

Margaret Ariel Gallagher: Field Sergeant of the Western

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-07-06 — 1 clipping

Margaret Ariel Gallagher: Field Sergeant of
the Western Frontier

Excerpts from the lives of early believers

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Margaret Ariel Gallagher was born on July 10th, 1920 in Omaha, Nebraska. Her proud parents were Julius James Ellerman and Rhona May Marshall. She grew up in Denver, Colorado, the oldest of 7 children. While her mother and step-father were hard at work all day Margie raised her siblings and managed the household. After a difficult childhood, she left home at the age of 17 and headed for California. She married young and had her son James who was her pride and joy throughout her life. She divorced when he was a baby and went to work to support them. Margie was not afraid to try any job. She worked as both

a short order cook and an ambulance driver among other things.

Margie met and married John Joseph Gallagher, a handsome naval officer, in the 1940's. As a navy family the Gallaghers traveled around the United States for some time before settling in Hayward, California in 1950. Margie and Joe were a dashing couple and Joe loved Jimmy as his own child. They settled into a happy family life together.

In 1954 Margie was introduced to the Bahá'í Faith. She soon declared her belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the most recent of God's messengers to humanity

and dedicated her life to sharing her new religion with others. Her energetic service to the Faith combined with her extensive knowledge of its teachings led to her appointment, in 1969, as an Auxiliary Board Member for the western states.

As a member of this Bahá'í institution her responsibilities included:

California,

Oregon, Washington State, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada.

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When Margie was on the road (in her lime-green Tornado that cruised at 80 mph.) she taught classes at summer schools and conferences and met

with countless Bahá'í groups. Everywhere she went was like a homecoming. She was

lavished with love and affection wherever she went.

At home Margie hosted numberless Bahá'í meetings and provided hospitality to many distinguished members of the international Bahá'í community

including several Hands of the Cause of God and members of the Universal House of Justice.

Other distinguished features of Margie's life as a Bahá'í

included: two pilgrimages to the Holy Land; attendance at both Bahá'í World Congresses;
being present at the dedication of two Bahá'í Houses of Worship (Panama and India);
and travels to many foreign countries (Mexico, China, Canada, England...) to spread
Bahá'u'lláh's message of love and world unity.

One of Margaret's most outstanding accomplishments was her skill as a public speaker. With just a high school education and at a time when a woman's domain was thought to be the home, Margie worked hard to develop her talents in public address. She was in the vanguard of women who set out to transform
the world. She could speak to 10 people, or 100, or 1000 and make them howl with
laughter, move them to tears, and bring them closer to their own spiritual nature.

In their 55 years of marriage Margie and Joe provided a loving home for their cherished son, Jimmy. They took in and raised Margie's grand-niece,
Margaret Ann as their own for the first six years of her life. They became surrogate
parents to many of Jimmy's teenaged friends. Any night of the week folks would drop in, unannounced, and be treated to great food (always enough to feed the troops), scrumptious deserts, good company, a challenging game of Scrabble, and enough laughter to choke a horse (let's not forget the colorful expressions). Her beloved Joe passed away in 1999 and with the assistance
of many of friends, she relocated to Placerville, California. After a lengthy illness she ascended on July 23, 2001. Her earthly remains were interred at Green
Valley Cemetery, Cameron Park, California.

Margie's lifetime of service to the Bahá'í Faith was commemorated
by both the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and
the Universal House of Justice. She will be remembered for many outstanding qualities.
Her humor, courage and confidence were powerful. Her warmth, culinary talents and hospitable nature was a blessing. Her sense of adventure and daring escapades
were legendary. Her commitment to and love for all people, regardless of their race, religion or culture as her guiding principle, was an example to us all.

Notes:

Marsha Gilpatrick remembered Margie's
indomitable spirit: how, at the time of her appointment to the Auxiliary Board, it was like a life sentence, because she was one of the first and the position was relatively undefined at that time. She was well organized, maintaining files

on just about everything. She spent most of her time on the road, in the "boonies" visiting everyone, safe-guarding the Faith. She kept in touch with pioneers and helped them understand and impressed upon them the importance of their work. Tony Lease described Margie in the following manner "She wore the Faith like armor". She met with the Friends constantly and if one asked a question, they had better be prepared to receive an answer. The Bahá'í youth respected her for being forthright; and when so many of them finally became parents, they carried on the ideas she inspired in them. Once she heard that there was a man in a Montana prison claiming to be Bahá'u'lláh. In short order "Sergeant Marge" met with him and afterwards the man asked to be kept in prison. Richard Francis recalls the time in 1972 when Margie was attending the Continental Board of Councilors Conference in Reno, Nevada. After the evening program a large number of the Friends proceeded across Virginia Street from the conference site at the Pioneer Theater to a Denny's restaurant. At the conference Florence Mayberry had just given a talk on the virtues of obedience to Bahá'í laws. Having proceeded with the rest of the Bahá'ís to the restaurant, upon entering, she succumbed to temptation and placed a nickel in one of several slot machines near the front door. (Bahá'u'lláh expounds in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the "prohibition of games of chance") To her surprise, it hit and all the bells rang, the lights flashed and the jackpot dropped into the tray below with a loud clang. All attention was subsequently drawn to her direction and all knew who she was. Displaying a rather embarrassed demeanor, her only commit was: "Bahá'u'lláh doesn't let me get away with anything!"

— Margaret Ariel Gallagher: Field Sergeant of the Western Frontier (Used by permission of the curator)