

Loren Webb interviewing Laura Fairchild and Judy Holly

Faith Represented: Baha'i

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Participants: Loren Webb
Jesse Stocking
Laura Fairchild
Judy Holly

Webb: Welcome to the Washington County Historical Society Oral History Program. Today we are on the campus of Utah Tech University. We are in the Community Education Channel studios. Here with us we are interviewing Judy Holly to my left, and Laura Fairchild of the Baha'i faith. To my right is Jesse Stocking with the Washington County Historical Society and also the Interfaith Council. So we want to welcome all of you here today. This will be our fourth interview. We are going to just start with questions for both of them. So what are your names and mention the day, month, and year of the recording session.

Fairchild: Today is Thursday, October 13, 2022.

Webb: Okay. Thank you.

Fairchild: My name is Laura.

Holly: I am Judy. Today is Thursday, October 13, 2022.

Webb: Okay. So where and when were each of you born?

Holly: I was born in St. George, Utah, in 1950.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: And I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1955.

Webb: Okay. And wh--, excuse me, what experiences did you have in public or private school that would help shape your character or help make you the kind of person that you would become?

Fairchild: I was raised at a Unitarian in the South Bay area of California, and growing up as a Unitarian I had the belief, the understanding, that wisdom comes from all sources, including all religions, and that definitely shaped my path forward.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: I have quite a varied background. My great-great-grandparents were part of the first 300 pioneers who came and settled St. George, and so the Mormon faith has been all the way down through my mother's side of the family. My grandmother came from Orderville. But my mother decided that she wouldn't, that she wasn't going to be LDS. So we were raised to be kind of open, to choose our own path. We lived here in St. George until about the first grade, and then we moved to Moab, and we were there for several years, and then we came back here, and then we went to Las Vegas. So in the schools, things were quite different, of course, here in St. George. Moab was very diverse. Of course the red sandstone is really in my blood. It's in my shoes, it's in my, the cells of my body, so, you know, I keep that with me.

Webb: Yes.

Holly: I became a Catholic in St. George. There was a bachelor who lived on the airport with us, and he started taking me to the church there. So that was my first experience with religion. As far as the schools go and how they shaped my life, it was a long time ago, but I did go on, because of my grandfather, with the gardening, I did go on and realize that my calling is to be outdoors working with plants. And so I became a horticulturist. But I went to UC Davis, and I think we will get into those later on.

Webb: Yes.

Holly: But that really shaped me, I think more my grand--, I think my grandparents might have shaped me more than my schools.

Webb: Okay. So you mentioned college, and so I just wanted to ask both of you if you've attended college, and if so, what was the name of the college or university that you attended, and what were the dates and the location of the school?

Fairchild: I went to San Diego State University, and I studied food science and nutrition there from 1973 to 1979.

Webb: Okay. Did you have a major or minor?

Fairchild: Just the major was Food Science and Nutrition.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: Yeah.

Webb: And Judy?

Holly: Well, we had—

Webb: Horticulture and—

Holly: Yeah, we had five children, and I didn't go back to school until I was in my thirties, and I started out at Portland Community College, and then I transferred to UC Davis, and I got a degree in International Agricultural Development with an Avian Science specialization. And then we moved to Maui, Hawaii, and I continued taking the courses there at the community college, anything that had to do with, you know, horticulture. So I have another thirty units in that. So that's me, I'm a horticulturist.

Webb: Okay. In your social life, whom did you marry, and when and where did you get married, and any children?

Fairchild: I married in 1989 to my sweetie, Brian, and we had two children in 1995. We started our family rather late, so we had twins when I was about 40, two weeks before I turned 40. And they're all grown up now and wonderful.

Webb: Okay, great.

Holly: And my family moved to Las Vegas in 1963. I was 13. And one block away was this young man who was a year and a half older than me that off and on we'd run into each other, and we got married in 1968. I was 18, he was 19, and he was a Catholic. I was a Catholic still at that time, and so we were married in the church there.

Webb: Okay. Occupation-wise, what were some of the full-time jobs or vocations that you did before becoming religious leaders of the Baha'i faith?

Fairchild: I worked my entire career in the medical device industry in the South Bay in California.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: Yeah. And we'll get into it soon, but there are no individual leaders in the Baha'i faith.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: Yeah, yeah.

