

## Direct teaching on the Navajo Reservation in the 1970's

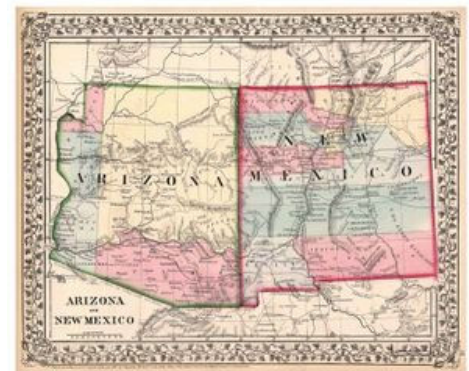
This is a true story which is dedicated to our youth and children and is written by a nameless author who would like to remain anonymous.

If I remember correctly, the year was 1975. In that year the secretary of the National Teaching Committee was Mr. John Conkling; Mr. George Dannells was working as staff of the National Teaching Committee helping Mr. Conkling, and Mr. John Cook was serving on the American Indian Teaching Committee. Cathy Cook was the secretary of the American Indian Teaching Committee, and some of you were not born yet. In 1970-1971 Mr. Cook was in charge of the "Office of Minorities" at the National Teaching Office, that was overseeing the work and guiding the following four committees: Deep South Committee, American Indian Teaching Committee, Spanish Teaching Committee, and Asian Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly.



Cathy and John Cook

I was in touch with George who was scheduling me to assist District Teaching Committees or groups that requested help in their direct teaching efforts. I was scheduled to go to the Indian territories of the Navajo Reservation in Window Rock, Navajo Nation, for a weekend.



It was at the end of autumn 1975, mostly all the leaves had fallen from the trees to nurture, cover, and protect mother earth from the cold of winter, leaving branches bare, stretched up to heaven in praise and thanksgiving, and winter was fast approaching. When I arrived on Friday afternoon at the Gallup, New Mexico, airport, tired and exhausted, John Cook picked me up, to transport me to the heart of the Navajo Nation at Window Rock on the next day. John said that the Gallup Spiritual Assembly, involved in teaching on the Reservation, wanted to meet with me. I asked him why, he said he did not know. We anxiously went to the Assembly meeting. The Assembly wanted to know why we wanted to try this kind of teaching there and if we could go and try it somewhere else, for this method was not fit for teaching the Indians. I mentioned to the Local Spiritual Assembly that I would do their bidding and would go back home on the next plane, but I was there at the request of the National Teaching Committee that had scheduled me for that event, therefore the Assembly really needed to take that matter up with them. The Assembly consulted and gave their blessing on the efforts if certain rules were followed, to which we all agreed, and we happily left the meeting, getting ready for our next day's journey.



Jim Stone, a good friend who had been serving the Indian friends for many years and had dedicated his life to it (his wife did also), came to me and said, "You do not mind if I do not participate and help you there, for I do not believe in direct teaching." I replied, "Jim, that would be fine, you do not have to go out to the field if you do not want to, but it would be helpful if you would be there with us." He said he would be there with us but only for arranging chairs and working in the kitchen and meeting room. We happily agreed.



On Saturday morning at dawn, John drove us to the reservation, it was dark and cloudy. Sitting in the car driving on those rugged roads, while seeing flakes of snow fall on the hood of car, I asked myself quietly what am I doing here? And why? Or, how can we drive in the muddy and snowy roads on the reservation? Or, would anybody else come or be there? While those different thoughts were crowding my mind, we arrived at the community center at Window Rock. No one was there yet; the room was cold and dark. The first thing to do was start the fire and warm up the place. At 8:30 registration started on time with two or three believers. We looked outside at the snow coming down, and started our prayers and meeting on schedule at 9:00 a.m. As eyes were closed and prayers were being said, believers started pouring in one by one, and at 9:30 we had about thirty devoted believers present, mostly youth, in that room.

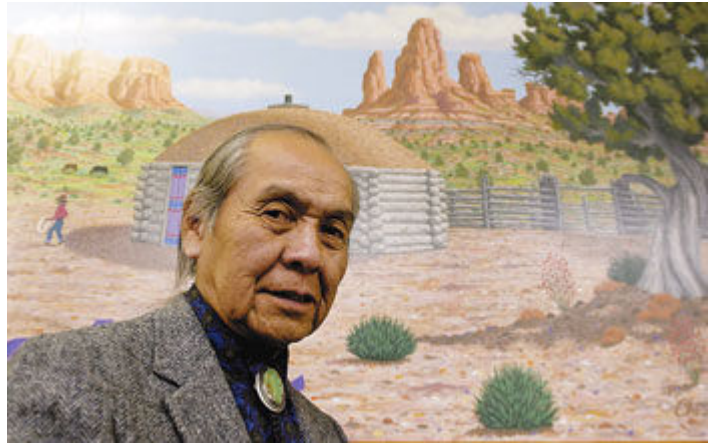


**The Battle of Fort Tabarsi.**  
Art work of Ivan Lloyd  
<http://www.bahaifaithart.com>

Snow was still falling, and stories of the Dawn-breakers were shared, specially the one of Shaykh Tabarsi, how in late November 1848 when Quddús told the tired, hungry, and thirsty friends inside that besieged fort, that, God willing, the next day it would pour down raining and snowing, and the friends would have all the water they needed. Indeed, the next day it rained and snowed, to such an extent that had not been seen even in winter, and all what Quddús said came true. The ammunition of the enemy was ruined, and the enemy retreated. Believers were able to store enough water to last for months.

