



Howard Edwin Chris Menking

March 29, 1925 - May 14, 2018

Howard Edwin Menking was born in 1925 of German-Lutheran parents in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His father was a tool and die maker and his mother was a homemaker. He entered the U.S. Navy Air Cadet program in 1943 and was assigned to the USS Vulcan AR5, serving in the Pacific during WWII as an Electronics Technician's Mate Petty Officer 2nd Class where he frequently repaired radar damaged in Kamakazi attacks. He was on the first U.S. ship to arrive in Hiroshima, Japan after the end of WWII, witnessing first hand the massive destruction associated with war. Later he would nostalgically recall exploring the mountains above Hiroshima where he was invited for tea by a loving Japanese family, a memory strangely juxtaposed with bearing witness to the horror of humanity's first use of an atomic weapon.

Upon returning home Howard began to settle in Indiana. He married a local beauty, JoAnne Lucille Kinsey, and started a career in sales and business ownership. Throughout his career he owned businesses in various industries, including typewriter sales, insurance and air conditioning.

After studying the Bahá'í Faith in 1949, under the tutelage of an early American Baha'i named Pauline Roth, Howard and his young bride accepted the tenets of what was then still an obscure eastern religion - a radical move for simple midwestern folk in the 1940's. He would later deny that the aforementioned experiences in Hiroshima had anything to do with accepting the unifying and peaceful message of the Baha'i Faith, but one has to wonder.

On the night JoAnne declared her belief in Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, they also agreed to move to São Paulo, Brazil to spread the message of the Baha'i Faith.

Due to various difficulties, they returned to the U.S. after only a year, vowing that they had had enough of international living. But when the then-leader of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, asked Baha'is to participate in a "Ten Year Crusade" that would take Baha'u'llah's message to countries where no Baha'is had ever stepped foot, Howard & JoAnne surprised even themselves and agreed to go abroad again. This time to a Portuguese penal colony, an archipelago off the coast of West Africa known as Cape Verde. Traveling by steamer, they arrived in Praia, Cape Verde, in 1954. With no one expecting them, it is difficult to imagine the emotions, courage and faith that accompanied such a bold move.

Not surprisingly, the young couple endured many hardships and soon became skeptical about their decision. The country was heavily Catholic and Howard struggled to earn a living. He frequently corresponded with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa, Israel, but was told to be steadfast and persevere, to remember that he and JoAnne were fulfilling a divine prophecy.

Then a blessing came their way. Howard met an exiled communist doctor from Angola that offered to examine JoAnne to see if perhaps he could help them with their difficulty in having children. To his surprise, JoAnne agreed to allow the doctor to perform a surgical procedure in a simple adobe room. What the procedure was remains a mystery, but nine months later a baby was born on Christmas Day, 1955. They named her Cristina Pauline Menking in honor of Christ and their "spiritual mother" Pauline Roth. Locals called her "nosa caboverdeana" and soon began to listen to the message of the Baha'i Faith.

Perhaps these strange Americans who had come to their islands, who lived amongst them on equal terms, and who had a baby born on Christmas that they named after Christ Himself, were not so bad after all. Many became Baha'is and in the spring of 1956 the first Local Spiritual Assembly was elected in Praia.

For their participation in the Ten Year Crusade, Howard and JoAnne both earned the accolade of "Knight of Baha'u'llah". Their names - along with 252 other Baha'is who settled a total of 121 new territories - were placed on a scroll under the threshold of the entrance to the shrine of Baha'u'llah in Acre, Israel.

In late 1956 the Menkings returned to the United States. The decades that followed were devoted to raising their three children. Clare Howard Menking, conceived in Cape Verde, was born in Clarksville, Tennessee in January of 1957. In February of 1964 Cornell Howard Menking was born in Dallas, Texas, where the Menkings had moved to be near their best friends from Indiana, Bob and Betty Hopkins, and to help strengthen the Baha'i community.

1988 would change the Menkings forever. JoAnne died of cancer and five months later Clare was killed in an automobile accident. Howard reconvened the surviving family in Cape Verde, including Cornell who was in the US Peace Corps in nearby Sierra Leone.

Once again Cape Verde grounded the family and gave them renewed purpose.

In 1990 Howard remarried Loraine Brown. They traveled the whole U.S. and then across Eastern Europe teaching people about the Baha'i Faith. Howard and Loraine separated in 2002.

Over the years, the institutions of the Baha'i Faith occasionally called on the Knights of Baha'u'llah to not rest on the laurels of their past accomplishments but to arise and inspire others to take heroic and audacious steps. To the very end, Howard took that exhortation to heart and inspired many with his energy and passion. Rich Pellegrino, who wrote an earlier draft of this biography, was over 20 years his junior and said he "could hardly keep up with him."

It is important to note that Howard was quite a character. As is often the case, extraordinary people can be extreme in many ways. He was no saint, and was the first to tell people this. He was hard on himself and very much regretted his mistakes. But this is perhaps, at least for this author, the greatest lesson we can learn from Howard. God works with imperfect instruments - and we are all imperfect. Christ Himself said let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Jesus' cast of characters is full of those who were reborn, people who constantly struggled to overcome their weaknesses and develop their spiritual capacities, or higher natures. After all, if we don't believe in our own higher natures how can we believe in that of others'? Howard understood this, which meant he loved and befriended people of all races and socioeconomic status; many saw this as eccentric. His eccentricity constantly challenged others to forgive him and focus instead on his incredibly strong dedication to a higher purpose. To say Howard found purpose in the Baha'i Faith is an understatement. He sincerely believed this religion and its administrative order to be the fulfillment of the Lord's Prayer - to establish the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven". He felt a sacred and urgent obligation to share this exciting news with as many people as possible, and did so constantly.

Throughout Howard's entire adult life, up until his very last breaths, he was always "going back to Cape Verde" - even though it was clearly impossible to those around him. He was permanently tied to the place that had given him such clear purpose, the place that had given him his family. For Howard, Cabo Verde was the the earthly manifestation of everything that was good in life, and everything he had done right in his life. Indeed, for Howard Cape Verde is the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

For this reason, Howard's family and friends are confident that this is where his soul rushed to as soon as it was freed from his fragile body.

Howard is preceded in death by:

Father and Mother, Edwin C. and Esther Menking (Zelt).

Brother, Earl Frederick Menking, and sister, Phyllis Eleanor/Dorothy Freeman (Menking)

Wife, JoAnne Lucille Menking (Kinsey).

Son, Clare Howard Menking.

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Comments



“ Howard, I'll never forget the time we met up in Hawaii while in the Navy. Wish we could have spent more time together. Carl Ahlersmeyer Jr I have some pictures of Howard and myself in Hawaii while in the Navy if anyone wants a copy.

Carl Ahlersmeyer - May 19, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ My heartfelt condolences to Howard's family during this difficult time. Death is truly an enemy of us all and I am so very sorry for you and your family. I hope this scripture can bring you some comfort during this time. 1 Corinthians 15:26 "And the

Beth Moore - May 16, 2018 at 12:00 AM