Holly: My mother became a Baha'i when I was 16 in Las Vegas, and then when my son was about 2, my husband didn't really want to be with the Catholic Church any more, and so I had to start looking. So I started searching different religions, and of course my mom was there with the Baha'i books, and then I studied with the Jehovah's Witnesses, and I looked at all the different religions, and I became a Baha'i in 1974.

Webb: Okay, that was going to be my next question—when did you become members of the Baha'i faith?

Fairchild: And for me it was 1997, and I basically told people I was looking for a spiritual home for our children because I felt it was important for them to have a spiritual education, and lo and behold, it was really for my own heart. I really needed something spiritual and based in a higher power at that point in time. And so I searched, also, and I looked at Buddhism and Christianity, and I ended up with the Baha'i faith in 1997.

Webb: Okay. And why did you, why did you join the Baha'i faith?

Holly: Same thing, because I was studying with all of the different ones. I was studying the Bible just with the Jehovah's Witnesses so that I would know the Bible because Catholicism doesn't really give you that. And I read from the different, you know, the Quran, the Bhagavata, the Bible, the Baha'i books from my mother. And there was a point when all of a sudden I went, oh, Baha'ullah is who he says he is. And that was it.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: Yeah—

Webb: Okay. So how, let's see, where was the church first located, and did you ever start at another location and then move to its present location, or has it always been at the same location since it's been organized here in St. George or somewhere here in Washington County?

Fairchild: Can I take that?

Holly: Sure.

Fairchild: So the Baha'i community here is a very small community, and we don't have enough people or enough funds at this point in time to have a physical location. For that reason, we meet in each other's homes.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Fairchild: And that is commonly done around the world where there are smaller communities. Where there are large, well established communities, there will be something called a Baha'i Center, and that's where the activities happen.

Webb: So if, if there was one particular headquarters in Washington County, where would that be, for the Baha'i faith?

Fairchild: St. George.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: Yeah.

Fairchild: The City of St. George.

Webb: Okay, the City of St. George. Okay.

Holly: Yeah. We have our first local spiritual assembly. You have to have at least nine adult members in a jurisdiction to elect a local spiritual assembly. And so our first local spiritual assembly was elected, what, three years ago?

Fairchild: Yeah.

Holly: And, which is another reason why I came back to St. George, because I was still living, I was in Las Vegas at the time. And so I came back to help establish that first local spiritual assembly.

Webb: Okay. So how would you characterize yourselves, when you say that there are no leaders, and yet you're here with us today representing the Baha'i faith. How would you represent yourselves as—

Holly: Members.

Webb: Any titles, or just members?

Fairchild: Members.

Holly: Members.

Webb: Members, okay.

Holly: If you're on the local spiritual assembly, we do elect officers. So we have a chairman, a vice-chair, a secretary, and a treasurer.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: Currently Laura is the treasurer, and I am the vice-chairman.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: But every year we have a new election from the community, and we re-elect officers.

Webb: Okay. How many members are there of your faith in Washington County?

Holly: Washington County.

Fairchild: I'm going to guess around 25.

Holly: Yeah.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: And in all of Utah there is just under a thousand.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: Adults.

Webb: In all of Utah. Okay.

Fairchild: Yeah, yeah.

Webb: How and when and where was the Baha'i faith organized?

Fairchild: You've got this one, Judy.

Holly: Okay. The followers, we're the followers of Baha'ullah, which means the glory of god. He declared his mission in 1862, '62, '63, in Iran. Actually, he'd been persecuted, okay, I'll start with the Bab; 1844 was the Bab, which means the gate. That's a title. And he came to, in Iran, he was there, you know, speaking to Islamic rulers and anybody, saying that the time of the manifestation, the next manifestation, is near. He was persecuted and martyred, along with 20,000 other Babis because the Islamic clergy at the time, of course, didn't want anybody to come and say, you know, take away their power. And Baha'ullah became a Babi at first, and then he took the title of Baha'ullah. And when he declared he was leaving—

Fairchild: Baghdad.

Holly: Baghdad, I was thinking Ashkhabad [Ashgabat]. He was leaving Baghdad at the time, and he said, "I'm the one the Bab foretold."

Fairchild: He wasn't leaving because he wanted to. He was leaving because the government was persecuting him. It was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time.

Webb: Um-hum.

Fairchild: And as you can imagine, for the Islamic Mullahs to be told that there's no need any more for any clergy, that didn't go over well with them. And so they persecuted him, and his family was first exiled from Iran to Baghdad, and then from Baghdad to Adrianople, Adrianople to Constantinople, and ultimately to Akko, which is in northern Israel.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: So the center of our world religion, because it is a world religion, is in Haifa, Israel.

