

## SHÍRÍN DÁLVAND (1956–1983): “Sweetness” By Gail Radley

When Shírín Dálvand and two others stepped through the heavy door into the prison cell, the Bahá'í women greeted them. They were eager to get news from outside and hear their stories. “I was completely ready for my arrest,” Shírín, 25, told them.

Shírín explained that she had attended a meeting to help Bahá'í youth in their city, Shíráz, Iran. It was November 29, 1982. In recent years, life had grown more dangerous for Bahá'ís. By imprisoning, torturing, and killing active Bahá'ís, the government hoped to destroy the religion. Many Bahá'ís fled Iran. Shírín had gone to England with her parents, but returned for college. As things worsened, they begged her to return to England. “But I couldn't . . .” Shírín said. “The Bahá'ís desperately needed each other's support.” She had asked her family, “How can I leave when so many of my friends' lives are in danger?”

“Although everyone thought there was a good chance of getting arrested even as we sat in that meeting,” Shírín explained, “we decided to go ahead . . .”

Later that night, guards suddenly stormed into the house and arrested Bahá'ís, including Shírín. She was known for visiting the families of Bahá'í prisoners and



While in prison, Shírín told her friend and fellow prisoner, Olya Roohizadegan, “If you ever leave Iran and see my family, send my love to each and every one of them, and please, Olya, tell the world the whole story.”

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martyrs and for helping to plan activities for children and youth.

Throughout the long months in prison, Shírín made many friends, young and old, Bahá'í and Muslim. When Olya, another prisoner, cried because she missed her oldest son on his birthday, Shírín hugged her. “Never mind,” she said, “tomorrow is my birthday as well . . . Now I feel you are my mother too.”

At lunch the next day, Shírín told her friends, “Last year my mother sent me a beautiful nightgown . . . This year, I am in prison for my beloved Bahá'u'lláh.”

Because it was her birthday,

each prisoner gave some of her food to Shírín.

Food was poor in prison, and there was not enough of it, although everyone shared. Soon Shírín looked worn and ill. Her grandmother's gifts of fresh fruit could have helped keep Shírín healthy. Still, she put them in a basket for everyone, as they all did. It disappeared before Shírín got any, but she didn't complain.

“I could never tell who among the prisoners was her closest friend,” Olya wrote later, “because she talked to everyone in the same loving, sincere manner.”

Finally, Shírín's trial began. Investigators demanded she report on other Bahá'ís. She refused. Every day, up to 14 hours at a time, they questioned her. If she and the other Bahá'ís simply became Muslim, they could walk out of prison. Although her life was in danger, Shírín refused to turn away from Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. She refused during her trial and again at the gallows. On June 18, 1983, Shírín and nine other Bahá'í women were all hanged.

Shírín's given name was Sháhín, but since childhood, family and friends called her Shírín, meaning “sweetness.” No doubt the sweetness of her love touched her friends and helped keep them strong.