

On Pilgrimage - September 1960

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Summary: Stops to see friends in Vermont on her way to a retreat in Montreal. Mentions books and machines for village economics and home industries. Recounts visiting folks on her last trip west and a miracle of an infant with polio. She delights in everyone's practice of the works of mercy. (DDLW #769).

I am writing from St. Ann's shrine, Island La Motte, Vermont, a lovely place, the oldest shrine to St. Ann in the United States. I used to go to St. Ann's Church on 12th street in New York before I became a Catholic, so I feel I have been acquainted with her for a long time. She is the patron saint of grandmothers, and since I am called Granny by the Zamarkys and the Scarpullas and the Hughes as well as by my own Hennessy family, and I feel most grand motherly to all the other children of the CW families, I am praying for them all on this visit here. I am on my way to Montreal for my yearly retreat.

Summer is a time when people use their vacations for retreats, and I am enjoying mightily the trip up to Montreal, coming from my daughter Tamar and weeks of pretty steady manual labor. It was truly vacation to stop at the Stowells at Cabot, Vermont, on their mountain top and see their new baby, little Laurie, and the loom, spinning wheels, printing press and garden.

We discussed village economy, home industries and machinery, as well as communes and Bob showed me a catalogue from Cecoco Chuo Boeki Goshi Kaisha, Ibaraki City, Osaka-Fu, Japan which was filled with fascinating home machines of all kinds from looms to wheat grinders and oil pressers and many other things too numerous to mention as the auction ads say. Bob showed me new editions of **Mutual Aid**, by Kropotkin, brought out by the Extending Horizons Books, 11 Beacon St., Boston. Another book of great interest to our children is **Workaday Life of the Pueblos**, by Ruth Underhill, volume four of **Indian Life and Customs**, which you can get from the Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C.

On the one hand some of the back to the landers consider study of the simple life preparation for decentralization brought about by war and widespread atomic destruction. Others are interested in the revolt it expresses against our crowded, destitute life of the city, and the flaunting luxury of America which does so much to bring about bitterness and revolution.

Little Way Farm

One day this month I drove over to Cuttingsville to visit Edna Hower who had the great generosity to give a year of her life to cooking for the conscientious objectors in the C.O. camp set up during the Second World War at Stoddard, New Hampshire. She is a real New Englander and knew how to feed a hungry horde on apples three times a day without repeating herself in her recipes. She raised a little pig too, which began as a kitchen pet and chased everyone around in the kitchen begging for its bottle, until it grew so big it had to be put in a pen. It was finally eaten. "If you eat it, don't name it," Tamar's neighbor Myrtle Baker says. She was helping us kill chickens (75 of them) to put away for the winter.

The Old Crown Point road runs right through Edna's place which is way up on the mountain past Shrewsbury, and that is the road the Indians took with their captives after the massacre at Charleston, New Hampshire. The same road runs a mile below the Hennessy place, and past Edna's it goes through a farm which used to be a **Catholic Worker** farm run by Allen Sheldon, when he had a House of Hospitality in Rutland. He is running a guest house now near Weston Priory. He gave up the farm, much to Edna's disappointment because so many of the C.O.'s spoke in terms of the land, she had been hoping for some kind of a settlement there. But after the war they all went back to the cities from which they had sprung, and she was left with some of the old men from the House of Hospitality, some of whom lived on **The Little Way farm** until they died. Aside from a good vegetable garden and some cash from Christmas trees, she has concentrated on putting ten thousand trees in the overgrown pastures. There will be a tree crop for the next generation.

Jericho, Vermont

I came away from the Spencers today with a fragrant bouquet of basil and two beautiful Grandma Moses prints on material which can be framed and hung. They will be beautiful reminders of this State of Vermont which wanted Independence when the Massachusetts crowd was thinking only of representation. Mountaineers are free men it is said. They live to mighty age, certainly in such climate as this, never too hot in summer and a still dry cold in winter.

Bob Spencer is running for Senator in the State Legislature again, and is beginning to know the whole state. We have known them for sixteen years at least and his mother took the CW since it's beginning. Bob teaches at St. Michael's college in the winter and as I left sent me away with the loan of a book on Gandhi by Powers, one of his favorite professors at St. Michael's, which had been sent to me previously for review but which I never got! Communal living, O voluntary poverty, O detachment! How long will this go on. O Lord. I don't want a hundred books on Gandhi later, I want the one that is sent me for review now!

