

Dr. Brian Leopard



Fire! Imagine waking up in the middle of the night to find a big wooden cross on fire in your yard! Brian Leopard was about five years old when that happened. People in his all-white neighborhood wanted Brian's family to stop hosting race unity gatherings with African American friends, so they threatened them by burning the cross. But his parents weren't intimidated. They just kept going.

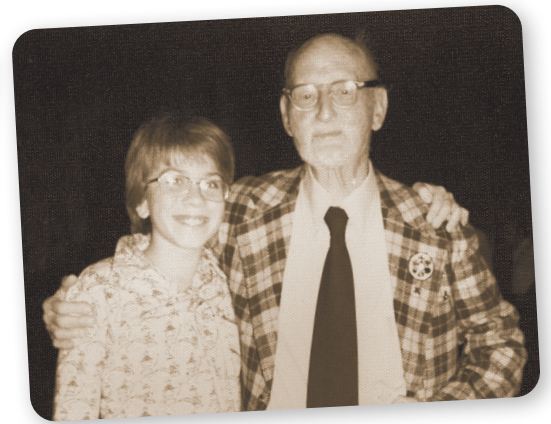
This experience fueled Brian's passion to work for social justice. Inspired by Bahá'í principles of peace, he got a bachelor's degree in international affairs at Princeton University. Later, he did human rights work for the Bahá'í International Community in New York, often focusing on supporting Bahá'ís in Iran who are persecuted for their faith. In 1989, he earned a degree from Yale Law School. Today, Brian teaches law at the University of Nebraska. He's written three books and travels the world speaking about the Bahá'í Faith and human rights. Brian and his wife, Jenina, live in Nebraska.

Q: What's your favorite childhood memory?

A: Playing in the fields near my apartment building in Amherst, Massachusetts . . . There were these wild raspberries that we would pick, and there was a swamp there too, with lots of frogs and little animals . . .

Q: What was the most challenging experience for you as a kid?

A: I got good grades in school, so [other kids] would taunt me . . . I really tried to reflect on how to respond as a Bahá'í, and I talked to my parents about it . . . I tried really hard to not let it bother me and to understand that this was their problem . . . Fortunately . . . I had a small circle of really good friends . . .



Left: At about age 10, Brian enjoyed helping his parents assemble *Child's Way* magazine. **Right:** Brian (about age 13) formed a friendship with Stanwood Cobb, an educator, author, and frequent speaker at Bahá'í conferences.

Q: Your parents, David and Mildred, launched *Child's Way* magazine, which became *Brilliant Star*. What inspired them?

A: They were very, very involved with Bahá'í children's education . . . They taught children's classes at Bahá'í summer schools . . . They created what I believe was the first album of Bahá'í children's songs . . . I think it all grew out of an effort to really develop engaging educational materials for Bahá'í children . . . that were also hands-on and involved lots of activities and projects . . .

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Brian and his family wore t-shirts with messages about social justice to a community picnic (left to right: son Brandon, wife Jenina, son Justin, and Justin's wife, Alexis).

Q: How did your parents produce *Child's Way*?

A: It was a very low-budget operation . . . My parents on an IBM Selectric typewriter would type up the text and . . . I would help cut out pieces of paper with the typewritten text, and we would glue it onto the bigger form paper to create the pages of the magazine.

Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* addresses Bahá'í consultation. What's important to know?

A: What's unique about Bahá'í consultation is that . . . we approach the whole process with the goal of finding a better understanding of the truth or the best thing to do . . . [not] as an opportunity to convince others that what we already think is the right way . . . Our goal is to . . . learn from others in a spirit and attitude of humility . . . It's so important that once a decision is reached, everybody try to implement it in a unified way . . .



Brian achieved his dream to teach both international law and tax law. In a contest (left), Brian's students voted for him to teach in a Luke Skywalker costume.



Q: What are some things kids can do to increase cooperation?

A: One thing . . . we can *all* do is reach out to people . . . of a different race or religion or nationality or ethnicity, and find some projects we can work on with them . . . Not only does that build cooperation, but it also helps break down prejudices and helps promote true unity . . . Those projects . . . might be helping a child with special needs . . . or if you see someone being bullied, you and some friends get together and say we're going to befriend that person . . . Bahá'í consultation relates directly to that, because one of the ways that cooperation breaks down is when we feel like we're not being heard or appreciated . . .

Q: We're celebrating *Brilliant Star's* 50th birthday. Why do kids need a magazine that encourages them to be world citizens?

A: There are so many forces in our society that are trying to pull people apart . . . I think a magazine like this reminds us of what our goals are as Bahá'ís—to try to achieve unity and heal all wounds based on prejudice. And promote consultation and cooperation . . . For me, working on all those projects, all the arts, all the crafts that are in the magazine and reading those inspiring stories . . . really made the Faith come alive for me as a child and really helped me internalize these Bahá'í values . . .