

On Pilgrimage - October 1957

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: An account of moving her daughter Tamar's family from Staten Island to a spacious home and farm in Vermont. (DDLW #729).

Since going to press last month we have had a very interesting Labor Day conference, at Peter Maurin farm, our sixth annual discussion of pacifism, with conferences in the grove, many families attending with all their children, two and three year olds. Having no baby sitters, parents had to alternate in the care of the children so that they could listen in on the conferences. In some cases the children came and played quietly in the dirt, made fortresses of twigs and stones, while we discussed peace. It was a quiet and beautiful week end, hot enough to go swimming each day.

Moving

A few days after the conference, the moving of the Hennessy family to Vermont began. Tamar and I started out with the eight children at nine o'clock Friday morning using the 1949 jeep station wagon, which runs with a variety of noises and rattlings but has nothing actually wrong with it except the emergency brake not working at all. Since Staten Island is not hilly, we had not worried about that, but I was concerned when I thought of the Vermont mountains. (We had it repaired later, having a new cable put in, but it still was not too satisfactory.) It is a small station wagon. Becky, Tamar and I sat in front with Peter, two weeks old, and the other six sat in the second seat. In back were piled blankets, an electric stove, a basket of lunch and plenty of fruit, changes of clothes and so on. We were starting out ahead and David was to follow the next morning with Pete Asaro and George Cevasco who were to come early to help with a drive-it-yourself truck, which turned out on renting to be smaller than we thought so many things had to be left behind.

We were mourning as we left at all the things left undone. Tamar had wanted to bring some seedlings of mulberry trees to Vermont, and other potted plants, but there was no room. We left a garden full of color, spider plants, marigold, zinnias, cosmos. It was a gorgeous day, clear and cool and we all enjoyed the trip which took us only as far as Gould Farm, Great Barrington, Mass., the first night. There we were given beautiful hospitality, a seven-bed cabin turned over to us for the night. We arrived in time for supper, and for the children to go rioting around a bit to get the stiffness out of their legs before going to bed. The cabin was on a mountain side and the surrounding trees shaded it so the wood fire all laid ready for lighting was very welcome. Harold Winchester and his wife were dear hosts and we enjoyed a visit in the craft shop the next morning before

we left. We were delighted to see Bob Stewart who had worked with us here for a year.

Vermont

We started out next morning at ten o'clock and arrived in Springfield, Vermont, which is five miles south of Perkinsville, around four o'clock. The truck that arrived that night made the entire trip in eight hours, but we drove at leisurely pace, stopping for picnic lunches, and never going more than forty-five miles an hour. It was so comfortable a trip that Tamar announced that when all the children were raised she was going to start travelling and never stop.

Just the same we were all glad to arrive at the new home which exceeded the expectations of us all. It is no wonder that Tamar and Dave fell in love with the place. There are so many rooms and such large rooms, one loses one's self. Heated by a hot air furnace which burns either wood or coal, there are five very large rooms, three of them facing south, the other two north and east. In back and to the side of these rooms there are other rooms and pantries as large as rooms, and the summer kitchen leads into a woodshed and that into a garage and that into barns. Over it all, and over the L-addition which is four-gabled, there are other rooms which are unheated. Over all there are attics, with separate stairs.

Remembering how Sigrid Undset loved that region of New England (north central Massachusetts) where she had spent her summers in this country, I could not help but think of *Kristin Lavransdatter* and *The Master of Hestviken*, those two great novels, telling all about the dairying, and the summer houses and winter houses. Tamar, too, has a loom-room now and a place for her spinning wheels and materials. The loom was set up the day after it arrived, Tamar snipping off a piece of clothes line to make up for a missing part.

In front of the beautiful old white farm house are two black walnut trees and two maples, enormous trees, quite too high for the children to climb. Everything on Staten Island was dwarfed in comparison. In back of the house the hills rose not too steeply, field upon field of lush green meadow, and at one end an old apple orchard with plenty of apples still on the trees. Within a day we were drinking grape juice from the wild grapes and eating apple pies!

A half mile up and down the graveled road on either side there are neighbors, young and energetic, with children, young ones and teenagers, so the Hennessys will not lack for company. Except that in these regions most of the children work on the farms after school.

This farm and home of twenty acres cost \$6,000, and I like to call attention to prices when I see this week's Saturday Evening Post cover with the man of the house looking aghast at the price of the small split-level house, \$29,995.

The hitch? The fly in the ointment? Of course there is always one, and if it is not solitude for the mother, it is the difficulty of finding work for the father. There is not much solitude for a mother with eight children. The daily chore, and the delightful avocations of spinning and weaving take care of that – not to speak of books. So the job is the problem, and transportation to and from.

But, as the Spanish saying is, a baby is always born with a loaf of bread under its arm, and God who so clothes the field and feeds the birds of the air, will see to it that all will be well, all will be well – all will be very well, as Juliana of Norwich has assured us.

I am starting out on a brief trip of three weeks, beginning with a 20th anniversary celebration of St. Francis House of Hospitality in Detroit on October 12, visiting Lady of the Wayside Farm at Avon, Ohio, on the way, and will go on to Chicago, to Nina Polcyn, St. Benet's bookshop, CYO Bldg., Chicago, Ill. I hope to get to St. Paul where my address will be Maryhouse, 450 Little Canada Rd., St. Paul, Minn. Since one works one's way on these trips, I am glad of some speaking engagements on the way to and from. So write either to the above addresses or to 223 Chrystie St., N.Y., and the letters will be forwarded to me.