Mention was then made that if it be the will of Bahá' u'lláh for the gathering in Window Rock, it would stop snowing, and the temperature would warm up and be dry enough to go out to the field in the afternoon. The briefing continued after lunch, and at about two o'clock when we were ready to go out, the sun was shining, and unbelievable warmth and feeling ruled in that atmosphere. It was indescribable.

When we all were getting ready to go to the field, I noticed some friends were a bit shy and were looking for an excuse not to go out. They were assured that they did not have to do anything at first, just to go and observe, and be there. So they left their fear behind and jumped into the ring. I believe that direct teaching is like learning how to swim, and at first, a person might be afraid of the water, but when a person gets in it, things start to look different. Teams of two and three were assigned to each area of the reservation, and many went in one car, also, different teams were dropped off at their assigned posts and were picked up at a certain time. We went out at 3:00 P.M. and came back at 5:00 P.M. Benjamin Kahn, Auxiliary Board member, Chester Kahn, member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, and John Cook, member of the American Indian Teaching Committee, were asked to go to the homes of influential leaders of the Navajo nation and have home visits with them and invite them to the meeting for that night, scheduled for 7:30 P.M. We all had our battle weapons, which were the love of Bahá'u'lláh, invitation fliers, the green book, enrollment cards, and "God's New Age" booklet (see Story of Mass Teaching in Texas in 1970's), and then we hit the road.



**Chester Kahn (picture taken from his art work)**

The results were astounding. As soon as we left the meeting room, it was as if the Concourse on High, the Holy Spirit, 'Abdu'l-Baha, even Bahá'u'lláh Himself, all congregated outside waiting for us. They were waiting for us in the field of service and teaching, as they had promised. You had to be there to feel or believe what you are reading. It was the same



feeling that we had on our pilgrimage as we were sitting next to His Holy Tomb in Bahji. We were neither conscious of time nor place; as if we were walking in a different world, we were feeling a glimmer of what those martyrs must have felt when they were marching to the field of their martyrdom.



We delivered and transmitted that spirit and love, Divine love, to the waiting masses of the beautiful and long-suffering Indians, who were truly waiting for it. I saw with my own eyes a 40-year old Indian man crying when we told him of the Message. He shared how his wife was murdered and how much he had suffered and that he felt this was that Most Great Spirit they have been promised and were waiting for. This indeed would become a book if we were to recount the stories that each participant shared. Let us see what happened when we got back to the meeting room.

It was about six p.m. and getting dark, and the clouds gathered again, as if God had put everything on a time clock for us. It started to rain again, but not hard. The public meeting room was downstairs, and you had to come down a flight of stairs to go to the meeting room. I was standing at the bottom of the stairs contemplating if anyone would come for the program in that rain and at night. While I was immersed in my thoughts, suddenly I saw that three or four Indian men were lifting a disabled old lady, who was in a wheelchair, down the stairs. I never thought they could be coming to the Bahá'í meeting, I thought they were lost, so in order to save them the struggle of coming down all those stairs (for only the Bahá'í meeting was scheduled there), I politely asked them what were they looking for and where did they want to go. They showed me their Bahá'í invitation flyer that Bahá'ís had taken to them; they asked if they were in the right place. I jumped into the ring of the helpers and said it surely was the right place, and helped the lady to the meeting room. One by one people poured in, young and old. By starting time we had over fifty non-Baha'ís there. The room was packed; you could hardly get around in that room.



I just want to take time here for two of the many stories. The first story is about Howard McKinley. Who was this Howard McKinley? He was a very dignified old man in his eighties. Chester and Ben Kahn had gone to his home and told him about the Faith and invited him to the meeting. After shaking hands with him, I learned that he was not only an

**Chester Kahn** old Indian Medicine man, who held a great station among the people, and now was one of the tribal leaders serving on the Indian Council, but I found him to be extremely funny and very likeable. He and quiet, kind, gentle Chester were sitting next to each other. I asked Chester if he shared with Mr. McKinley the story of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. All I got back was a warm smile. Then I knew that Mr. McKinley was told enough about the Faith to be approached for enrollment. I asked Mr. McKinley, "Do you believe that Bahá'u'lláh is true?" I did not get an answer right away. However, after a few minutes of silence, which seemed like ages to me, he broke the silence very calmly saying, "Truth is truth whether I believe it or not." As profound as that statement was, it was not a sufficient answer for me to bring out my enrollment card. The silence ruled for a while, and I asked him the same question. He had a bigger smile and gave the same answer. Then I told Mr. McKinley that I knew he believed this was true by his smile, but I needed his word because it was important for his people to know his beliefs. Then he realized the importance of the occasion and said, "I do not have my glasses with me to sign the card." We replied that was not an issue; therefore we read the card and held the card at a distance (since he was far-sighted) where he could see it. He did become a Baha'i. Seeing the smile of Chester was more precious than a pile of gold, for it is still with us. After signing the card, Mr. McKinley looked at me seriously and asked where the water was? I asked, "What water?" He said, "Aren't you going to baptize me now?" I did not know then of his sense of humor and depth of his faith, I thought he was serious. I started to explain, when suddenly both he and Chester started laughing, and then I got the point. Mr. McKinley said, "I have been soaked in so many waters in so many years that I did not need to take a bath anymore."



