

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum: Noble Life of Service

Mary Maxwell loved exploring nature. Her mother wrote, "Everything that grows is dear and familiar to her . . . Most of all the animal world . . ." This passion began as she grew up in Montreal, Canada, and it stayed with her forever. She seldom left home without a pet, from snakes to parrots. She often said, "I get strength and vitality from animals."

In her youth, Mary was curious and adventurous, with a thirst for knowledge. She was often busy with Bahá'í activities, and began giving public talks in her teens.

World Traveler

In 1937, when Mary was 26, she married Shoghi Effendi, the head of the Bahá'í Faith at the time.* They lived at the Bahá'í World Center, Haifa (in what is now Israel).

Shoghi Effendi gave her the name Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum. "Amatu'l-Bahá" means "Handmaid of Glory," "Rúhiyyih" means "spirit," and "Khánum" is a respectful title, like "Lady."

Khánum helped Shoghi Effendi with his many letters to Bahá'ís all over the world. On the rare occasions they had time to relax, they enjoyed nature together, especially the mountains of Switzerland. Once, they drove all the way from South Africa to



Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum loved the outdoors from childhood (at age 4, left) and traveled widely in her teens (center) and as an adult, visiting 185 countries in her lifetime.

Egypt, stopping at natural sights like Victoria Falls.

In 1957, Shoghi Effendi died unexpectedly. Before his passing, Shoghi Effendi had suggested that his wife should travel around the world to encourage the Bahá'ís. And she did.

Over the next 35 years, Khánum visited 154 countries (a total of 185 in her lifetime)! She met heads of state, spoke at Bahá'í conferences, and attended the dedications of Bahá'í Temples. She especially loved to meet native people and enjoy their cultures, whether riding an elephant or learning a traditional dance.

On a six-month trip through the Amazon Basin, Khánum made a film about the people and their environmental concerns. She said, "The jungle is a wonderful place to

be and fills one's heart with peace." Reflecting on her travels to the tropics, she wrote, "I have learned . . . that the greatest single blessing on the planet is water."

Care for the Earth

Rúhiyyih Khánum was a founding supporter of The Arts for Nature, a project with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). After the arts program at the first event in 1988, she urged the audience to care for "our mother, the earth."

When Khánum passed away on January 19, 2000, the Universal House of Justice praised her steadfast work for the Bahá'í Faith. Memorial services were held in all the Bahá'í Houses of Worship to commemorate her life, "so noble . . . so rich in its dedicated, uninterrupted and selfless service . . ."