

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1978

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, July-August 1978, 2, 8.

Summary: Complains that she needs to rest her heart at the beach house instead of joining a demonstration at the UN. Reminisces about friends, greets visitors, mentions her reading, and recalls the start of the movement when she met Peter Maurin. (DDLW #590).

Patience! Patience! The very word means **suffering**. I'm glad I studied Latin for five years. Being a journalist, I use many words, and like to get at the roots of them.

I had planned to go to the Mobilization For Survival demonstrations for disarmament at the United Nations last month, but my heart "went back on me" and a deplorable state of weakness kept me on the beach on Staten Island, where we have two bungalows for rest houses. I can at least pray. "**At least!**" What an expression! It is hard work, praying, and trying to subdue a rebellious spirit.

Deane Mowrer came down from Tivoli with Kathleen Rumpf for the sit-in on June 12th at the United States Mission to the Nations. Twenty from the Catholic Worker were arrested, and arraigned, and released. I had so counted on going with them.

Christ said, "He who takes the sword will perish by the sword." We are a guilty nation, threatening this beautiful, natural world with neutron bombs.

But all times are dangerous times! I often think of my mother, a most dearly loved mother to all her five children, saying to me in her last days – "Don't pray I live longer. I've been through the San Francisco earthquake, the Florida hurricane, and two World Wars, and I've had enough." But she smiled as she said it, because she had been a happy wife and mother.

Charles Elston, archivist, and Marc Ellis, who wrote a thesis on the Catholic Worker, which will be published, visited us from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They packed up what we had collected of the Catholic Worker archives (mostly correspondence), which are kept at Marquette.

I love the Middle West, having spent so many years growing up there – from my ninth to my eighteenth year. Two of those years I spent at the University of Illinois, where Rayna Prohme was my dearest friend. Her story was made memorable by Vincent Sheehan in his **Personal History**, in the section called "Revolution."

“Doth it not irk me that upon the beach, the tides monotonous run? Shall I not teach the sea some new speech?” Who wrote it? Those lines came to mind when I woke this morning. It certainly doesn’t irk me! I love it here.

Rosemary Morse was up early, reading Scripture, but brought me food for the body and a hot cup of coffee. Then she worked all afternoon, mending the screen door, and, on the roof, stopping leaks. The Pentecostal movement has made her an avid reader of Scripture. She is a living example of co-ordination – the active, the contemplative, and the ecumenical life. But the roof still leaks!

Red roses, and red and yellow ones by the back door are all in bloom.

Mary Humphrey from Minnesota (a Catholic Worker for years) called. Fr. Henry Fehrens will drive her out to see me. He helps, during the summer, at St. Patrick’s Parish in Richmond, Staten Island, a parish where Tamar, my daughter, went to boarding school many years ago. Fr. Aldo Tos is a pastor there. Sisters of St. Dorothy, a Portugese community, had a small boarding school there. Tamar used to come home weekends to Mott Street.

When Mary arrived with an armful of fresh, new, summer dresses she had made, I greeted her wearing a colorful one she had made for me years ago. Every time I visited her in the past, she made me a dress. She and her husband (a gold and silver smith, specializing in chalices) raised their family in Minnesota (they are among our oldest friends) but were originally from the Milwaukee Catholic Worker group. The Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minnesota groups were all made up of brilliant, young volunteers, trying out our ideas in the city and on the land, with crafts their specialty.

Breakers rolling in on the beach – the air is damp – a flannel nightgown and **two** blankets are necessary if the windows are open.

Pat and Kathleen Jordan, our fellow workers and beach neighbors here, start on their trip to the West Coast tomorrow, with Justin and Hannah, to show Justin, born this last year, to his grandparents. Pat has been working at St. Rose’s cancer home, which was started by Rose Hawthorne in the early thirties or before. Bill Griffin also works there. Bill lives with Jacques Travers, who runs the Arthur Sheehan house of hospitality for men near Prospect Park in Brooklyn. But he is staying at Pat and Kathleen’s house during their absence and commuting to work.

Jacques once gave a great talk on Emmanuel Mounier (one of Peter Maurin’s favorite philosophers) at Tivoli, on Sunday afternoon, with Mary Lathrop Pope giving readings from Mounier, to illustrate the points Jacques made.

July 6th – a busy day! In the morning, to New York City, and, in the afternoon, Cardinal Cooke, Monsignor Murray and Father McDonough visited from Maryhouse, to bring me greetings from Pope Paul! I was overwhelmed by this. How one dreads such honors when inactive. Though it was in my name, it is young women and men volunteers who are doing all the work, getting out the paper, running the house of hospitality, etc. One feels like a figurehead!

Opera on the radio – “Tannhauser.” The bay is filled with an uncountable number of sailboats.

Tamar, my daughter, who is visiting me from Vermont, found a bag of wool in the closet, left from her last visit, and is working on it. She washed it, carded it, spun the yarn with a hand-carved spindle, and is finishing a sweater for one of her grandchildren.

I have finished the first volume of **The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell** (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York). A great human being. I had read his **Road to Wigan Pier** and **Down and Out in Paris and London**.

I am also reading C. S. Lewis’ book, **Reflections on the Psalms**, with great profit.

Stanley Vishnewski came down for a visit, bringing some mail. Also, Margaret Quigley from the Davenport, Iowa house of hospitality visited one afternoon. Stanley, Tamar and I walked and sat on the beach. Complete quiet. We collected stones, a beautiful, colorful variety. Every day, I am promising myself to walk a little more, to get my strength back.

Doris Neilsen brought me a stationary rocker, very comfortable. Haven’t seen one like it in years. The bungalow is **crowded**. How we accumulate things – comforts!

My brother John and his wife Tessa visited. A beautiful day, not too hot. They met on this South Shore of Staten Island years ago. They were both only eighteen, but promptly fell in love and got married, much to our parents’ dismay. But it has been a happy marriage, with sons and grandchildren now. They were living with me on Fifteenth Street in New York, and I have often said that if it had not been for Tessa de Aragon Day I would never have met Peter Maurin, and there would have been no Catholic Worker. It was her Spanish hospitality which welcomed this French peasant when he came to our door. (He had gone to

the **Commonweal** magazine first, and George Shuster, editor then and knowing me as an “activist,” sent him to me.) It was the Great Depression, the Hunger Marches, and Peter Maurin, Master Agitator, as he liked to call himself, who started it all, by coming to my door with his program, which still goes on, of round table discussions “for the clarification of thought,” houses of hospitality for the practice of “the works of mercy,” and farming communes “to raise what you eat and eat what you raise.”