

On Pilgrimage - June 1975

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Vignettes from her date book—life at the beach house on Staten Island, visitors, books she is reading, meetings attended, and visits to Catholic Worker houses and her family. (DDLW #552).

The easiest way for me to write my piece this month is just to follow my diary for the last month. When my sister and I were little girls, we used to climb out after school on a breakwater on Lake Michigan, just off Lincoln Park, and sit there surrounded by that inland sea and write in our diaries. (Whatever became of them!)

Nowadays, I keep two diaries. One just a date book with large space for extended notes, and the other an occasional one when I have a sense of leisure, as at my sister's near Tivoli or my daughter's in Vermont. I will follow the date book now. It is a mixed bag of notes on my winter on the beach in Staten Island, an interim to recover from general fatigue, and to catch up on mail and a book. (I don't remember the time when I was **not** writing a book.)

Sunday, May 4. Pouring rain all day. Everything smells fresh. Waves are pounding on the beach. Went to five-thirty Mass up at Holy Child Church in Eltingville. There seems to be music at every Mass, a children's choir and congregation joining in, and of every hymn, every verse is sung. St Augustine wrote that a prayer sung is twice said. There is no parochial school, but a school of religion for the children. There are pamphlet and book racks, and a St. Vincent de Paul Society (very few of **those** left what with our centralized charities). The priests are Irish, Polish and Italian, and the sermons are very good. Food for thought.

Monday, May 5. Sunny today. Walked on the beach and collected driftwood for the pot-bellied stove. Storms have been so severe this winter that all sorts of timber, remains of wrecked ships and piers, even huge blocks of cement, portions of waterfront sidewalks, have been tossed up by the waves that ate away part of the shoreline through the winter months. And plenty of small scraps for the stove.

Tuesday, May 6. Answering mail for hours . . . Reading the correspondence of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, a fascinating account of the two famous and lovable anarchists who were deported to Russia after the First World War. With difficulty they left Russia, finding it too oppressive. Their story of their years in exile all over Europe is called **Nowhere to Home** (Schocken Books, \$12.95). I had met Berkman years ago after his release from prison. (Ammon Hennacy writes of him in his own autobiography, of his meeting with him in the Federal Prison in Atlanta, Ga. Ammon had a great admiration for Emma Goldman too.) My old friend, Peggy Baird Cowley, with whom I shared a prison cell during the woman's suffrage struggle in 1917 or '18, had given Berkman hospitality after he did time in Atlanta, and Emily Coleman, writer and poet, had been Emma's secretary in Paris while Emma was writing her autobiography (still in print, as is Berkman's prison memoirs). Both Peggy and Emily became Catholics and ended their days with us at our Tivoli farm. Peter Maurin was more interested in the philosophical anarchism of Peter Kropotkin, with his constructive ideas set forth in **Mutual Aid, and Fields, Factories and Workshops**. Kropotkin's **Memoirs of a Revolutionist** was first printed in the **Atlantic Monthly**. His books can be bought in paperback and in these times of highly centralized authority, not to speak of corruption, it is good to read about these freedom-fighters, and a vision of a decentralized society.

Honorable Work

Tuesday, May 6. Press day. May Day is an important date for us, since our paper first came out May first in 1933. We have many writers and many editors. But they are all so engaged in baking bread, making soup, begging from the market, not to speak of taking care of St. Joseph's House on First Street, that writing is always done at the last minute. However, this May Day issue is a gem, covering all our positions and our activities—what we are all about. Also, it is twelve instead of eight pages.

How we pay our bills I do not know. God knows. Scripture tells us, if we “sow sparingly we will we will reap sparingly,” so when we are in need we become more generous and serve an even richer soup to an ever growing line. “Give to him to who asks”—we try to do that. Today it is a cold day. There will be a run on the clothes room, an old store on Second Avenue.

Down here on Staten Island, Augustino caught the first fish of the season, a striped bass. He gave it to Marge Hughes to bake (she is wintering next door but will soon return to West Virginia to the village springing up there). She skinned the fish. I once spread out eel skins on a board and dried them in the sun, and later made a beautiful binding for a prayer book. A bit smelly, but I was reminded that Peter, James and John were fishermen. “After the crucifixion, those apostles could go back to their nets, but Matthew could not go back to his counting house,” Fr. Vincent McNabb, the famous English Dominican writer, said. Fishing is an honorable occupation!

Friday, May 9. I went in to New York to attend the Pax Christi Meeting at which there were two bishops present, Bishop Dozier of Memphis and Bishop Gumbleton of Detroit.

Saturday, May 10. The meeting lasted all day, and Tom Cornell drove me downtown to Union Square in the late afternoon to join the United Farm Worker's meeting which had begun with a parade down Seventh Avenue. It was a beautiful day for the meeting and the joyful confidence of the strikers continues. I hope they get plenty of volunteers for their training courses which are carried on by Fred Ross, a brilliant organizer who has been on their side from the first. I wish I could get to the Farm Worker's headquarters at 331 W. 84th St., New York, New York 10024, to sit in on some of the sessions.

At Staten Island

Monday, May 12. Back to Staten Island. Johnny Hughes and Tommy Turner, his cousin, found star fish and sea horses at low tide today on the beach. It was fun to see them swim around upright. The larger ones, which we picked up on the beach, were dead and dried up. I learned an interesting fact. The female lays the eggs and the male has the burdensome task of carrying them in a pouch (my informant says his **stomach!**) until they hatch!

