

# On Pilgrimage - February 1978

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*Summary: Series of diary notes from early winter 1978. Recalls visitors from Australia and bad weather in New York. Discusses her current reading including re-reading **Anna Karenina**. Discusses suicide with a priest. Other readings and thoughts revolve around her college friend Rayna Prohme, the Chinese Revolution, the music of Wagner, and Masses at St. Joseph's House. (DDLW #584).*

## Diary Notes - - January and February 1978

No noise this New Year's Eve - - as there used to be at Mott Street when neighbors threw all their old trash out the window. Only two revolver shots heard in the early morning.

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Peter and Eileen Willis visited us from Australia. Had lunch and then showed us slides of Australia and the aborigines, among whom Peter lived for many years. (Many of us read the "Boney" books, about an aboriginal detective. They give us a wonderful feeling of that vast country.)

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Tonight, I went downstairs to the dining room at Maryhouse for the first time in weeks, and there was a "cabaret," an older woman and a little child dancing to Strauss waltzes played on the phonograph.

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Woke up feeling so thankful for the parents God gave me. I want to write "Having a Family," as a follow-up to "Having a Baby," which we reprinted in the December 1977 **Catholic Worker**. This morning's psalms in **Praise Him, Prayer Book for Today's Christians**, edited by William Storey of Notre Dame (a family man and a good friend) are especially beautiful, and pertinent for one who is ill.

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I have been reading, once more, **Anna Karenina**, the tragedy of suicide. When a son of a friend of ours took his own life, by putting his head in a gas oven, I asked

the Spanish priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on 14<sup>th</sup> St., “Did he die in mortal sin?” I was remembering Kirilov in **The Possessed** by Dostoyevsky. The priest said, “There is no time with God, and all the prayers and Masses said for him after his death will have given him that moment of turning to God in penitence.”

“Worst storm in a decade,” the radio says. Woke up to find my floor deep with snow blown in. My window was only open a few inches. Not a car able to move on the side streets. Frank got through with the mail.

It is the heaviest snow I can remember, since the first World War in 1917-18, when I walked the streets through the drifts with Mike Gold.

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My room feels like the Russian tenement in Dostoyevsky’s **The Honest Thief**, where people lived in corners. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay lived in such “corners” in the Soviet Union. Wally and Rose Carmen verified this for me. Now I too am living in a corner, what with Stanley Vishnewski and Tamar, and my granddaughter Katy spending much time with me. Actually, Katy is on her way back to East Hill School in Vermont, and Stanley and Tamar are having a vacation from numerous duties at Tivoli and Perkinsville. It seems so long since I have visited either place!

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Thinking of Nina Polcyn Moore’s and my trip to Russia. Wonder did Nina keep a diary? We all should, no matter how brief and factual - - and be careful, in a letter and diary, not to err in charity and write things that may hurt others.

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Quote from C.S. Lewis’ **Letters** “...a dear old man, but the **inexhaustible loquacity of educated age** drove me back to the City and the University, to recoup on a Guinness” p. 76.

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Mass tonight - - with Father Peter of the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld. He and Father Lyle Young both offer Mass for us here at Maryhouse, one on Monday night and one on Wednesday night, and our prayers are for all **Catholic Worker** readers too. I have such a feeling of gratitude to Father Lyle, for coming through the slush and all-but-impassable roads from Putnam Valley N.Y. to say Mass for us.

Our beautiful altar cover was woven by a young Egyptian women, away up the Nile, and sent to us by one of the Grail women. These women of the Grail are sent all over the world - - India, South America, etc.

Our chapel is so beautiful. The picture that Dr. Katherine Breydert gave me hangs in the chapel now, to the right of the altar.

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Stanley brought me **Personal History**, by Vincent Sheehan. One third of the book (“Revolution”) is about Rayna Prohme, my dearest friend in college. When I was working my way (four hours of manual labor for board and room in a professor’s family) and got ill, she shared her room and food with me. This chapter about Rayna inspired a woman from the Grail to go to work among the poorest of the poor in Brazil.

Stanley also brought me a book on China’s revolution, **The Morning Deluge** by Han Suyin. Reading this book recalled my filling in on a Friday night meeting once with a talk on the life of Mao. I had just read a book on his life. The word got around, and Chinese and University people showed up! I had just reviewed the book.

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Found a grand, old book in our library at Maryhouse on Richard Wagner. (This house of hospitality used to be a music school. I feel its very walls are soaked in music.) The book has a long analysis of all his operas. Since Hitler, it has been bad form to love Wagner! At the end of World War II, at the death of Hitler, Wagner’s music was played, with a sense, I hope, of the tragedy of the life and death of such a man as Hitler - - a sense of the terrible aspects of sin and cruelty - - a sense of meaning of the words “a lost soul.”

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Our selling arms to Egypt and Israel! Sin and sickness!

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It is good to see the winter months slip by. First glimmer of sun was at 7:40 a.m. on the window panes across the street, and on the pigeons flying past my window. Reading St. Ignatius of Antioch on submission to bishops prompted a breakfast discussion on obedience. One of us said she would move to another diocese (if told to close the Worker). I said I would obey, thinking of “man’s first disobedience.” The Lord would straighten things out, I am sure.

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Quote from C.S. Lewis’ **Letters**, “One must take comfort in remembering that God used an ass to convert the prophet. Perhaps, if we do our poor best, we shall be allowed a stall near it in the celestial stables.”

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Father Rene Voillaume, founder of the Little Brothers and Sisters of the Gospel, is in town, and came to concelebrate Monday night Mass with Father Peter in our chapel. Word got around, and all three rooms, chapel, library and front office were full. We met and talked afterwards in the library. In the thirties, Peter Maurin first told us of Father Voillaume. Now the Little Brothers and Sisters live near us on the Lower East Side.

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News of Charles Butterworth's death of leukemia came last night. Shocking news. He was so **good**. It was at Pendle Hill that I first met Charlie, when I went there to speak. He later came to the Catholic Worker, and, when I asked him what I had said that brought him to us, he replied, "When you said you wore the clothes that came in!" I will pray not only for him and those he left behind, but ask him to pray for Tina, who also has cancer; and for me, so old and imperfect. I am sure he is praying for us all.