

On Pilgrimage - May 1978

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Jottings about the neighborhood architecture, hymnals of her childhood, Ade Bethune's artwork, and the education of her daughter Tamar. (DDLW #588).

These are jottings from my diary:

When I was a little girl, I never tired of hearing my mother tell stories about when **she** was a little girl, living in Poughkeepsie, and sometimes the Hudson River froze solid from shore to shore.

I have spent this winter in our comfortable Maryhouse on Third St., and I think it was the snowiest winter I have seen since 1917 and '18. These were war years when we had heatless Mondays and meatless Tuesdays.

I look from my window these mornings at the sunlit embellishments on the "tenement" across the street—red brick, six stories, every window elaborately decorated, framed vertically by pillars and topped by little wings and cherubs, every floor different, fire-escapes painted black or green, and somehow not defacing this delicately decorated frontage. These are part of the luxury houses of old New York, perhaps at the time of Mother Seton, who was the first American-born saint canonized, and one of whose present-day daughters of the order she founded, Sister Aloysia, helped along my conversion in the 30's.

The little sycamore tree across the street is budding. I have some potted plants in my room and comfortable chairs, and lots of books and company. But I am restless for the Staten Island beach.

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When I was fourteen, I sang my baby brother to sleep with the Episcopal hymnal—"brightest and best of the sons of the morning" was one of the songs. I told Ann Perkins I wished I had an Episcopal hymnal now, remembering **The Wide, Wide World**, my favorite book when I was age twelve. A best seller in England as well as America, Vincent Van Gogh recommended it in one of his letters to his brother. It is good spiritual reading, and really brought me to an enjoyment

of work I never had before. I became a better student and worker (having a “philosophy of work,” as Peter Maurin called it.)

Hymns were stressed in **The Wide, Wide World**. The little girl in that book was converted by a hymnal. So, Ann Perkins brought me a most beautiful prayer book and hymnal in one volume, a gift from Fr. Mallary of All Saints Church. God bless him! Now I shall enjoy it again, singing to comfort myself.

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Comment of a reader on the title of my book, **The Long Loneliness**: “Your life is anything but lonely.” Many a time, over the years, someone has said, “I found my wife (or husband) at the Catholic Worker.” What an overwhelmingly large family we have! There will be two weddings amongst us this year, in May and July.

One Catholic Worker family, Mike DeGregory and Micki Timmins, both exceptional workers, are starting a Catholic Worker Center in Trenton, N.J.

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Spent the weekend at the beach on Staten Island. Up at six. Sun already high. Had a good visit with neighbors there. Winter storms were terrible. Beach piled with driftwood. Banks of shore washed away. The bay is so beautiful with its gulls!

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The writing of an obituary can be a joyful affair, as well as a test of the faith, which we so often thoughtlessly proclaim each day, when we recite those last lines of the Creed at Mass. When someone you love, like Ade Bethune’s mother, dies, how especially comforting the Creed is. I believe in . . . “the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.”

When the Catholic Worker began, under Peter Maurin’s inspiration in 1933, one of our first visitors was Ade Bethune, then a young girl who was going to Cathedral High School here in New York City. She brought us a number of black and white drawings of the saints, all of them working. We were delighted with them. They were exactly what we wanted, as Peter Maurin’s concept of man as a co-creator with God, “little less than the angels,” born with duties to perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Jesus said—“Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the harborless, bury the dead. Do this and thou shalt live.” The duty of all Christians.

A simple and appealing program, especially to one with my communist background. (I was never a “card-carrying” member of the party, though I had “signed up” years before with the old I.W.W., who waged a struggle in the Mesabi Iron Range strike in Northern Minnesota the year I began to work for the **Socialist Call**. Upton Sinclair and his book **The Jungle** inflamed me during my high school days, not the **Communist Manifesto**.)

Ade later made murals for our houses—New York, Philadelphia and Chicago were the first—and when, in an excess of zeal, some volunteer workers painted the walls and covered them over on Mott St., she patiently made more (framed copies that could be taken down and put up again).

Ade's name is really A. de Bethune, but we mistakenly signed her drawings Ade Bethune, and so she has remained for us. We moved from 15th St. to Charles St., and then to Mott St., and the Friday night meetings were a weekly event, as they still are to this day. Mrs. de Bethune (lovingly called by the young people "Mama Lion") used to come with her daughter Ade and with her son (who often did his homework as the meeting went on, while Mrs. de Bethune knit wool socks). One winter she and all her friends made enough socks to provide a pair for every man on our breadline, which had started by itself those depression years. There must have been 800 pairs distributed.

When the de Bethune family moved to Newport, R.I. some years later, my daughter, who was of high school age and in rebellion against our school system and city life in general, joined them. She had already spent a term in a French-Canadian school, which Monsignor Ligutti told us about, and had learned spinning and weaving. To graduate, one had to be expert enough to make a suit from one's own spinning, dyeing and weaving.

Then, together with Eileen Egan's sister, she attended a school of "Applied Agriculture" at Farmingdale, Long Island, N.Y. There were many young Jewish women studying there to prepare for a life on a Kibbutz in Israel.

Tamar, my daughter's name, is a Hebrew name. Her education included a year's training as a practical nurse, which meant that one year I took leave from the Catholic Worker to stay with her nine children while she went to a school in Brattleboro, Vermont, too far from her Virginia home to commute. How glad I was for that vacation.

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The sycamore tree across the street has burst into leaf!