

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1964

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Summary: Tells of the marriage of Tom Cornell to Monica Ribar and the help received in setting up their apartment, the legal troubles of a theatre group, how their soup line started in 1936, and plans to build a model women's prison at Riker's Island. (DDLW #817).

This month, July, Tom Cornell who has been associate editor and getting out the *Catholic Worker* these last two years, attending to copy and makeup, correspondence, visitors, speaking engagements, etc., married Monica Ribar, who has been helping us at Chrystie Street for the past year. The marriage was solemnized in Holy Crucifix Church on Broome Street, right around the corner from the Vaccaro apartment house where we have four apartments, three for women one flight up and one for men on the top floor. Tom and Chris Kearns and assorted visitors had the top floor apartment.

Their new home will be on Prince Street, where they will be in old St. Patrick's parish. Living as we do in scattered apartments on Kenmare and Spring Street, we have been divided between these two parishes from some time now. The new apartment was partially furnished by our dear friends, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, of Living Theater fame, who were selling all the belongings in their apartment on West End Avenue before leaving the Country to fulfill their engagements in Europe. The Becks are under prison sentence, postponed until their return, for obstructing the Federal authorities who padlocked the Living Theater for non-payment of taxes. I testified as to Judith's character and libertarian principles last month when they were being tried in the Federal Court building on Foley Square. They conducted their own case. Judith and I had been cell mates for thirty days at the Women's House of Detention a few years ago when among others, we refused to take part in the futile air raid drills which have since been abandoned. Our civil disobedience was to protest a law which was contrary to right reason (there is no defense against atomic weapons), and to call attention to the psychological warfare of which the civil defense drills were a part.

We have participated with the Becks in the General Strike for Peace, and been with them on many a picket line. We are grateful indeed to them for their contributions to the Cornells. Just as our clothes "come in," so also does our

furniture. There is so much discarded in New York that one has only to wander around the streets, even on the East side and in the poorer neighborhoods, to pick up chairs, tables, even beds. Wednesday is pick-up day for the sanitation department and it is the only day when it is legal to put furniture out on the street. Anyone with a station wagon could make a good selection.

Monica Ribar's mother was one of two sisters, Monica Durkin and Carlotta Ribar, who helped Jack English start and keep going one of the two Cleveland Houses of Hospitality. Jack, who was not a pacifist, became a member of the Air Force in the second World War. He is now a Trappist priest (for the last eight years) at Conyers, Ga.

This is the second second-generation wedding to take place this summer. Elin Paulson and Alan Learnard were married early in June at her parish church in Upton, Massachusetts and are living on a farm in upper Vermont. Al went to Fordham, was a member of CORE, worked as a plasterer in the building trades for a time, and is now working on the farm he bought north of St. Johnsbury, Vermont.

Morality Plays

There was talk of the Becks giving Morality Plays on the streets of New York, after their theatre was taken over by the government. Robert Nichols, poet and playwright, has taken up the idea and **Everyman** (a modern version) was presented by the Peace Center of Greenwich Village and was reviewed in the last two issues of **The Village Voice**, and though it will not play in August, it will be resumed in September, according to Arthur Sainer, reviewer.

Village Voice

There have been some first rate articles in the recent issues of **The Village Voice** which I have seen, thanks to Marie, who keeps everyone supplied with newspapers around **The Catholic Worker**. Just state what you want, **Wall Street Journal**, **Christian Science Monitor**, **Daily Worker**, **Times**, **Tribune**, **News**, **World Telegram** - - Marie will search the trash receptacles of our neat and tidy streets of New York to find it for you.

The articles, which I no longer have with me, are the ones on the World's Worst Fair, to be held every Saturday afternoon in Harlem, a most horrendous contrast to the World's Fair at Flushing Meadow; an article on the new palatial home of the National Maritime Union. From the story, it looks as though the rank and file don't fare as well as the officers. I was much interested since this was a union we saw spring from the rank and file under the leadership of Joe Curran, who worked as ordinary seaman on the decks of American vessels. During the May 1936 strike, some of the seamen came to stay with us at 115 Mott Street, and during the '36-'37 strike, which marked the real beginning of the union, Bill Callahan, John Cort, Joe and Austin Hughes and I ran a strike kitchen to feed the pickets. Mountains of bread, and tubs of peanut butter, jam and cottage cheese, and tons of coffee were consumed during the three months of the strike.

