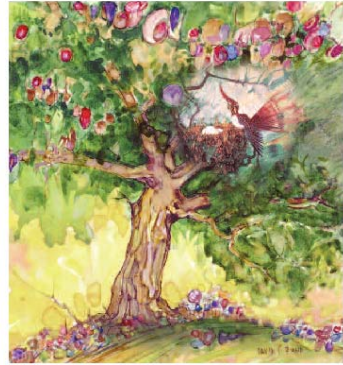


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume One



These stories are lovingly provided to download as a convenience to teachers or communities otherwise unable to acquire the book. Each book in this storybook series also includes an appendix with questions for discussion and reflection, a glossary of words and phrases used in the stories, a bibliography, and an index.

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Graphic Design by Pepper Peterson Oldziej

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 60091-2886
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Published 2001

04 03 02 01 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Illustrations: cover © 2001 David S. Ruhe; pp. 1–16 © 2001 Carla Trimble;
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Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education • Stories
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States


Bahá'í Publishing Trust
Wilmette, Illinois



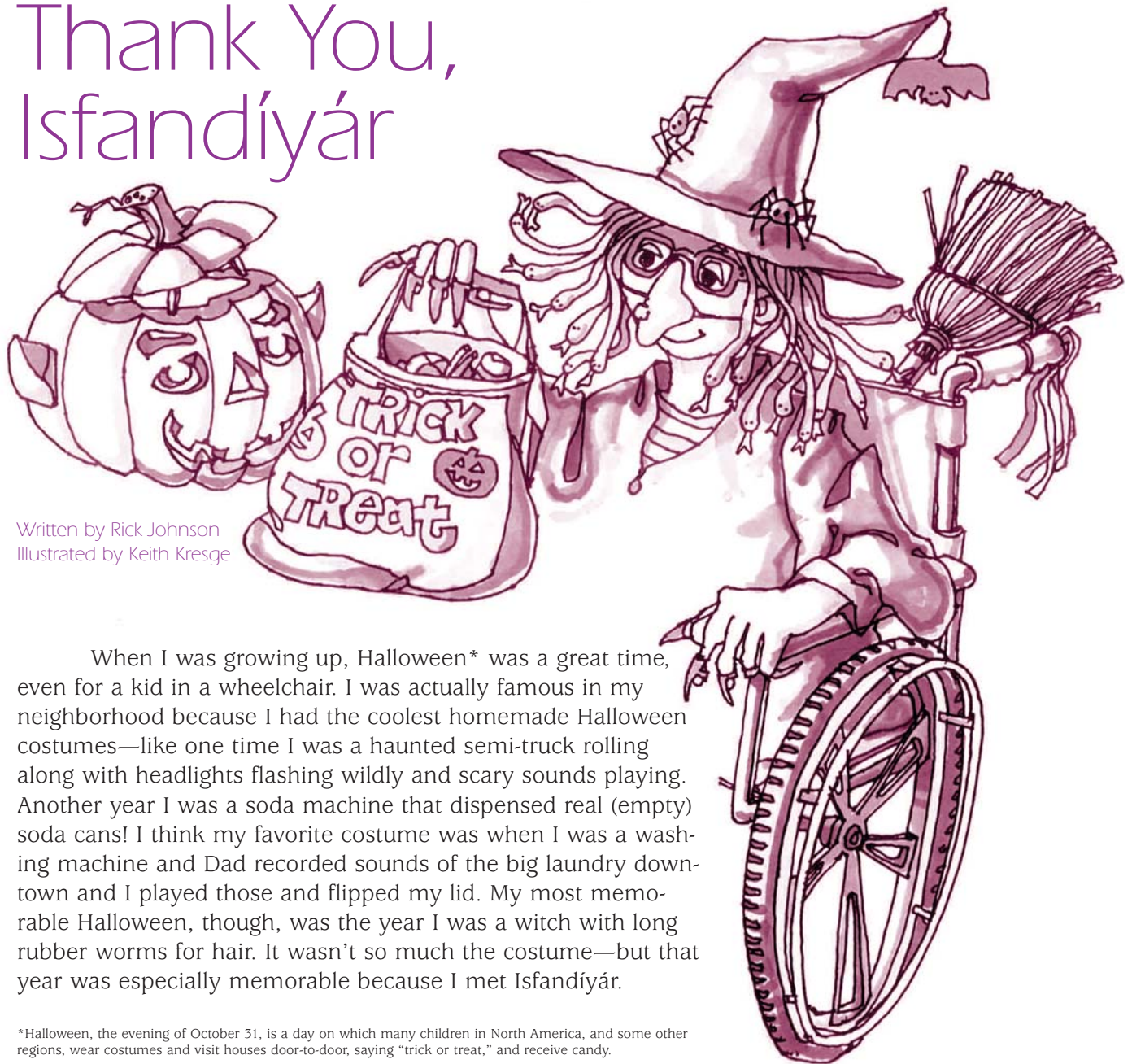
O CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust?
That no one should exalt himself over the other.
Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created.
Since We have created you all from one same substance
it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul,
to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth
and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being,
by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness
and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.
Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light!
Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit
of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

— Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic No. 68

Illustrated by Carrie Kneisler

Thank You, Isfandíyár



Written by Rick Johnson
Illustrated by Keith Kresge

When I was growing up, Halloween* was a great time, even for a kid in a wheelchair. I was actually famous in my neighborhood because I had the coolest homemade Halloween costumes—like one time I was a haunted semi-truck rolling along with headlights flashing wildly and scary sounds playing. Another year I was a soda machine that dispensed real (empty) soda cans! I think my favorite costume was when I was a washing machine and Dad recorded sounds of the big laundry downtown and I played those and flipped my lid. My most memorable Halloween, though, was the year I was a witch with long rubber worms for hair. It wasn't so much the costume—but that year was especially memorable because I met Isfandíyár.

*Halloween, the evening of October 31, is a day on which many children in North America, and some other regions, wear costumes and visit houses door-to-door, saying "trick or treat," and receive candy.



Isfandíyár—yes, that was his amazing name—was my first real friend, and he truly changed my life. But, I should slow down with the story because I’m getting ahead of myself.

In our neighborhood, I knew most of the people, and everything was fine. So, most years, I’d go out by myself and I’d roll up to the door or porch and shout “TRICK OR TREAT!” like any other kid. But the really memorable year, things didn’t go exactly like always. That year, I ran into some bullies stealing candy bags away from other kids. There were three of them, and they just stepped out of the dark when I was alone.

“Well, lookie here—a witch in a wheelchair! Ooooh, I am soooo scared.”

“Hey, witchie, if you’re so powerful, why don’t you heal yourself?”

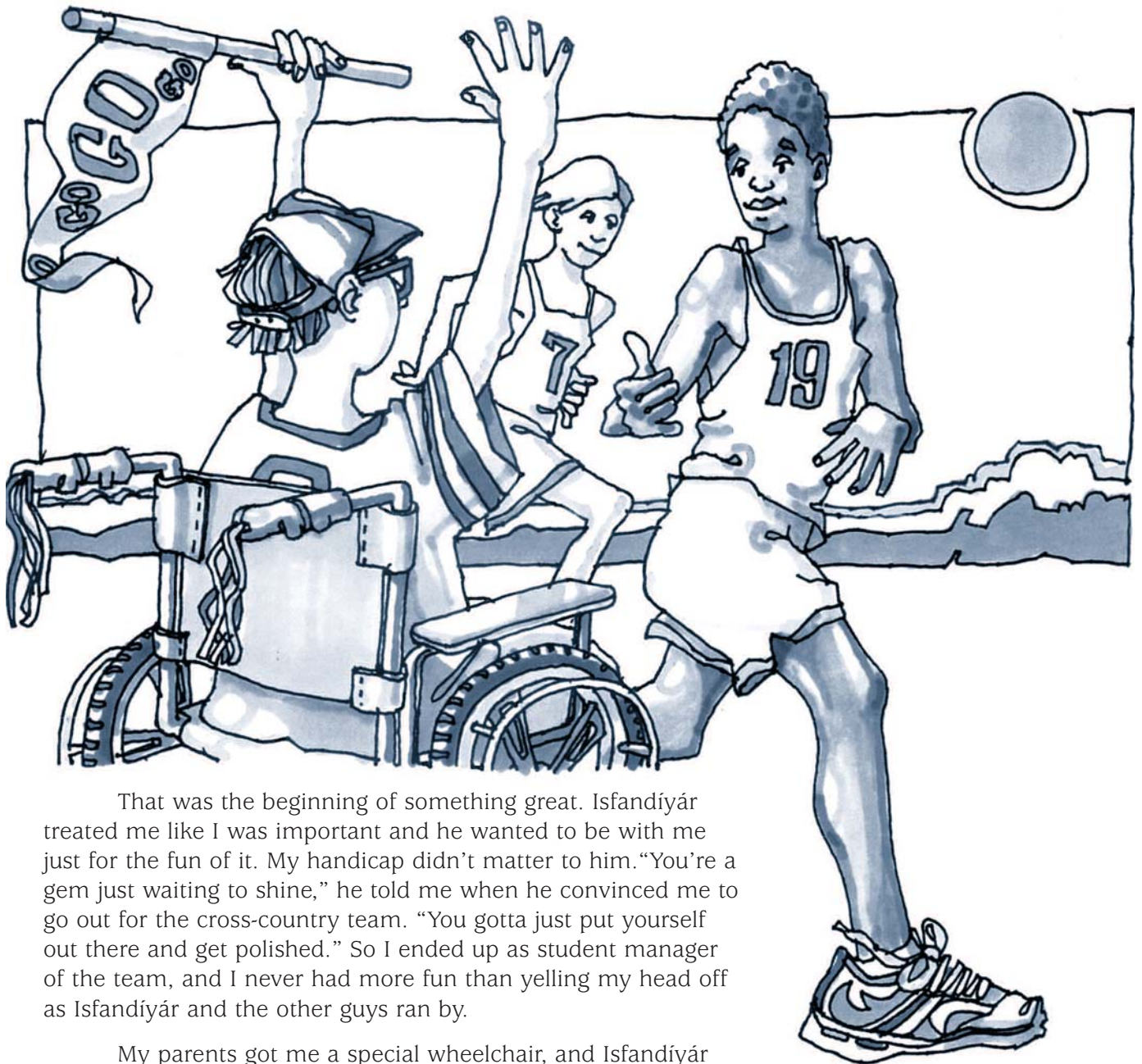
“Yeah, you must be a fake witch . . . let’s see if you can stop me from taking your candy!”

