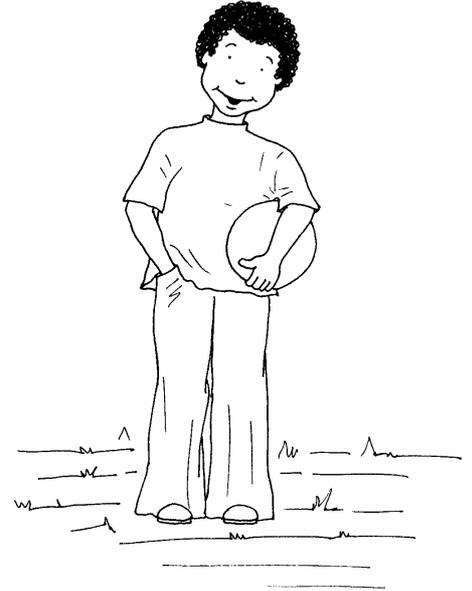


Neela's Bahá'í Class

Written and Illustrated by Wendy Keenan

Gordon's Story

Gordon is nine years old, but he is tall so people often think he is older. He is also strong and very fit. Gordon has two big loves in his life – the Bahá'í Faith and football! Gordon is good at football and is in his school team and a league team. The city football club have asked him to train with their junior team as well. Gordon trains and plays football every day of the week, except for Sunday mornings when he goes to his Bahá'í children's class.



In the Bahá'í class he has lots of friends; some are sporty like him, while others don't like team games at all. Neela, their teacher, tells the class a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá saying we should think of people as being like flowers of different varieties and colours in one big garden, and how beautiful that is. 'Abdu'l-Bahá called it "unity in diversity".

A garden full of the same coloured flowers would be quite boring, thinks Gordon, and asks Neela what "unity in diversity" means. She explains that although people may be different from one another, they can be united if they work together like one family or one team.

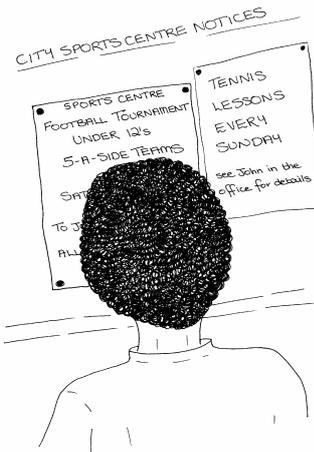
One day, a boy called Rudy, who is an older boy in one of Gordon's football teams, asks him:

"What is the Bahá'í Faith, and what do Baha'is believe?"

Gordon tries to explain to him but Rudy still looks puzzled. Gordon asks the boy if he would like to come to the Bahá'í Centre, or to the children's class, or to borrow a book, but the lad is not keen on any of these suggestions.

During the week Gordon wonders how he can answer Rudy's question about the Bahá'í Faith in a way he will find interesting. He decides to ask Neela and the other children in his class on Sunday and see if they have any good ideas. He also consults with his Mum and Dad as they drive him to a football practice at the Sports Centre.

While Gordon is training, his parents have coffee in the Sports Centre café. On the wall is a notice board with lots of posters and leaflets pinned on it. When Gordon is ready to go home his parents show him a poster which says there is to be an “Under 12, five-a-side Football Tournament” for new



teams. Gordon does not understand why his parents are showing him this poster, but then his Mum explains that the children’s class could become a team and compete in the tournament. Gordon laughs at this idea because he knows how hard he has to train, and he also knows that the others are not nearly as fit as he is. But he says he will think about it.

The next Sunday he tells Neela and the class about the possibility of making up a team for the tournament in the Sports Centre. One of the girls, called May, jumps up straight away and says it is a great idea and could she please be second-captain after Gordon? The class all laugh, but they like the idea and say it might be a way for some of Gordon’s football friends to get to meet them. They discuss what name they should call themselves and decide on “Team Spirit”.

Afterwards, Gordon is worried. He tries not to be, but he is worried he might be ashamed if his Bahá’í friends play badly, especially if any of his football friends are at the tournament. He tries to remember that



games are just for fun, not about judging who is the best footballer, but it isn’t easy.

Over the next two weeks, once the Bahá'í class has said prayers and listened to stories about the early Bahá'í believers, everyone goes out to the park to play football. Gordon teaches them the rules and one of the dads helps as a referee for their games.

Finally the day of the tournament arrives. The final five who have been chosen to be part of "Team Spirit" look like a proper team because one of the friends in the community has a shop, and she had given them all matching T-shirts with their names on the back. May wants to wear her T-shirt with her

name on the front so she can see it, but Gordon explains this was not what you did in football!

As the team goes into the Sports Centre they see Rudy and some other boys whom Gordon knows. They have also formed a new team for the tournament. He introduces all his friends to each other.

When the first game starts, "Team Spirit" scores two goals (both by Gordon). But unfortunately the team they are playing score twelve! "Team Spirit"

is knocked out in the first round. But they stay for the entire tournament and cheer all the other players and clap at all the goals.



At the prize-giving ceremony in the evening, the cup for the winning team goes to Rudy's team. The judge giving out the cup and medals says that he wishes he had more prizes because he and the other referees would have liked to have awarded a prize for the "Most Sporting, if not Sporty" team, and it would have gone to "Team Spirit"! He says they had been good, friendly competitors and very enthusiastic in their support for everyone else.

Rudy likes meeting Gordon's Bahá'í friends and asks if he can come to the next children's class and maybe help to train them when they play football afterwards.

When Gordon gets home that night he thinks about the day and is very happy. He is not disappointed that his team

didn't win. It had been good fun. There had definitely been unity in diversity in the team, and that was very powerful.

He can almost imagine 'Abdu'l-Bahá being there in the Sports Centre with them all and smiling.