**Howard McKinley**  
Photo courtesy of  
**Chester Kahn**

After the enrollment, he looked at me and said, "These are my people, may I have a word with them." He took the microphone, and addressed his people by saying, "You all know me, I am Howard McKinley, your leader, but you do not know that I knew there exists in this world a truth, a spirit that I wanted to find and tell you about, before I die, I want you to know that now I am ready to die, for I found that truth, it is Bahá'u'lláh, and that spirit is the Most Great Spirit that we have been waiting for. I just joined His group and put my name under His banner, and I am finished now having fulfilled my duty toward you. For those of you, especially you young people, if you want, follow my example."

After that moving testimonial, people got in line to sign their cards. I wish you were there to see this amazing historic happening. Of course, we shared with them the entire Message and invited them to become Bahá'í. Among them was that old lady who could not move. I saw her in her wheelchair from afar and asked Ben to take a card to her and see what her feeling was? Ben returned with card unsigned, I asked Ben what happened. He said that she believes, but did not want to sign the card; all she did was raise her finger, as if she was pointing at something. I asked Ben to take the card back to her, but this time to put some ink on her finger and see what happens. This time Ben returned with tearful eyes and a marked enrollment card with fingerprints of our giant spiritual sister.

Some critics of direct teaching might say that the new enrollees did not know all about the Faith. That is correct; we have to understand that this was the beginning and by no means the end. We had to start our work of consolidation and deepening work. Some of you might ask how can people become Bahá'í like that or in a few minutes? Well, we do not have the answer to that question, you have to take that up with Bahá'u'lláh Who revealed:

"He is fully capable of revolutionizing the world through the power of a single Word."  
 Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 259

"Through the power of the words He hath uttered the whole of the human race can be illumined with the light of unity, and the remembrance of His Name is able to set on fire the hearts of all men, and burn away the veils that intervene between them and His glory."  
 Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 285

The story does not end here, but our time does. Just one more story, in memory of my friend Jim Stone. Remember him, my buddy. After everyone left, Jim got his map and broom in hand, arranging chairs, he said to me, "You can come here and do this anytime." I told



**American Indian Teaching Committee 1975**  
**L-R: Dolores Taken Alive, John Halsey, Cathy Cook (Sec'y), Dan Detender .**  
**Photo courtesy of Cathy Cook**

him to understand that this result is not due to one person, but all helped with the assistance from on High, as promised. At the same time, it was some of the fruits of all those years of his and his wife's and other Bahá'ís' hard work and the American Indian Bahá'í teaching Committee,



**American Indian Teaching Committee 1974**  
**L-R : Dan Detender, Cathy Cook (Sec'y), Pearl Schyler (non-member) Jerry Batlike.**  
**Photo courtesy of Cathy Cook**

who dedicated their lives to serving those long-suffering and blessed people, and thank God that nothing spoiled it up to that point. Baha'u'llah said, "He, verily, rewardeth beyond measure them that endure with patience" (Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries). It is like the



rain; all the ingredients like clouds, right barometric pressure, and temperature must be there for it to rain, otherwise clouds would float away. We put forth effort for His Beauty selflessly and at its own time this effort will bear fruits when all the ingredients are there.



I could not believe all those events that took place within the past twenty-four hours. Only the Power on high could accomplish that, certainly not we mortals. As mentioned, we were lucky to be there to pick the fruits of years of efforts of the lovers of Bahá'ú'lláh, and, as John Cook mentioned, Indians will respond greatly to direct teaching if it is done with love and honesty. Indians have great capacity to feel and read the spirit and sincerity of people.

Since then, Mr. Howard McKinley, our spiritual giant sister in the wheelchair, Jim Stone, and Benjamin Kahn have joined the forces on high; may they continue to progress in the worlds of God. I heard that Mr. McKinley was faithful and supportive to the Faith to the end of his life. Benjamin Kahn died at the age of 47 from a heart attack. John and Cathy Cook live in Arizona, John Conkling lives in Austin, Texas, and George Dannells lives in the State of Washington. May they all have a blessed life.

Article written in 2007



**Howard McKinley and Nellie Terry  
At Fort Defiance-Navajo Nation  
Photo courtesy of Chester Kahn**



**Here are a few pictures of the friends; all these pictures are courtesy of Cathy Cook.**



**Navajo Children's Class**



**Dancers at the Council Fire in the 1970's**



**Walter Taken Alive and Granddaughter in 1975**