Webb: Right.

Holly: On Mount Carmel.

Webb: Okay. Right. Are there something like nine manifestations of what is, Baha'ullah—

Holly: Baha'ullah.

Webb: Baha'ullah, right.

Holly: Um, well, we consider Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, Krishna, all manifestations of God that they brought God's message, or they reflected God's message for that day in that particular time.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: And Baha'ullah brought to unify the whole world, so it's a little different; it's more broad now.

Webb: Okay. What sacred writings does your church subscribe to?

Holly: The writings of the Bab and Baha'ullah.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: And then we also have—

Webb: And what, what are they called? Or just his writings?

Holly: Just the writings.

Webb: No title or anything like that?

Holly: Well, we have titles of the—

Webb: Like a tablet or—

Holly: Book. There're different tablets and things.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: The Kitab-I Aqdas, which means the Book of Laws, is considered the most important one of Baha'ullah because that's the laws for the next thousand years' future.

Webb: Okay. So your headquarters, of course, is the, in Haifa, Israel, and it's called the Universal House of Justice?

Holly: Yes.

Webb: Correct?

Holly: Yes.

Webb: Okay. So how is, and here's this question again, how is the leadership of the church structured?

Holly: We have our local spiritual assemblies, and the local spiritual assemblies vote on, or the community votes on a delegate, which we just did this last week, who goes and elects our National Spiritual Assembly. And then the national spiritual assemblies around the world meet in Haifa and elect the nine members of the Universal House of Justice.

Webb: Okay, so it's a nine-member—

Holly: It's 9-9-9-9, yeah.

Webb: Okay. Is that all male?

Holly: Only the Universal House of Justice.

Webb: Okay, and why is that? Why not any females?

Holly: We—

Fairchild: Abdul-Baha said that it will become as clear as the mid-day sun.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: Right now I know that is a stumbling block for some people. Personally, I understand it. I did serve in Israel for nine years underneath the Universal House of Justice as a horticulturist in their gardens. And we also have another body, world body, which is the international teaching center.

Webb: Um-hmm.

Holly: And those are the counselors which come from all the different countries and then the auxiliary board members which come from all the different countries. So there's like two wings, in a way. The Universal House of Justice is the final word, but they get

advisement from the International Teaching Center and from all of the people around the world.

Webb: And where is that located?

Holly: That's all in Haifa on the—

Webb: Oh, [unclear words], okay, okay.

Holly: On that Mount Carmel. Yeah, we have what we call an Arc of buildings there, which includes the Archives Building which has the original writings and other memorabilia, very historical. We have the International Teaching Center, the Universal House of Justice, and do we have another building up there?

Webb: So are these part-time or full-time positions or non-paid positions?

Holly: Non-paid, volunteer, basically. Non-paid; once you're elected, you serve, no pay.

Webb: Okay, okay.

Holly: In Haifa, it's, you're provided with a home and food and basic, a very basic stipend, including the Universal House of Justice members. They don't live much different than the rest of the volunteers there.

Webb: Okay. And so you're doing a lot of, you do, what you're doing now is volunteer, is that correct?

Holly: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Webb: Okay. So do you have any other jobs or occupations that you, you know, spend your time with, as well? Because you know, sometimes people are part-time—

Holly: Right.

Webb: Like in the Protestant faith there are, they have part-time pastors and they go out and do another job to—

Holly: Well, in really large communities they will sometimes have an assistant to the secretary, or, you know, or they have, like in Las Vegas they have a Baha'i Center.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: And so they have an assistant that has a paid position that basically oversees the center and assists the assembly. But yeah, I just had my own income from what I did, and then now I'm retired, so—

Webb: Okay. Are there any physical boundaries for your spiritual assemblies like here in Washington County? Is it, is it by the—

Fairchild: Yeah, so the City of St. George has at least nine adult Baha'is in it that can form that local spiritual assembly.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: And Washington City would have its own community.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Fairchild: And Santa Clara would have its own community. Ivins would have its own community, ultimately.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: We all get together, and we share just the same as if it was all one community because at this point in time, it is.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: Yeah.

Webb: Do you have a regular amount of visitors from St. George who attend your services?

Holly: Not regular, but we do, we do have people, and one of the things that happens because we're the first Local Spiritual Assembly for Southern Utah, we have five counties in our area teaching committee, and we have like scattered people, like we have people over in Kanab, we have people in Ivins, we have people in—

Fairchild: Cedar City.