I was just starting to feel really scared when another voice yelled, “Leave him alone!” It sounded loud enough to hear across town, and those guys froze! “Leave him alone! Now!” The voice really wasn’t so much loud as determined and commanding. These cowardly bullies were not of a mind to argue even though this new person did not look bigger or older. Something in his voice and look just made you want to say, “Yes, sir!”

The bullies moved off, and I looked at this new person. I didn’t know his name, but I recognized him from school. “Thanks, I really appreciate what you did.”

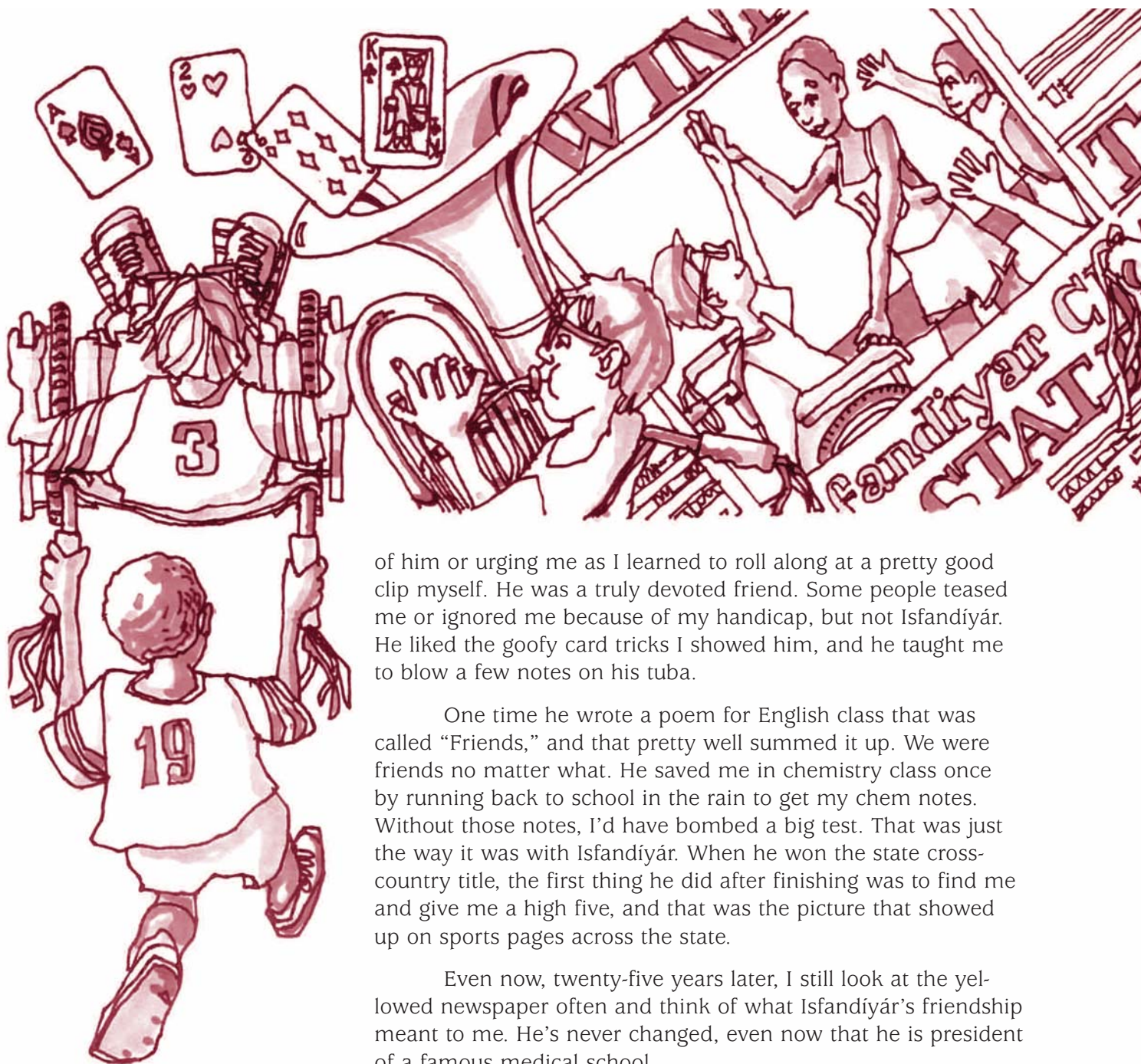
“No way I was going to let those guys get away with that,” he replied. “My parents taught me to take care of people. I’m new here—who’s got the best treats?”