A Work of Mercy

Fr. Tompkins said that all the work we did should be judged as to whether or not they can be classed as works of mercy. Certainly running two convalescent homes for the aged, which is a job the Spencers have been doing for the last few years, can certainly be called works of mercy. They are so attractive, with such taste, a gentle homelike atmosphere, visiting hours at all times, the patients allowed not only to have their own things but pets as well, and both houses with beautiful outlook. Edith says she can hardly wait to get into one herself. Having scrubbed, painted, furnished the second one they started this year, she still suffers from fatigue in retrospect. All this with a house full of children too.

We drove over to the lake to visit with Dr. Katherine McSweeney in the evening – she was taking her day off – and we talked about the Langlois brothers who ran the Burlington House of Hospitality, ideals and practicality and the state of the world today. Dr. McSweeney is one of these people who give themselves to every patient they have and it was a joy to see her again. On the way home there was a magnificent display of northern lights, an awesome sight, the whole sky flickering with great flames of bright light, colorless like draperies of fog, forming and reforming into angelic hosts, swaying gigantic figures that seemed to be bathed in flames of white fire. I had never seen this before and it was hard for me to tear myself away and go indoors, though it was already almost midnight. The display keeps up for hours at a time, one of the children said.

Highlights

I must try to recall some of the highlights of my last spring's trip through the west, and at least touch on some of the things I saw. Very often I **talk** so much about what I have encountered, that I forget to **write** about it, and someone told me that I had not mentioned the thousands of high school students in the San Francisco diocese who met to discuss the problems of agriculture, and promised to try to help the agricultural workers. There is plenty of omission to call attention to, but it is better to seek out the things which are being done and call attention to them. There was Kara Brewer and her husband in Palo Alto and Sister Maria Jose Bravo, working at the Holy Spirit Center 20 miles from Palo Alto. I could not visit that noble family of Mario Carota since they were forty miles further and my schedule was so crowded. I met Dr. Gerhard Steinke whose Theory and Practice of Non Violence Resistance to Evil is a fine essay which we hope to publish. I met the John Herndons again, a valiant family, still close to the Carotas and the Brewers.

The Demarests

Donald Demarest and his family have been close to us for many years. Before he moved to Mexico with his growing family, he used to come to Mott street to

work with us on Saturdays. He always dressed in dungarees, hoping to get some manual labor to do, and then we sat him down to clerical work. I wrote about my visit with him in Mexico, and this year I visited him again in Fresno. He had moved up from Mexico to handle the Academy Guild Press and its publications, a growing concern. They are bringing out Peter Maurin's essays in the fall, and if anyone wants to send in their orders we will be glad to fill them. The book will be illustrated by Fritz Eichenberg's beautiful work. I think I mentioned that often, throughout the trip, I found Fritz's full-page illustrations from **The Catholic Worker** tacked up on the walls of homes.

Miracle

At my request Donald just sent the following story of his son's miraculous recovery from polio just before they left Mexico.

"I never wrote the story of Pepe's miracle. Although I tried I was too close to it at the time. Quite briefly when Jose was 30 days old we noticed that he couldn't cry although he was trying to do so. We took him to the Hospital Infantil in Mexico City, one of the best children's hospitals I've ever come across. The doctors wouldn't believe that anyone that young could have polio, until they took a spinal tap. The specialist who was called in said he had both kinds, bulbar and the other, and that his right side, throat, lungs and chest were completely paralyzed. He held out little hope that he would survive – 'which is just as well,' he said, 'since he would be paralyzed for life.' The third day after they put him in the iron lung (he looked like a doll in the smallest one they had). Betty and I went to pray that noon at the nearby church and Betty promised Our Lady of Guadalupe that if he were cured she would make a pilgrimage from our house in Coyoacan. I had to go back to the magazine but Betty returned to the hospital. When she got to the ward she noticed that Pepe was no longer in his lung and was sure that he was dead. The nurse came running up (B. thinks she must have screamed) and told her that Pepe was completely recovered and that the doctor said we could take him home that afternoon.

