

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1977

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Summary: Amid the beauty of Staten Island she recalls the time of her conversion. Noting the 50th anniversary of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti she defines Catholic Worker anarchism. Comments on her Scripture reading. (DDLW #579).

It is low tide, on a dull, grey day, after a week of glorious weather, a good time to settle down to writing my column. How rich we are, we who profess voluntary poverty as a foundation for our work as agitators, to be able to take a ferry ride and be, within an hour, in a rural area which is still part of New York City. Staten Island is not as fashionable as Long Island, its beaches are not clean and sandy, but rocky, strewn often with driftwood and debris. But my conversion took place here. My Russian and my Jewish friends were neighbors, including Mike Gold, and his brothers Manny and George, all Communists, who regarded my spiritual struggles as a stage through which I was passing – my own business, in other words. Mike came to see us often, some years later, in the little apartment on Fifteenth St., where the Catholic Worker started. It was his brother, George Granich, who was one of the organizers of the Hunger March on Washington, which I supported and wrote about as a reporter for **Commonweal** or **America**. I'm not sure which. (Memory is so strange a thing. My copy of St. Augustine's **Confessions** has a long chapter about it. I can't find it now. Someone is always walking off with the book I happen to be reading!)

I am writing this in the early morning, and a mourning dove is making doleful sounds in one of the beautiful mimosa trees, which abound hereabouts. Tamar, my daughter, intends to transplant some tiny, mimosa seedlings. No matter how small these seedlings are, they close up their fernlike leaves if you touch them.

Sacco and Vanzetti

Rita Corbin is here too, in our Staten Island headquarters, and all day she has been carving a woodcut of Sacco and Vanzetti, the 50th anniversary of whose death we are commemorating in this issue.

I, too, wish to write about these two anarchists, because that is the word, or label, which confuses many of our readers (especially the bishops?) and “clarification of thought” is the first plank in the Catholic Worker program. After all, study, and clarification of thought, leading to the communication of ideas, is why we publish the **Catholic Worker** over all these years. The 90,000 or so copies which we mail out nine times a year go to readers all over the world, and who knows where the seeds we are planting take root.

I add my contribution to the recalling of Sacco and Vanzetti, because I was very much alive when their execution took place, and will never forget that day of grief. My sister Della, and her friend Katherine Ann Porter were among the many demonstrators and mourners at the scene, and I would have been there except for my baby daughter (now a mother and a grandmother). We spent the day in mourning, and Tamar’s father lay with his face to the wall, almost unconscious with shock and grief. The struggle to establish their innocence had been a long one, and they were put to death.

To us at the Catholic Worker, anarchism means “Love God, and do as you will.” “For such, there is no law.” If anyone asks for your cloak, give him your coat too.” One could go on with these Scriptural teachings of Jesus, though the above quotations could be expressed in many ways.

Journal notes, Staten Island, N.Y.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . . If, in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard . . . the things which God hath prepared for those who love Him.” What sample of His love in Creation all around us! Even in the city, the changing sky, the trees, frail though they may be, which prisoners grow on Riker’s Island, to be planted around the city, bear witness. People - all humankind, in some way.

“In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.” Looking out over the bay, the gulls, the “paths in the sea,” the tiny ripples stirring a patch of water here and there, the reflections of clouds on the surface—how beautiful it all is.

I love postal cards. This week I was given one of birch trees from Aspen, Colorado—a beauty. Mary Roberts, at Cabrini Center, sent me one of St. Francis in ecstasy by Bellini, c. 14 century. Her note was as beautiful as her card. She is a “lover of beautifulness” (I phrase I think is Scriptural).

Alone all day. A sudden storm in the night. Vast, dark clouds and a glaring, lightning flash with thunder. No rain. Reading **Dr. Zhivago** a second time.

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Stormy day. Woke at 5:30 A.M. Reading scriptures—Genesis and Psalms. Today I will begin with the Ascension and read Acts. Mass at nine at Huguenot—Anne Marie and Kathleen and I (with Hannah).

I need a Bible, large print. I read so much, my eyes tire. Every day we have been sitting on the beach, Doris Nielson is learning to work with stained glass. She made us a Chi-Rho. We also have Isidore Fazio's colorful, stained glass Cross hanging in one window.

Still reading **Dr. Zhivago**—his last days in Moscow. Remembering Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Wally and Rose Carmen, and Mike Gold, all of these friends of mine who spent time in Moscow at this same time Pasternak writes of. And Diego Rivera in Mexico City, and his telling me of the reprinting in Russia, of my story from **New Masses**, "Having a Baby," "Go to the Soviet Union," he said. "You can collect royalties." Maybe we should reprint it in the next **Catholic Worker**.

A letter came, reproaching me for my love of Solzhenitsyn, claiming he is a war monger.

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Very cool. Woke up with great feelings of joy and gratitude to God for His great gifts of the Holy Spirit. "Ask and you shall receive."

Reading this morning from Ezekial, "these bones shall rise again," reminds me of John Cort's talk at Jane Marra's wake. She, a member of the ILGW, was the first to open another house of hospitality, in a loft (Boston). John Magee and Arthur Sheehan ran it for her.

How widespread the **Catholic Worker** is! Now two responsible women from Maryhouse may be taken from us—one for Guam, the other to start a house of hospitality in a Brooklyn slum. But other women are coming, (and men, too) and, of course, will go away to extend the work, and do even better than we do, as we flounder here in the hot slums, trying, as Peter Maurin used to say, "to make the kind of society where it is easier to be good."

"Consider all things but dung compared to the love of Christ." St. Paul certainly went to an extreme in expressing himself. Fr. Hugo too did not hesitate to quote this. He ended his famous retreats with, "You are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God."