

Chapter 8: St. Lucia: 2000 - present (June 2019)

I arrived in St. Lucia with mixed emotions. First, I really wanted to stay in Trinidad, but here we were in spite of all our efforts. I knew then that Bahá'u'lláh wanted us here, not in Trinidad any longer. It wasn't until I took a visit to Trinidad a few years later and attended a National Convention that I realized why we had to leave. I looked around and saw so many local Trinidadians in the forefront of the Bahá'í activities and administration that I knew that we weren't needed there for support anymore.

We first stayed at one of the Bahá'ís, Urmie Persaud's, house in Sunny Acres which is right outside of the capital Castries. We met with the National Spiritual Assembly and they asked us to move to



Choiseul to help with the consolidation of the Faith in the area of La Fargue, Choiseul. A St. Lucian and member of the National Assembly, Conrad Dos Santos lived there and it was felt we could him help with the work of the Faith.

He took us around the village helping us to find a house to live in. One of the last houses he took us to was owned by a friend of his who moved back and forth between the United States and here. It was a big house, 4 bedrooms, lots of space, and a lovely view of the sea. We were chatting on the back porch and I asked if I could look around the house. Calixte Joseph, the owner, looked a little startled but said "Sure". Frank and I liked it a lot and as we were leaving, I said to Calixte, "We would like to rent your house but can't afford a large rent". He looked at me strangely and said, "I don't want to rent my house". Oops, it seems Conrad had taken us here to meet his friend, not as a possibility to rent his house.

Now I gulped, apologized but we then began to talk about the idea of our renting it as he was out of the country so much. We did come to an agreement and we stayed there for about two years.



It was in this house that we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary on 15 October 2000. It was a wonderful gathering; all our family and friends from St. Lucia came as well as Bella and Ashmeed Edo and Marlene Ramlal from Trinidad, and my sister Jill and niece Michele from the United States.

Frank and Conrad worked together every week contacting the Bahá'ís who were on our membership list. Everyone was cordial but did not attend the meetings they were invited to. At one time I visited four ladies with Conrad and invited them to study the Faith with us at our house. The day arrived as did the ladies. Conrad did not come. It was a matter of misunderstanding, Conrad thinking it was for ladies alone and the ladies really put off by Conrad not attending the meeting. This effectively stopped this gathering from happening again.

I was asked by the National Assembly to serve on the National Teaching Committee. I told them that I had many years experience on the National Institute Board in Trinidad I would prefer to serve on the Board in St. Lucia as well. This was accepted and I began to work with the first Board shown below in the photo.



L to R; Moses Auguste, Verdiana Louis, Urmie Persaud, Pat Paccassi

We had our first meeting, started to elect officers and with four members we were in a deadlock with two votes for me as chairman and two votes for me as secretary. We paused and Urmie Persaud asked, "Doesn't the secretary do most of the work?" I replied "Yes" and the next vote I

was elected secretary and Moses Auguste was chairman with Verdia Louis and Urmie as members. The Institute members did change but I stayed on as secretary until the Institute Board concept was changed when it was dissolved in 2009 with a new Caribbean Initiative Committee appointed and I was not on it.

The photo of another (2006) Institute Board:

L to R:

Seated; Pat Paccassi, Grace Leonce

Standing; Moses Auguste, Ada Leonce, Betty Antoine-Faucher



I was able to share the idea of residential institutes and the first



one was planned for July 2001. Once again as we lived in a big house, the nine day institute was held there. At this time there were not enough trained tutors on St. Lucia to carry out this institute. I contacted Bella Edoe from Trinidad asking her to come and help. There was also a young travel teacher, Vahid Elliq, from the United

States and he attended the institute as well. Their names are on the photo itself.

In 2001, the year following our return to St. Lucia, I was, once again, elected to the National Spiritual Assembly. This meant for me three hour traveling time to and from the National Assembly meetings.

As living in Trinidad was literally rent free for 10 years, we still had the bulk of the money left to Frank by first, his mother, and then after her death, his step-father. After a lot of discussion, we finally decided to build a house for ourselves in this area. We had always lived in wooden houses in St. Lucia. They were built in Green Heart lumber from Guyana. This is a very strong and pretty wood and hard enough to, as the local saying goes, "Break the teeth of termites".

We looked around for a builder, and decided on one whose price seemed more reasonable than others. Who we picked turned out to be a bad decision. He was a crook and ended up building only the outer frame of the house. He did buy much of what we needed for the inside such as, windows, etc, but left us with a useless signed contract and had spent all of the money but \$5000. And this was the monies earmarked for "...finished-house" matters.



This was the condition of the house that he left us with.

Later we found out that we were not the first he cheated. I compiled a list of the others, and built a case for fraud. The police came and said there probably wasn't anything they

could do. Later, I found out that his mother was a Police Matron at one of the nearby women's prisons. His father had done the same thing before him and had fled the country.

Years later, I heard that he also had fled to Trinidad, started the same scheme, got caught, and there he was sent to prison.