Holly: Almost every one of the different counties, there's like one or two. So it's very small numbers, but because we have the main activities here, they're invited to everything that we do.

Webb: Okay. Are people of other faiths welcome to your congregation?

Holly: Yeah.

Webb: To your assemblies? Okay.

Holly: Not an assembly meeting, but yeah. We have devotionals, we have what we call Feast, which would be similar to like a church Sunday morning, but we do it every 19 days.

And we have devotionals, and we have deepenings, and we have study classes, and so we have a lot of things that anyone is welcome to attend.

Webb: Okay. During this time have you been asked by representatives of other organizations such as clubs, other faiths, or government bodies to serve in any community capacities?

Holly: Yeah.

Fairchild: Well, yeah, yeah, definitely. And I volunteered my services to be the representative of the Baha'i faith on the Interfaith Council.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: And that was just something I felt strongly about, and I said, "Hey, can I go do that?" And they said, "Sure, go for it." And here we are.

Webb: How did you become affiliated with the St. George Interfaith Council?

Fairchild: I went online and found out about them, and I found their secretary, Tim Martin, and I said, "I would like to represent the Baha'i faith at the Interfaith Council," and he said, "Okay, come on along."

Webb: Okay, great.

That's how it happened.

Webb: So what experiences, if any, could you relate to us that have come out of your membership with the Council? Anything that stands out?

Fairchild: Oh, it's fabulous because the Interfaith Council is all about sharing city and county resources and state and federal resources, as well, so that various clergy have resources for people who are suffering with depression or alcoholism or mental health issues or how can we help with one aspect or another of community life. Also, when the new temple in Cedar City was opened, the Interfaith Council was invited for a VIP tour, and, boy, I tell you, that was really fascinating, and people just wanted to answer our questions, and we asked lots of questions—

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: And learned a lot from that. I've really learned a lot from that, and getting to know people from the other churches in the area has been fabulous.

Webb: Okay.

Fairchild: Yeah.

Webb: Let's see. Can you tell us how the Baha'i first came to Washington County and who the leaders, well, or—

Fairchild: Who the people were.

Webb: Who were the founders or originators in the County?

Holly: I don't really know who was here first.

Fairchild: I think Dean and Phoenix got here first.

Holly: No, no, no, no. Karen was here before then.

Fairchild: Oh, yeah, Karen in Washington City.

Holly: Karen was here.

Webb: Last name?

Holly: Frieden.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: I had to think for a minute, that old brain.

Fairchild: And she's been very active. She's invited friends and neighbors and associates to come to her home and just have elevated conversations, and all conversation is welcome, and then really good goodies afterwards.

Webb: Great.

Fairchild: And socializing.

Webb: About what year was this? Any, or—

Fairchild: Boy, gosh, I found her before, she's probably been here 15 years, anyway.

Holly: Yeah, before 2008, I think, because that's when we came back from Israel.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: I'm sure that there have been like single Baha'is that have maybe lived in this area before that. I don't have their names. I know my daughter was here for a while, her, my granddaughter was born in 2009, and she was, you know, so she was here for a

couple of years around that earlier time. But I don't really know the names of people before that.

Webb: That's okay. Are there any, do you have any spiritual stories, if any, about you or other members of your faith that you would mind sharing with us, about, you know, establishing this area or any experiences—

Holly: In southwest Utah?

Webb: Yes, in southwest Utah, any experiences or anything that stands out?

Holly: Hmm.

Fairchild: I just remember when I first became a Baha'i that a number of things just fell into place for me. You know, once I opened my heart and opened my heart to God and allowing God into my life that it was just like heavenly confirmations. And I'm sure there have been those for us, basically, opening up southwestern Utah that maybe passed our notice.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: For me, one of the things for coming back, because it's always kind of felt like home anyway, was my mom. Of course, once she had become a Baha'i, she didn't think anybody here in southwest Utah would ever listen. And so when Laura came to a meeting in Las Vegas and said they needed one more person to elect a first local spiritual assembly here, I was, "that's me!" For my mom, I'm here. So, yeah, I came back.

Webb: Okay. What goals do you have for the Baha'i faith in Washington County?

