Well I have one back here". He took us way back, and there sat this dusty, rusty, multi-coloured car

looking as if it would have to be pushed off the lot. The man said, "You can have this for one hundred and fifty". Now Frank is really startled as we had been quoted prices much higher, so he says loudly "What". The man who is now startled says, "OK, OK, you can have it for seventy five dollars." Frank is now speechless, so I poke him in the side and quietly say "That's what we said prayers for". We now have a bargain. As the man shows us the car, he goes back to his office, gets his screw driver and opens the trunk and points to a spare tire even shinier than those on the car.

We later called her Baby, as she really did need to be treated as such. For example; she had a cranky carburetor. It would stop working whenever and wherever it wished. Frank always fixed it by taking it apart and putting it back together. The transmission gears would snap out of place regularly. Frank would reach through a hole under the front seat, snap them back into place and away we go. The engine overheated very often, so we would park, find the nearest coffee shop, sit for a while, go back to the car and take off. Also. whenever it rained our passengers in the back seat would get sprayed through a hole in the floor when we went over puddle.

The one idiosyncrasy of the car that was not at all endearing to me was that she did not like to carry her passengers up a steep hill. So, at the bottom of a hill, all passengers disembarked while she and the driver went up the hill and waited until we could join them. But she lasted the whole nine months we were there. Iris, one of the new Bahá'is, against our better judgment, bought Baby for seventy five dollars. She drove it home from our departure at the airport and parked it by her Grandmother's house. When Iris went back to get it her grandmother said "But Iris, I gave it to the man who said he was getting it for you" Oh my, Oh well, probably just as well.

If I ever write a book I most certainly will have to include a chapter called "The Car". I have talked to lots and lots of pioneers who have these great funny stories about their cars. My son-in-law, Richard Berry, tells of picking up Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhájir at the airport in Grenada in a car belonging to another

pioneer, Arthur Winner, whose car was surely was a descendant of the one we had in Puerto Rico.



Let Rick tell his story:

“...Arthur’s car, an English Ford, ran, but you didn’t dare turn it off if you were planning on using further that day. The generator didn’t work and the battery was weak. To start the car, Arthur rolled the car down our common driveway. He also always made sure he parked on a hill.



We got to the airport, about an hours’ drive from our house, about five minutes before the plane was due to arrive. Arthur thought it would be OK to leave the car running for that short a time. Of course, the plane was delayed. About an hour as I remember. Then Dr. Muhájir finally arrived, got through customs, and after sufficient hugs and greetings we all three walked out to the car park. The car had stopped running! We loaded the luggage in the car and told Dr. Muhájir to just stand by the side of the road while I pushed the car and Arthur would come back and get us both. He said OK. I started pushing the car, and after a few feet noticed it suddenly became much easier than I had expected. Dr. Muhájir had joined the car push. Both Arthur and I said “No, Dr. Muhájir just wait and we will get it started.” Of course he kept pushing and the car was soon started.



We all got in the car. Arthur and I were both profusely apologizing for having to have the car push-started. Dr. Muhájir smiled and laughed and said ‘My dears it’s alright. Every pioneer has the same car’.”

We had moved from our Puerto Rican hotel to a new and almost completed apartment complex. It was clean, plenty of room, with

four bedrooms and not expensive. We had finally realized that most Puerto Ricans speak English when they choose to. Our first night I went to bed, snuggling down for a good night's sleep, only to discover one of the reasons the rent was so reasonable. There was a chicken farm about 10 feet from our bedroom. Now contrary to the urban U.S. opinion that roosters only crow at dawn, I am here, testifying to the falseness of that belief! They crow on and off all night and all day long. Welcome to the Caribbean, our culture shock had begun!

In a short time we were joined by another American pioneer, Leonard Ericks. He was young, handsome, and an artist. His story of how he came to pioneer is fun, as are most similar stories. He lived in Los Angeles, California and wanted to be an actor. His studies included all the things young aspiring actors need to do; singing, dancing, horseback riding, diction, etc. He had been invited to a fireside by a friend and though attracted, felt this could certainly not include him. However it wasn't too long before he found himself writing a letter expressing his desire to pioneer. The only problem was that he couldn't make himself mail it. He'd walk up to a mailbox and couldn't drop it in. Then, one time, much to his own surprise, he snatched the mail box door open and in went the letter! Now he was here in Puerto Rico. He did end up getting a job in one of the large department stores as a decorator. He has remained a pioneer all of his life!