We did find another builder and was able to finish the house in 2003 and I still live here. There is a lovely view including the Caribbean sea, a large mango tree and swaying coconut trees. I happily meditate and say my prayers each morning enjoying the quiet and safety of the area of La Fargue, Choiseul in which we built our house. As the Rasta's say here "Jah provides".



One of the courses that I wanted to hold here that was not a Ruhi



course was one that our friend, Erica Toussaint, put together and held in Portland, Oregon. It was on the Bahá'í covenant and her description of the two day course and the response to it intrigued me. I wanted to hold it here. I invited a few of the more deepened Bahá'ís and it was held at the Bahá'í Centre in Castries. The idea was to

cover the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha and give some emphasis to the work and lives of the Hands of the Cause of God. To enhance this course, photos of all of the Hands were posted for the second day. We were surrounded by them and the effect was startling. We were looking at a group of people whose services to the Faith were unique.

At one point, we were talking about Charles Mason Remy and his claim to be the second Guardian. A young St. Lucian Bahá'í, Moses Auguste, stood up, threw his pencil down and exclaimed "Good God, couldn't the man read?"

This same course was also well received in Trinidad and Barbados

The Ruhi Institutes continued with both the longer residential and later I held a weekly one in my home.

This first photo is an early 9 day residential one held in Augier;



These later ones were held weekly at my house;



We had designed an Award Certificate of Participation listing the book completed and gathered the participants for Award Ceremonies.



These awards were really welcomed in this country. Recognition of efforts and accomplishments here are not the norm. I have had Bahá'ís years later ask for a duplicate certificate as the one they were given had become damaged.

I have included these several examples to show the extent of the efforts made on behalf of the Institute Process in St. Lucia. The

Core Activities were held and promoted in the whole island. It has been my great pleasure and honour to serve it.

Efforts were not only in St. Lucia. In 2005 the Continental Board of Counsellors held a Conference for the Caribbean in Antigua.



A Message from the Universal House of Justice to the conference outlined its purpose;

“..In presenting to you the features of the coming Five Year Plan, the subject of your deliberations in this conference, we will review the record of recent accomplishments of the Bahá’í world and indicate how current approaches, methods and instruments should be carried to this next stage.”

Representatives from all our islands attended, including the wider islands and area of the Caribbean. We met, shared, learned and returned to our countries determined to further the Institute process. I was especially happy to see Bella and Ashmeed Edoe from Trinidad. Bella came up to me and we hugged and hugged and hugged. It had been so long since we had seen one another. One of the friends watching later said “That was the longest hug I’ve ever seen.”

In 2006 when I was 78 years old I asked the National Assembly permission and blessing to retire from service at the National

Spiritual Assembly level. It was given and my life at that point underwent an unexpected dramatic change. I was no longer "in the loop" so to speak. We were living in an area a good distance from an active Bahá'í community and the area in which we live no longer seemed to be interested in hearing anything about the Bahá'í Faith. We were well treated here in La Fargue with concern and lots of help from those around us. They like us but are not interested in our religion.

The years had settled into a pattern of being Bahá'ís in the South West area of the island. Most of the other Bahá'ís lived in the north of the island, which by island standards, was a long distance from us. Visitors and Bahá'ís from there would come once in a while to visit, and everyone told us it was a "long drive". Time-wise, it took one and a half hours one way.

In 2010 we celebrated our 60th Wedding Anniversary. It was a big celebration.



Our friends and family came to share this moment with us. I always said of our time together that we were "happily" married all those years! I cannot imagine a better husband than Frank Paccassi.

This photo was taken at our 60th wedding anniversary right after we had said our Bahá'í vows. As we had become Bahá'ís way after we were married, we thought it would be nice to say the Bahá'í marriage vows on our anniversary with all our friends and family present.



We spent our time in La Fargue pretty much settled into a routine that now suited our advancing years. It was not strenuous but steady. We saw the Bahá'í friends as much as possible; told people about the Bahá'í Faith as much as possible, and took care of everyday chores as best we could. I always felt that all was well when we were together.

Then on the 5 December 2017 it all changed. I was sitting on the porch in the morning, saying my prayers as usual. But now in my view were several people chatting on the road in front of me. They had stopped and were showing no signs of moving. I became annoyed and decided to move inside to finish my prayers in peace.

Frank had made our yogurt breakfast drink as usual. He was eating at the dining room table which in our house is one open-room area of living, dining and kitchen. He was sitting right behind me at the table. I heard a noise that sounded like a rattle. I turned around and thought Frank looked strange. I asked him if he was OK. He didn't answer so I got up and went over to him. As I got there I caught him just as he started to fall out of his chair. I wasn't really alarmed then as he had fainted a few times before. I held him like that for 10 minutes, and now suspected he was gone. I stayed liked that for a half hour. He was gone. I then leaned way over and got a pillow from one of the chairs, placed it on the table and carefully laid his precious head on it. He was 89 years old.