Fairchild: Well, ultimately, we'd love to increase our community involvement. We love to say prayers with people. We love to say prayers with people of any faith and every faith. And we just feel like sharing such prayers opens hearts and helps to build community. So what we really want to do is build community.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: And also, you know, helping people to develop themselves spiritually, to seek. It's not to say, oh, you know, here, you need to be a Baha'i. It's like where are you on your spiritual journey? Where are you on seeking the truth? Where are you on developing your spirit? And giving hope. We have a different view of the future. We, we believe that it's an ever-advancing civilization. We don't believe the world is going to end. Now a lot of us might die, I mean we've got Covid, we've got lots of things still coming and hitting us. But we have hope for the future, and we want people to have hope. You know, some of our main principles which you'll see there in the book, like the elimination of prejudice, the elimination of, you know, non-involvement in

politics, because it's disunifying. So unity is one of the main principles that Baha'ullah brought to the world. It's time for the whole world to be united.

Fairchild: There's also equality between women and men and harmony between science and religion. And so, yes, it's a very hopeful message for the future. There's great acknowledgement that we're going to go through very difficult times on our way to building a future where there is unity and equality, but we're on our way.

Webb: Okay. So when you look back over your lives, what are some lessons that you've learned and what advice would you like to share with others?

Holly: I think one thing that kind of was really good for me when I was going to UC Davis and getting my degree in sciences, was that science and religion agree. And I saw students in some of the science classes really struggling with accepting science and what they were being taught at home in their religion. For me, science just, it's a confirmation; it's constantly confirming my belief. And God is amazing. It's, we believe God is an unknowable essence, and all you have to do is look out in the universe, look down in the sea, look in all, you know, a microscope, and it, it's just amazing.

Webb: Yeah.

Holly: His creation is amazing.

Webb: Okay.

Holly: And we say *he* because what else would you say?

Webb: Yeah. Jesse, do you have any questions?

Stocking: Yeah, I have quite a few I've thought of.

Webb: Great. Let's hear them.

Stocking: I've really enjoyed getting to know Laura over the past few years since she came on board at the Interfaith Council, and I'm always fascinated to learn how other faiths are structured or oriented in contrast to mine. And so I always pay attention to how people in various prayers we do as groups, the International Day of Prayer breakfast that we used to do, and the Harmony event that you guys put on, and the Prayer Over the City, and so I wondered if you guys have a prescribed or an ideal or a preferred way that you open or close a prayer, in a certain name, like my faith, Christian, does?

Holly: No, we don't say *Amen*. Sometimes we will say *Abdul-Baha* or *Baha'allah* or whoever wrote the prayer, or the Bab, but no, there's no, it usually ends, the way they have written the prayers is they have ended them with praising the different attributes of God, the all-knowing, the all-wise, the, you know.

Stocking: Yeah. And I've heard so many different variations. I'm always listening for that with the different representatives of all the faiths at these prayers, and I think that's really fascinating. I did wonder how you felt about your Day of Service that you did at Solomon's Porch and wanted to ask if you would maybe just share a little bit about that, just touch on that briefly.

Holly: Um, yeah.

Stocking: Maybe what you liked about it.

Fairchild: Yeah. So one thing that's very strong in all the world religions is to be of service to others. And we were looking for an opportunity for us to go out and serve. And we knew that Solomon's Porch could use somebody, so we wanted to show up, and we did, and I thought it was fabulous. I really admire the service that Solomon's Porch does for the community. I admire the type of community that has been developed there. I admire the unity that was exemplified by the way people handled themselves and interacted with everybody who showed up.

Holly: Yeah, it was, it was a wonderful experience. And from that we did a couple of other little services for some of the people there that were in need. Our community was able to provide some shoes and pants for someone that needed them. Yeah, it, it was really fun. It was, we really enjoyed being there.

Fairchild: Uh-huh.

Holly: And I liked seeing, like she said, you know, what Solomon's Porch provides and to be able to pass that on, if we run into other people that are maybe in need.

Fairchild: Um-hmm.

Stocking: Well, I suppose that covers it for now. I can think of several, but---

Webb: Okay. So one other question, last question, then—is there anything that you feel important about your faith that we haven't asked you that you would like to share with the listeners out there?

Holly: Wow, I think we've covered quite a bit.

Fairchild: But if any of the listeners would like to follow up and get any more information, the best source is at Baha'i.org (B-a-h-a-i-.org).

Fairchild: Yeah.

Webb: Okay, all right. Well, thank you all for listening in for this series of interviews, and we really appreciate Laura Fairchild and Judy Holly coming to meet with us, and until next time, thank you.