We were left a few thousand dollars in debt to the grocer which Margaret Gage, one of our readers, promptly paid, and the seamen themselves, many of them, sent us money to repay us. Thanksgiving and Christmas that year meant peanut butter sandwiches for us all.

Gerry Griffin, at Mott Street, was so jealous of our feeding the seamen on the westside water front, jealous for our men on the Bowery, that he promptly started a coffee pot going at Mott Street, St. Joseph's House, and with the help of a woman who brought in ten loaves of bread every morning, (which was multiplied to feed a line everyday), the soup line which we are still running at St. Joseph's House, Chrystie Street got going. John Cort is now father of ten and chief adviser to the Peace Corps in the Philippines and Bill Callahan, father of five, is editor of the diocesan paper in Greensburg, Pa. Austin died a few months ago and Joe's son Tom is now going to sea.

Women's Prison

Another story in the July ninth issue of the Voice, (Sheridan Square, New York), questions, "Why Build a Model Prison When a Hospital is Needed?" Susan Goodman wrote the story and tells of the plans for a 55 acre site on Riker's Island, where a model prison may be constructed at a cost of \$14,000,000, which is allocated in the 1964-65 budget for a new prison. The present House of Detention was considered a model when it was built 30 years ago, Susan Goodman reminds us. I wrote about it at the time, thinking Greenwich Village a strange place to have a House of Detention. I little thought when I first wrote of it that I would be lodged there myself four times.

The report of the New York Citizens Council, of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency favored construction of a jail on Riker's Island but stressed the need to cut down the prison population altogether by such means as freeing people unable to post bail until their trial. New York City only paroles 11% of its convicted prisoners, the Council noted, compared with 70% probation rate in some other states. "Non-violent felons could be handled more effectively outside of jail," they added.

To quote further from Susan Goodman's story, "They are building a jail for women who don't need to be jailed," caustically commented Carl M. Loeb, Jr., formerly head of the New York City Board of Correction. Observing that 80% of the inmates of the women's House used narcotics, he said, "I think we ought to build a hospital instead. The last place to put an addict is in jail."

Village District Leader Carol Greitzer adds a human touch when she notes that at least mothers can communicate from the windows of the present prison with their children on the street below, in the present site, and though Riker's Island with its campus-like atmosphere may be attractive, even heavenly, compared to the present prison, it is isolated. She questions the sense of building a high security prison for women who are not dangerous and wishes that there were more people mobilized to urge prison reform.

And as for seeing visitors, evidently the same old system will prevail - - trying to talk through a mesh screen, at a counter with many others, and one's visitors fingerprinted and questioned.

I have talked to many prisoners and under many circumstances. In the Tombs you stand at something like a telephone booth, and talk through a heavy plate glass window. In Trenton penitentiary it is the same. I visited a prisoner convicted of second degree murder there, who found visits so painful he urged us to write instead.

In Philadelphia, Ammon was ushered into a room with a convicted murderer who is at present in a hospital for the criminal insane. He was locked in a room with him with no attendant present. I myself visited this same prisoner, who was brought out with a dozen others who visited friends and relatives, side by side along a counter which separated us. In San Quentin too I visited a convicted murderer who was brought from Death Row to spend half an hour with me alone in a locked room. This in a high security prison.

Heat and Drought

The heat continues unabated and we have had so little rain that prospects for crops are not so good up the Catholic Worker Farm at Tivoli. I have spent most of the month in the city, but now will go up to the farm for our annual retreat, which will be crowded indeed.

Hans and Joe and Larry are doing a valiant job in the kitchen and Rita, Jean and Marge are helping out with the baking.

Our food bills rise!

But it is a summer of beauty and happiness for many and we thank God for our new farm at Tivoli.