



The Albanian Experience

'An exhilarating and uplifting experience ... I could see this new burning love in their hearts'

THE PILOT ANNOUNCED we were about to land at Tirana. I looked out of the window expecting to see some kind of semblance of an airport. To my amazement I only saw fields of sheep, cows, and other barnyard animals. I saw a small road, which I soon found out was the runway! Well this was Albania which would be my home for the next three months.

The first thing I did was to set up a dance workshop for non-Bahá'í pre-adolescents. We started every session with prayers, and then would say Alláh-u-Abhá. In the beginning the kids would be giggling, or behaving inappropriately during the prayers. Eventually when I started talking about the Faith, and more Bahá'í youth attended, they could see how you are supposed to behave during a devotional. They soon learnt, and became shining examples. In fact when more recruits joined they would behave unacceptably during the prayers and it would be the old attendees that would tell the newcomers off for acting inappropriately.

Originally the dance workshop was two days a week for one hour. Eventually it became every day for seven hours with numbers rapidly increasing and the eagerness to know about the Faith intensifying. The children started visiting firesides, youth deepenings and 19-day feasts and now they are established within the Bahá'í community of Tirana.

I found out that the National Teaching Committee had been formed for about a year but still had not had their first meeting. Therefore I decided to ask for one. So the first meeting of the National Teaching Committee was held this summer, with the new objective of implementing dance workshops all over Albania through local youth committees. Within three months, three dance workshops had been set up. While I was there I was asked to be on both Organisational Teams (O-Teams) – one for the arts seminar. This was an intense week of talks on the importance of teaching and the responsibility that we have as Bahá'í youth, performances, and workshops designed to prepare the attendees for the teaching project that began immediately afterwards.

The second O-Team activity was the teaching project. We had decided on three goal towns – Fier, Krua and Korcha as focal points for taking the message of our beloved Cause to the people of Albania.

The O-Teams were a huge part of my life in Albania. I spent so much time in meetings – come to think of it, I must have had a meeting with almost every Bahá'í institution in Albania. Finally the arts seminar started. It had a very international and diverse feel to it. The Italian "One Family" dance workshop had arrived, along with Bahá'ís from England, the Czech Republic and various other nationalities. I found this one of the most exhausting weeks as I had about seven hours of meetings a day with both OTeams and the National Youth Committee. I also had to chair the seminar, patrol the corridors in the evening, and prepare for my own talks. Everyone woke up at 6 am because there was no water between 6.30 am until 3 pm every day.

After the arts seminar, myself and another O-Team representative had to travel to Pesa where the arts seminar was situated, to talk to the Italians who were to be travelling to Fier on the teaching project. We spent some time with them. The atmosphere was so bright I thoroughly enjoyed it, as it was the first time I could properly start mingling with people and my time was not tied up in meetings, or other activities.

On the way back, however, we had no transport because the van that was meant to wait for us had left. We decided to hitchhike. A car soon stopped over. They started speaking to me. Elton, one of the youth, explained that I couldn't speak Albanian, so the people started talking in English. They asked why I was in Albania. I told them that I was here for some Bahá'í service, and immediately the man said, "Oh...the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." My mouth dropped to the ground! We swapped numbers, later met up for a coffee and he is attending firesides now.

The teaching projects then started. I cannot comment much on the Fier project, as I was only there for one day, but this one day, was the most uplifting, inspiring, and fulfilling day of my whole Albanian experience. The "One Family" workshop had been asked to perform at Lucnia, a nearby small town. This town had no Bahá'ís living there, and I don't think it had even heard of the Faith.

I arrived in Lucnia with Bahá'ís from Tirana, one member of the National Spiritual Assembly, one member of the National Youth Committee, one member of the European Bahá'í Youth Council, and one member of the Local Assembly of Tirana. As soon as we got out of the car, we could feel that there was something very different about this place, and that the time was right to spread our beloved Cause.

As the members of the workshop performed, they attracted crowds of people to hear Bahá'u'lláh's Message and the gates of the town were opened to Bahá'u'lláh's Cause. I cannot put into words what was happening before my eyes. Bahá'ís who were not performing were networking through the crowds to teach.

Directly after the performance a women declared, and we announced a fireside that would take place the following weekend. The consolidation process of Lucnia began. A town which had never been open to the Faith now has three children's classes and two study circles implemented.

Danielle Pee

(You can read more of Danielle's experiences in Albania in a future issue of the Journal – Ed)