“The next house is Gorman’s, and they do homemade candy apples . . . Come on, let’s go!”



That was the beginning of something great. Isfandíyár treated me like I was important and he wanted to be with me just for the fun of it. My handicap didn't matter to him. "You're a gem just waiting to shine," he told me when he convinced me to go out for the cross-country team. "You gotta just put yourself out there and get polished." So I ended up as student manager of the team, and I never had more fun than yelling my head off as Isfandíyár and the other guys ran by.

My parents got me a special wheelchair, and Isfandíyár often took me running with him, pushing my chair along ahead



of him or urging me as I learned to roll along at a pretty good clip myself. He was a truly devoted friend. Some people teased me or ignored me because of my handicap, but not Isfandíyár. He liked the goofy card tricks I showed him, and he taught me to blow a few notes on his tuba.

One time he wrote a poem for English class that was called “Friends,” and that pretty well summed it up. We were friends no matter what. He saved me in chemistry class once by running back to school in the rain to get my chem notes. Without those notes, I’d have bombed a big test. That was just the way it was with Isfandíyár. When he won the state cross-country title, the first thing he did after finishing was to find me and give me a high five, and that was the picture that showed up on sports pages across the state.

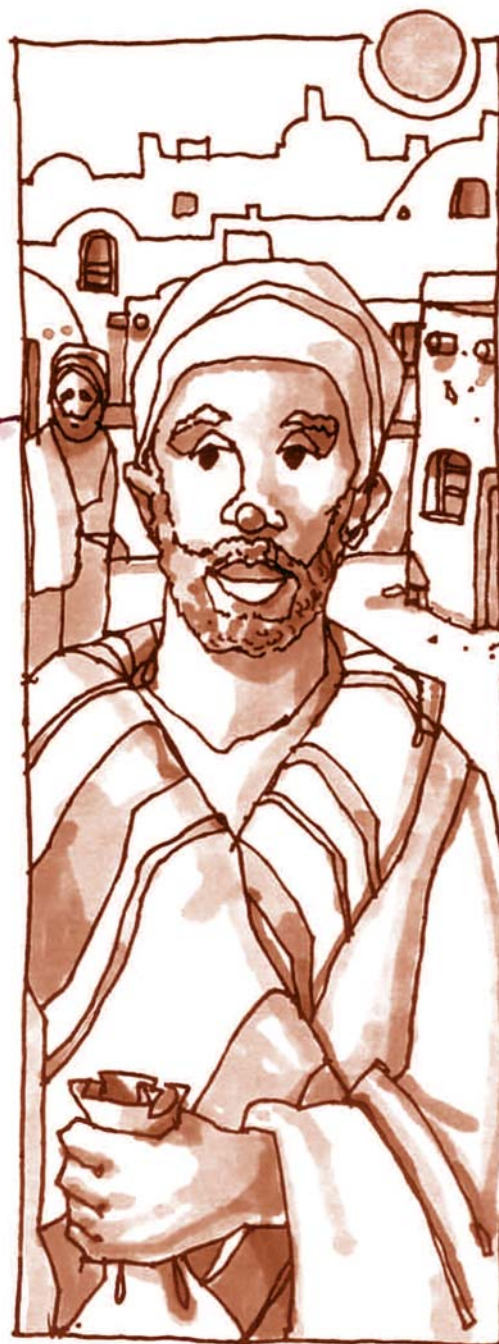
Even now, twenty-five years later, I still look at the yellowed newspaper often and think of what Isfandíyár’s friendship meant to me. He’s never changed, even now that he is president of a famous medical school.