He was buried 9 days later with a lovely Bahá'í program in a lovely area in La Tournay Cemetery. We had a "two" compartment tomb built and I shall be buried there as well. It seems only right as we always wanted to be together.

An email was sent to the Universal House of Justice informing them. They returned one calling him an "...illumined soul" as well as other endearing and heartwarming remarks. Others came as well from the International Teaching Centre and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States.

The following year on 3 June 2018 I had my 90th birthday party sharing with many friends and lots of food. Bella came from Trinidad for the weekend before bringing and sending presents for the day itself. One was a crown and when I asked her about it, she said "You are the queen for the day"! It's not every day you turn 90."



At the end of summer in 2018, it was nice to be asked to give the closing talk at the Youth Camp held near me at the Balenbouche Estate. The youth are lovely and I always enjoy being with them. They are so sincere and our future as well.

In looking back over the years I realize that so many things I have done and been part of could never have been accomplished were I not a Bahá'í. There is nothing in my background or training to qualify me to do what I have been able to do while serving the Faith. It has been a distinct honour and I am very grateful for the opportunities given to me. I am attaching an outline* of services I have been privileged to perform for the Faith.

As of now one of the Bahá'is, Barbara Loader-Stanislaus and one of her daughters, Eldie, stay with me five days a week. I am still strong enough to be by myself on the weekends. I still have pretty much the same routine. As my memory is still good I decided to finish these "recollections" which I had started years ago. I am not at all sure if they are of any value, but it gives me something to do

and perhaps a future historian will be happy I did them. One can only hope!

'Ya Baha'u'l-Abha'

“O Glory of the All-Glorious”

**PIONEERING Service for Pat Paccassi*

CURRICULUM VITAE OF BAHAI EXPERIENCE

NAME: Mrs. Patricia June Paccassi

NATIONALITY: North American

COUNTRY OF DOMICILE: St. Lucia, West Indies

LANGUAGE: English BIRTHDATE: 3 June 1928

Enrollment, Carmichael, California, March, 1964.

Pioneering from October 1965 to present (June 2019), in the Eastern Caribbean Islands residing in; Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Barbados, St. Vincent, Dominica, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and again to St. Lucia.

Served in most all aspects of Baha'i Committee structures.

Served on Local Spiritual Assemblies in St. Thomas, Barbados, St. Lucia, and Trinidad

Have been travel teaching to most English Speaking islands in the Eastern Caribbean.

Coordinated Mass Teaching Projects in Barbados, St. Vincent, Grenada and St. Lucia.

-Coordinated National Spiritual Assemblies responsibilities for the Regional Auxiliary Board Member Conference held in St. Lucia August 1984.

Served on National Spiritual Assemblies in the Eastern Caribbean for 25 years, with officer responsibilities of Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, and Chairman. I asked to be retired from this level of service in St. Lucia in 2006 at the age of 78.

Attended as a delegate to International Baha'i Conventions in 1973, 1978, 1983, and 2003

-Attended 100th Commemoration of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land as one of the 19 representatives from Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1972 in conjunction with my Pilgrimage I took a travel teaching trip around the world, to Uganda, Iran, India, Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Philippine Islands, Hong Kong, Japan, and Hawaii.

Travel Teaching with Meherangiz Munsiff in 1985 to Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Panama.

Coordinated and conducted first annual Mona Project for Counsellors, July and August, 1985 in Grenada.

Conducted monthly deepening Ruhi Institutes for a year after arriving in Trinidad.

-Served as Assistant to the Auxillary Board Member, Ganesh Ramsahai, for the area of Rio Claro, Trinidad.

-Appointed to first Board of Directors of the National Bahá'í Institute of Trinidad and Tobago serving as secretary.

Received training in Institute Process at Ruhi Institute in Cali, Columbia.

- Attended 100th Commemoration of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land as one of the 19 representatives from Trinidad and Tobago.
- Travelled to the Leeward, Windward and Virgin Islands headquarters, collecting historical information on the growth of the Faith in their respective areas. Both audio and video interviews of long time believers were made in each island. Additional material was gathered from the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States and Canada.
- Established web site putting the chronological listings of the Pioneers, Travel Teachers and Events to respective islands with photos, videos and stories on a Web site entitled "Bahá'í Faith in the Caribbean". The web address is bahaihistorycaribbean.info
- Appointed to Board of Directors of the National Bahá'í Institute Board of Directors of St. Lucia in 2000. Served as Secretary/treasurer until 2009 when the Boards were replaced by the Caribbean Initiative.
- Conducted weekend course on the Covenant in Trinidad, Barbados, and St. Lucia.

NonBahá'í involvement in St. Lucia: served as secretary on the St. Lucia National Council of Women's Voluntary Organizations.

Received acknowledgment of volunteer work as one of the "25 Outstanding Women in St. Lucia" they honoured at their 25th. Anniversary Awards Ceremony held at the Prime Ministers Official Residence in 2001.