Tuesday, May 13. Dr. William Miller, historian from the University of Florida who wrote **A Harsh and Dreadful Love**, (now in paperback in the Image books of Doubleday, and originally published by Liveright), arrived for a two-day visit. He is driving back to Florida with a carload of manuscripts and notebooks to help him complete his work on Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker movement. This should be an invaluable help to all the young people who are starting Houses of Hospitality around the country. His own sons and their college mates are starting one in Tallahassee (At present there are about 47. I can not be too sure of the number as there are many beginnings and unless we keep in touch, we do not know how long they survive.) Every now and then we have small epidemics of violence in our houses and neighborhoods, and they are pretty hard to take unless there is a good supportive group. Our windows get broken regularly, but since they are made up of many small panes, they can be mended more easily. One of our fellow workers who enjoys our evening meals, offered to paint vines all over the cracked but reinforced panes, and his artistry resulted

in a regular Jack and the Beanstalk vine which wandered over the panes and spread over the walls. And among the broad green leaves fluttered a number of peaceable white pigeons! I always delighted in this working out practically Peter Maurin's synthesis of Cult, Culture, and Cultivation. Cult (religion) resulted in our bearing these affronts calmly without resorting to violence in turn; Culture was increased thereby, a reminder that the workman on a medieval cathedral also passed from cult to culture; and, of course, the greenery as a whole reminded us of the Cultivation which is going on not only among the little mountain farms of West Virginia, but in Tivoli. When Harry Simmons, our "genius" of an architect (as Ruth Collins, our co-worker on our House problems called him), dropped in one evening, he liked our cheerful utilization of one of the smaller of our daily disasters around St. Joseph's House.

Thursday, May 15. Marge is packing up to go to West Virginia, but finding time to plant the garden in the little yard of one of the two small houses which we have named St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila. They are the nearest thing we have for our young volunteers to use as a Poustinia, which Catherine de Hueck Doherty of Combermere, Canada, has introduced us to through her book by that name, published by Notre Dame Press. Most of the winter I have lived in one and Marge Hughes in the other with her son John. But now the winter has come to an end, and I must go to the farm at Tivoli for a brief visit to Unity Acres and Unity Kitchen in Syracuse.

Friday, May 16. Spent the day cleaning up, getting the little three-room place ready for summer visitors. And always there are letters to write! And temptations to read. I have been reading over Thomas Merton's four long reviews of Indian civilizations which were originally printed in the **Catholic Worker** and which are now going to come out in book form. I am supposed to write the introduction. I feel utterly inadequate. The reviews, really long articles, are inspiring to read and one finishes them only to say, More, more,—we need to study more about these peoples, these former great civilizations! Why do I say yes to such assignments? Partly, it is my newspaper background where writing is a daily job. But I here confess with a great sense of guilt, that this last year I have agreed to write articles for a number of periodicals and have not done so. We are too overwhelmed at The Catholic Worker. The sufferings of so many of those with whom we live day after day, year after year, weigh us down at times so that there is no energy to adequately handle writing jobs. Just to live, to endure, and yes, to rejoice too that God has given us a work to do, is enough. These little houses should serve that purpose, to give us breathing space, time to reflect, and to let go, drop out of activity for a time, leave the work to others and to pray. Work enough!

Spring Visits

The rest of May. I did indeed visit around and enjoyed it very much. Travel refreshes me. Reading Chekhov's letters, I find that he too, was an ardent traveller. Nothing was too much for him. His long trip across Siberia by river and by carriage to visit the Penal Colony of Sakhalin (he hoped to alleviate the sufferings of the people there) and all his letters to his family are fascinating reading. Both Viking Press and Harpers have published volumes of his letters to his family, his publishers and friends, and I have been reading them, and feeling justified in starting out again as I am going to do the rest of this month.

So to finish my report—I have visited Tivoli, and am preparing to go back for much of the Peacemaker Conference the last two weeks of June. A weekend with my sister at Kinderhook, New York. A few days in Syracuse, where I visited Carol and Jerry Berrigan, and the mother of those valiant sons who shared the sufferings of prisoners by their sentences for destroying draft records. A good visit in Syracuse with the group who help Fr. McVey in his great venture, Unity Acres, and then on to Unity Acres itself, where probably two hundred and fifty men have been given refuge in a beautiful tract of forest surrounding an old t.b. hospital which was no longer being used. They are thirty or so miles north of Syracuse and many of our men “off the road,” as we say at Tivoli, and many a one from St. Joseph's House in New York also have found time to recover from illnesses of various kinds. As far as I know, no limit is put on the time they can stay there.

I was sorry I did not get the chance to visit Unity Kitchen in Syracuse, but the trouble is, one is taken possession of by one's friends. But I saw the large building, which is like a three-story loft and houses the dining room, a dormitory which can take care of thirty men, and a clothing room and repair shop. I was much impressed. I also visited in Rochester and was happy to find that the House of Hospitality is still operating, serving food but not lodging. A monastery not too far away is supplying the Rochester and Syracuse houses with bread daily for hundreds of men—good monks bread.

And now I set out for a visit with my daughter up in Vermont. I have not seen her for many months, as her hillside farm was covered with snow and ice during a particularly hard winter. But now I will have the joy of visiting with her and the grandchildren, and their children! On the long bus trip today, I shall do much praying for them all, and for all those I am leaving at home on First and Third Streets, and at Tivoli, who continue the hard round of daily labors, and for our readers and writers, and all those who break bread with us daily.