

PETER ADRIANCE



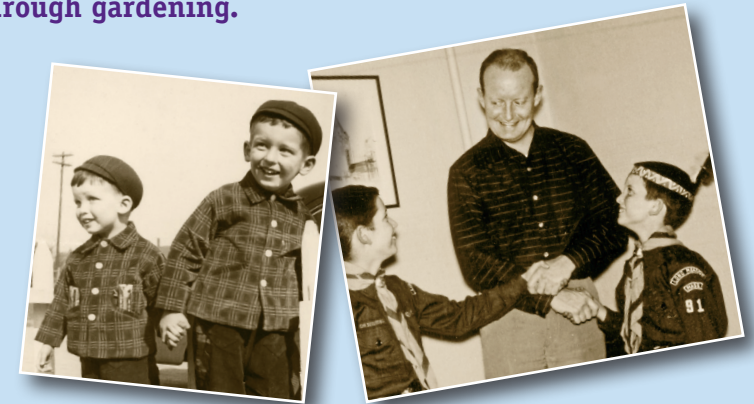
Saving the planet starts with love—a love for the natural world. Peter Adriance learned this as a kid, exploring the woods and fields in Massachusetts, U.S. When he grew up, his passion for nature grew with him. After college, Peter worked at two universities and then ran an advertising business. In 1990, he was hired by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.* Since then, he's been educating people about caring for our planet. He's traveled to Brazil, Indonesia, and several other countries, representing the Bahá'í community in efforts to solve environmental problems. He consults at United Nations conferences, Bahá'í schools, interfaith gatherings, and more. He says, "I love learning about the world, studying issues like climate change and . . . how the Bahá'í teachings can help address those challenges . . ." In 2009, he earned the Bridge Builders' Award from an interfaith group in Washington, D.C. Peter and his wife, Riva, live in Virginia, where he expresses his zest for nature through gardening.

Q. What's your favorite childhood memory?

My family . . . went to a very special place on Cape Cod . . . There were no telephones, no TV . . . These cabins were all nestled on top of 100-foot sand dunes looking out over the ocean . . . It was all sun and sand and food and rest and reading . . . Mother saved up quarters all year long and put them in a jar. And at the Cape, we would take those quarters and buy lobsters and have a big lobster dinner . . . That was always a lot of fun.

Q. How did you become interested in the environment?

Where I grew up . . . there was a path that went through the woods . . . There were all kinds of places that were really interesting. We could make forts . . . There was a swampy area where you could fish for tadpoles . . . and watch them grow into frogs . . . When I got . . . older, I went to camp up in Maine . . . That also exposed me a



Left: Peter (left), at age three with his brother, Ricky, in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. **Right:** Eight-year-old Peter (right) and Ricky are congratulated by their dad for earning Boy Scout merit badges.

lot to . . . hiking and fishing and canoeing and swimming . . . I used to think . . . How is it possible that we could dump our garbage in the ocean and the ocean would just digest it? They used to take big barges out into the ocean from New York and dump them in the ocean. It was a few years after that that we started to see trash on the shore . . .

Q. What are the most important things kids can do for the environment?

Educate their parents. That's one big thing . . . Try to live your life in a way that minimizes your impact on the natural world. There are so many ways to do that,

but I think kids . . . are becoming leaders to point us in a direction that's more sustainable . . . They can also set an example that inspires adults to action.



Q. Your title is NGO Liaison for the National Spiritual Assembly of the U.S. Tell us about your work.

NGO means Non-Governmental Organization . . . I'm a liaison . . . which means you link with other organizations in areas of common interest . . . A big area of common interest [is] the environment and the . . . challenge of sustainability—in other words, living on . . . our fair share of the planet's resources and leaving enough for future generations to prosper.

Q. What major changes do people everywhere need to make to solve environmental problems?

It's not the same for everybody around the world . . . We only have one planet to live on, and we can't live as if there's more than one planet. But in the [U.S.], we're living as if there were five planets with the amount of resources we're taking . . . The average European has a level equivalent to three planets. On the other end . . . some . . . are living [on] only a tenth of a planet's-worth of resources. So we have to . . . reduce consumption on the high end and increase it on the low end so that we're using our fair share proportionally of the earth's resources.

Q. What do you say to someone who doesn't think our actions can make a difference?

In the Bahá'í writings, there are many references to small things having the ability to . . . impact big things. In one of the prayers, it talks about [God] making a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas, an atom into lights and suns . . . If you consider . . . a river, it's just tiny molecules of water coming from many different places . . . Each molecule adds up eventually to an ocean.

Q. If you had one wish for our *Brilliant Star* readers, what would it be?

They become the best that they can [be] and contribute to the world . . . Kids can contribute a lot to the progress we're making on the environment, and I encourage them to be creative and share their ideas and thoughts, and not hesitate to make a contribution in their communities . . .



Top Left: Peter (right) talks to Ron Gould, who oversees Bahá'í properties in the U.S., about the "green" aspects of the new Visitors Center to be built by the House of Worship in Wilmette, IL.

Top Right: Peter works with people such as 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai.* **Bottom:** Peter and his family enjoy a nature-filled vacation to Ecuador in 2008.

Q. How does the future of our environment look to you?

Challenging, but hopeful, because I think that we're faced with immense challenges in almost every area—the increasing numbers of people on the planet and all the things that they need. There are many solutions being found to move us toward a more sustainable track. The big thing that we need in combination with the technology is that we need people that care, that both see the big picture and care to act on it, and then are taking action.

*See *Brilliant Star*, March/April 2009, page 11