The Bahá'í Community in Puerto Rico seemed quite large to me at that time, very friendly and open to newcomers. I had enrolled in a class in Spanish soon after we got there, but I was struggling with the language. A Catholic University near us was holding Spanish lessons designed to train their missionaries to go into South America. Worked for me and I enrolled. I was 37 at that time, and languages are best learned at a young age. But the Bahá'ís were patient and supporting in my efforts to learn Spanish. I remember one large meeting, where Jose Monge was the chairman. After a long introduction in Spanish, he leaned over to where he could see

me and said in English, "You got that Pat?" I, of course answered, not totally truthful, "Si, Si".

It was here that we found our first spiritual children. A long time pioneer to Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Dorothy Behar, used to visit us on a regular basis as we had become good friends. It was around



Christmas time, and one could hear carols from every direction. Iris Guinals de Maul, one of the young women from upstairs, came down and wanted to know if we knew all the words to the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas?" You bet we would try!

As the weeks went by we all became good friends, and the talk of Faith started. Iris liked what she heard, but she was a law student at the university across the street plus she did not want to take this kind of step without first talking to her husband who was in the US Armed Forces at that time.

Also during this time frame, a young man, Noel Robbles y Robbles started coming to visit. He seemed attracted right from the start. I can still see him going home late one night, reading a Bahá'í book stopping under street lights to be able to read the book better. After a few visits and more reading, he declared himself as a Bahá'í.

Iris, however, was not showing that kind of interest in spite of all the discussions we had about the Faith. In the early part of the year 1966, late one night, when she was trying to study, she came downstairs all distraught! She said she has started to pray, and looked up into the sky and saw the stars formed in a symbolic shape that she recognized as meaning that the Bahá'í Faith was true, and that she needed to join!

The ensuing events in Iris's life showed her becoming a dedicated, devoted Bahá'í. She was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Puerto Rico. She also was the first Puerto Rican to go on Pilgrimage. Her other services include travel teaching to Caribbean Islands.



Here is our group in Ponce:

L to R standing: Noel, Leonard Ericks (holding Robbie), Dorothy Behar, Pat
Kneeling: Frank, Lynn, Iris Gunials de Maul, Judy

Noel, however, soon moved to New York, and we have not had any contact with him since.



It was here in Puerto Rico that I learned that pioneers come in all sizes, shapes and descriptions. One should always keep an open mind and not doubt the guidance another receives from Baha'u'llah. We met Vivian Taylor, a pioneer from the United States. She told us the way she had decided to come here. She was sitting one day, wanting to go pioneering somewhere, and as she sat looking at the sky and the clouds, one passed by that she says was in the shape of Puerto Rico, and that was it for her. Here she is in Puerto Rico, happy and serving.

Vivian was in her 30's, tall, slim, very blonde and clearly beautiful. She later left Puerto Rico, staying in our islands, from St Thomas to Antigua. She served the Faith, devotedly, and steadfastly, passing away in Antigua, having married Counsellor Rowland Estall years before. I loved that lady.



Our highest priority in order to stay was for Frank to get a job. Frank was hired within a month, as a local, at CORCO, the

petrochemical plant outside Ponce. This meant he received 60% of the salary of those hired from overseas. But the job didn't last long.

One of the ground rules at the petrochemical plant was religion was not to be discussed. The secretary of Frank's big boss asked him a question about the Faith, so she was given a pamphlet. Nothing more was said.

However, Frank was accused of telling people about the Faith. When it was mentioned that it was his secretary who asked, Frank was accused of trying to blame the secretary and was fired. That was in May 1966.

I am sure there were other factors involved. As pioneers we wanted to be near and associate with Puerto Ricans. We moved to an area far from the "American Ghetto" where all the Continentals from the United States lived. I had also started taking Spanish lessons, and it was preferred by the company that its engineers speak English. We sent Lynn to a public school, knowing she would pick up Spanish quickly. None of our moves made a good impression on Frank's boss. But also, as I learned slowly, but surely, Bahá'u'lláh has his own plan. It is His Plan that we want to follow, and hope that we are.

After he lost his job in May, the family moved to a suburb of the capital, San Juan, where Frank began looking for a job. The house we moved to was one I will never forget! We were shown the outside and it looked fine. Moving inside, the rooms were large and cool, with enough bedrooms and the rent not too expensive. AND then we opened the door to the bathroom. No telling how long the house had been vacant. Leaning against the wall in the bathtub was an old mop, AND the room was totally, completely, covered with brown shiny-winged roaches two to three inches long. We could not believe our eyes, and jumped back. The land lady

said, casually, "Oh I'll spray and get rid of those for you". Welcome to the tropics!

Another job however, did not materialize. I now had to write Foreign Goals, with a sheepish "It looks like you were right after all, we should have gotten a job first, and it looks as though we will have to return to the United States". In a few weeks we got a letter back telling us that as we are already in the area see if Frank can get a job in St. Thomas. They will be forming a new National Spiritual Assembly in the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands. They can use some more help.

We scraped together the funds and Frank booked a flight to St. Thomas.