"Betty carried him the 30 miles or so to the Basilica, walking barefoot and accompanied by some of our Mexican neighbors – who took it all very much for granted since miracles of this kind, especially those associated with Our Lady of Guadalupe, are so common in Mexico. Now, as you know, he's an exceptionally husky little two year old and the only trace he has of the polio is that he tends to favor his left hand and his right shoulder is noticeably thinner than his left. Johnny has just started swimming like a fish, diving and jumping off the high board at the public pool and Pepe is doing his best to imitate him. We think he'll be swimming a few yards before the summer is over."

Los Angeles

I spoke at Compton Junior College one morning. Frances Langford was my hostess during most of my stay in Los Angeles area and her little rear house in Glendale was very pleasant. Paula Ogren and her husband were both converts from the University of Chicago and had been reading the paper a long time, and it was Paula who, with the group called the Christines, organized my main meeting in Bishop Manning's parish. Bud, her husband has been defending another hapless murderer, who I believed was executed August 2. I wrote letters of appeal to Jerry Brown, the governor's son, begging him to intercede with his father. Bud is the kind of a lawyer who grieves whole heartedly over the tragedies of his clients, and prays vigorously for them. He understood well what Bob Steed was doing when he was fasting and praying for Chessman.

There are still reverberations and hostilities because of our interceding for convicted murderers and people still accuse us of not caring for their victims. We can only remind them that Christ came to save sinners and said that the shepherds should be leaving the ninety-nine and going after the one lost sheep.

Visiting the Prisoners

Fr. Joseph, O.F.M. is famous all around the Los Angeles area for the work he does with prisoners and he has gathered many others to work with him. Frances Langford goes out too to teach in the detention house for women or delinquent girls. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine is the big organization in Los Angeles and most all of the apostolic work is done through it.

I met the Carlsons who are most interested in labor and during a recent strike when there was an injunction against picketing, Mr. Carlson hired the use of some elephants and camels and put them on the picket line. Most effective publicity. He has a joyful and original spirit.

Desert Friends

Barstow is also desert country, and there I visited with Helen Caldwell Riley who used to run the house of hospitality in Memphis, Tennessee, where Bob Steed helped her. Her husband Jesse works at the marine base as a laborer and both of them work with the Legion of Mary with others around them. Barstow has a population of 12,000, half Mexicans and there is much work to do. There is poverty everywhere, and the nearest free hospital is 80 miles away and you have to be a 3-year resident to get care. Butch, Helen's oldest child still gets care from the National Polio Foundation. The marine base is called Nebo and another five miles away is called Yermo. Jesse Riley helped build the church, Mt. St. Joseph, and with the other civilian workers put in 100 hours of labor on it.

Helen said that there are wild goats, sheep and horses in the desert and extinct volcanoes. The children collect plants, fossils and rocks, “rock hounding” they call it. She has two more children by Jesse and Butch’s cousin is with her, so her hands are full, yet she is baby sitting for neighbors, where the mother is forced to work, and she does much of the Legion work. A number of the women came over after supper and we had a very good meeting together, and before I left one of the women packed me a delicious lunch for the bus.

Mesquite and sage and vast sky, illimitable air – how fascinating the desert is – what beauty. One meets many vacationers going on long bus trips, just to see the greatness of the country. I do not wonder that Ammon loves the desert and can sympathize with him wanting to get out to Utah, a state he has never worked in. Rumor has gone around that he is resigning from the CW – I heard it first in Staten Island from the children, and then Bob Stowell mentioned it in Vermont. But he is not resigning at all, he is just going out to a section of the country we have never reached, to tell his good news of personal responsibility and what that so simple, harmless phrase can lead to. “I have conquered New York,” he boasted maddeningly, “and now I go to new territory.” At the pace he has gone, the years he has been with us in New York, I know that he craves the quiet, the great spaces of the west where he had lived so long.

But he is not going until January, and right now as I write this he is picketing in New York, fasting for the eleventh day on his sixteen-day fast, doing penance for our having been the first to drop nuclear weapons on the cities of Japan.

Next month, Albuquerque, Fayetteville, Ark., St. Louis, Rhineland, Missouri, Detroit, which is my last stop before New York where I returned in April.