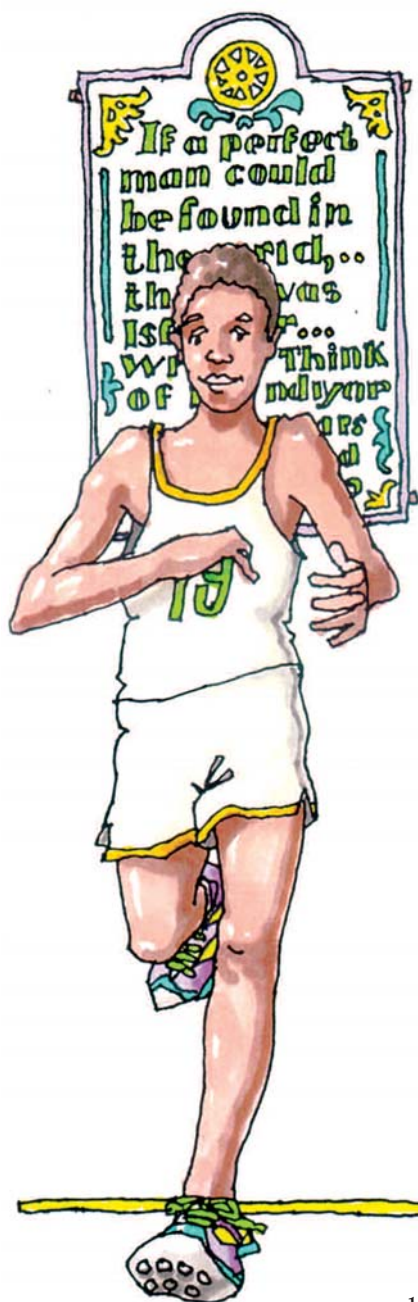


Isfandíyár was the first Bahá'í I ever knew, and he told me one day, as we sat in the shade after running, that his namesake was a hero of the Bahá'í Faith. "I'm named after an incredibly courageous Ethiopian who served in the household of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith," he said, "and I think he is one of the great heroes of my Faith."

"When Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned during some horrible persecutions of the Bahá'ís, His family was left with no one to take care of them. Enemies were looking for Isfandíyár in order to force him to betray other Bahá'ís. But despite the danger, he returned to the looted ruins of Bahá'u'lláh's house looking for Bahá'u'lláh's Family. 'Where are the children?' he asked. 'What has happened to their mother?' Through courageous, devoted searching, he was reunited with the family. Bahá'u'lláh's family was homeless and had no money or friends. Although a hundred police wanted to capture, torture, and kill him, Isfandíyár refused to hide and went boldly around the city attending to the family's needs and paying off debts left in Bahá'u'lláh's name after His imprisonment. He could not bear to see the family suffer or the good name of Bahá'u'lláh dishonored. Even when other unfaithful family members and servants fled, Isfandíyár remained loyal to Bahá'u'lláh."

"I can see some of those qualities in you, too," I said.





"I'm really proud of my name," he replied, "Isfandíyár loved the truth so much that nothing scared him. That's the way I want to be."

Even now, years later, I can see Isfandíyár sitting there under the tree, smiling as he talked. He made the most difficult things seem so natural that you just wanted to do them. It made me happy just to be around him.

"My mother made some needlework for me," Isfandíyár continued. "She put some words about Isfandíyár into needle-point and framed it for me. They're words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Son of Bahá'u'lláh: 'If a perfect man could be found in the world, that man was Isfandíyár . . . Whenever I think of Isfandíyár, I am moved to tears, although he passed away fifty years ago.'"

I saw that needlework many times as Isfandíyár and I went through high school together. It hung in his room over his bed, and those words just seemed to soak into him. It was wonderful to see how he strived to love and care about others as the earlier Isfandíyár had done.

I am now over forty years old myself and see my old friend only rarely, but I think of him often. He made doing new or difficult things seem natural. He made me feel like I could do things I never dreamed were in me. I guess that's why I just finished "running" my nineteenth marathon in my wheelchair and why I love Bahá'u'lláh so very much. Thank you, Isfandíyár, my noble friend. ★

