

Neela's Bahá'í Class

Written and illustrated by Wendy Keenan

Farah's Story

Farah is the smallest, youngest and newest person in the Bahá'í class. She and her family have not been in this country for very long and are still trying hard to learn the language. Farah looks forward every week to going to her Bahá'í class because all the children are her friends and the teacher, Neela, is very patient with her. Neela explains things over and over again until Farah can understand.

In the country where Farah and her family used to live the government did not allow the Bahá'ís to go to Feasts or tell people about Bahá'u'lláh. And they could only say prayers secretly in their own homes. But

Neela tells her that in this country people are free to do all these things.

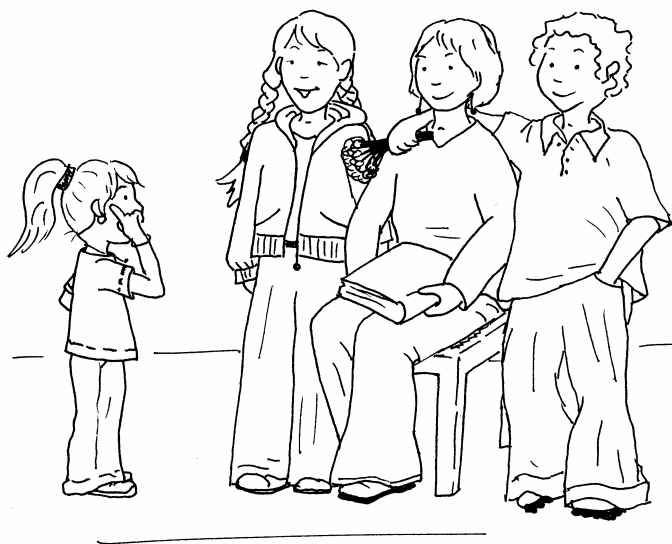
At the next 19-Day Feast, Farah listens as a letter is read from the Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly. It tells everyone how much money is needed for the Bahá'í Fund to buy a new Bahá'í Centre in Edinburgh. With the letter is a lovely story from a long time ago about a woman called Nora Crossley and her two children who lived in England.

The story says that Mrs Crossley worked hard scrubbing floors for other people, but she and her family were still very poor. When a letter came saying money was needed to build a Bahá'í Temple in the United States of America, Nora wanted to give something. But she had no money and nothing she could sell. Then she had the idea of cutting her lovely long red hair and selling that. From the day she was born until she was grown up she had probably never had her hair cut because that was common in the olden days. Sometimes, girls grew their hair so long they could sit on it. Everyone admired Nora Crossley's hair and said how beautiful it looked.



The lovely hair was sent to the Fund to be sold. One of the friends who saw it was very touched that Mrs Crossley had sacrificed her hair to help build the Temple. He decided to buy the hair himself, and to pay more than anyone else offered for it. He then made a beautiful picture with the hair, which he framed. When the Temple was built, the picture was put inside for everyone to see.

Farah loves this story and thinks about it all week. She wishes she has some money she can send to the National Spiritual Assembly for the new



Centre in Edinburgh. At the next children's class, she says she wishes there was a way to send some money for the Fund, and that she would not mind getting all her hair cut off like Nora. Neela says that is kind of her but nowadays people don't pay very much for hair and maybe if they all work together they may be able to

raise money in a different way.

They decide to have an Open Day at the Bahá'í Class to raise money for the Edinburgh Centre. They all get very excited by this and everyone has lots of ideas of things they can do, make and sell. They decide to have the Open Day in one month and to invite their families and Bahá'í friends from the communities nearby.

At each class, the children make lovely craft things to sell. One girl in the class called Lily shows them all how to make picture frames and decorate them with torn scraps of coloured paper and PVA glue. When they dry they look wonderful, like a shiny mosaic. A bigger boy called Gordon neatly copies out prayers. Some of these are put in the frames and others are stuck onto cards with some dried pressed flowers from Neela's garden. The children also decide to have a toy and book stall, sell cakes, sing some songs and act a short play about Nora Crossley as she had inspired their efforts.

When the Open Day finally arrives the children are very excited. Farah's Mum has made some special little cakes to sell; these were made from a recipe from the country she used to live in and they are delicious.

But Farah wants to also give something that she likes and belongs to her. She looks around the bedroom she shares with her family, but it is very bare because they have not been able to bring much with them. The only thing that Farah has that is truly hers (apart from her hair!) is a little rag doll her Mum's Aunty made for her. It is so beautiful, with a little soft round face, tiny black eyes, black wool hair and a pretty dress with petticoats underneath. Farah loves it because it smells of her old home.



She takes the rag doll carefully down from the shelf and wraps her in three plastic carrier bags to keep her warm and safe, then takes her to the Open Day.

The classroom looks wonderful. The chairs have been arranged so that they face towards the back of the class where the children have made a stage area. Tables are around the sides of the room displaying the art items the class has made, the cakes, and the books and toys. When Farah comes into the room she quietly goes over to the table with the toys and carefully unwraps her doll and places her among the things for sale. Neela sees her do this but does not say anything to Farah.

The Open Day is a great success. The families and friends drink tea and eat cakes while watching the play and concert. And every single book, toy and craft



item is sold, until every table is empty.

At the end of the concert Neela gets up and thanks everyone for coming to the Bahá'í Class Open Day. She says she is happy to tell them they have raised £100 towards the new Edinburgh Centre.

Farah is amazed they have made so much money and thinks that will surely be enough to pay for it all! She is also happy because Neela told her that she had been lucky enough

to buy a beautiful little rag doll, with a soft round face, tiny black eyes, black wool hair and a pretty dress with petticoats underneath, to add to her collection of dolls from around the world.

A few weeks later, just as she is getting ready to leave for school, Farah's Mum tells her the postman has brought her a letter from London. Farah is very



surprised because she has never had anything posted to her before. She opens the envelope very carefully and inside is a card with a picture of a pink flower on it. The card is from the Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is writing to thank her and all the other children in her Bahá'í class for their kindness in helping to raise money to buy the Edinburgh Centre.

As Farah cannot read English very well yet, she asks her Mum to help. Mum explains that there are also nine names on the card. All nine people on the National Assembly knew about the Bahá'í Class Open Day and were sending their love.

Farah carefully places the card on the shelf where her doll used to sit. At the next Bahá'í class she will show it to Neela and the other children and it can be pinned up on the notice board. She is very happy, and feels so lucky to have a National Spiritual Assembly who loves her.

