

On Pilgrimage - September 1961

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1961, 3, 7.

Summary: On a hot and humid August day she describes their neighborhood and the many visitors coming and going. Longs for the country and the beach. Mentions several Workers who participated in freedom rides in the South as part of the civil rights movement. Mentions several conferences on third-world development noting that "some kind of ownership which gives security" is needed in the U.S. as well as elsewhere. (DDLW #784).

The temperature is ninety degrees these days and there certainly has been a long continuing spell of hot weather. Right now at early morning, with the apartment door open, there is a current of air and one can catch a breath. The humidity is high and everything is so damp it is hard to handle paper or pen and one's reading glasses slide down the nose and get filmy. Walking down stairs the stair rail is sticky. August weather, in other words.

During the month we sent out an SOS to friends to help us pay the rent which comes due in frightening frequency. Now in a few days September first will be here. Rent for the 175 Chrystie Street place, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, is \$275. Then there are rents for all the apartments, eight or ten of them, I forget which. Hatty and Scotch Mary have an apartment on Spring Street, and Dianne, Jean, Sharon and I are on Ludlow. Our places are \$25 and \$21 a month, and our landlord who is a plumber, generously tells us he will give us a few days leeway. If we are evicted I understand landlords can charge an increase of 15% of the new tenants.

Rents and utilities remain our biggest problem. Ed Forand goes regularly to the market and gets free vegetables and fruits, and of course we are raising all the vegetables we can eat on the Peter Maurin Farm.

HOME

I am writing in front of the window of the little apartment on Ludlow St. very much like the apartment I had when the **Catholic Worker** started so many years ago. There is an ailanthus tree outside the window, an old tree stripped almost bare of leaves. Two doors down there are some beautiful maples, doing very well, and occasionally one sees tenants cleaning up the yard, a little haven of green in this slum area. It is a deep valley these windows look out on. The buildings are six-story walk-ups across the yards fronting on Essex street, and the Ludlow St. buildings are the same.

Essex street is famous for its markets, now under roof but formerly on push cart; and Ludlow street itself since we have been here, has been receiving every night great trucks from the south, from Florida, South Carolina, etc., bearing bushel baskets of small cucumbers and peppers for the innumerable pickle factories all

over the East Side. The smell is delightful. When I come home from the office about eight at night, the glaring lights show a scene of unloading and loading. Men and boys stripped to the waist pass down baskets to others to load on small trucks to take elsewhere in the city. It is good to have this bright busy distribution center out in front of the house. Downstairs under me is a Chinese grocery store, and on the corner a kosher restaurant where one can get good barley soup, or in hot weather borscht or schav, which is a green sour-grass soup with sour cream, and served with heavy pumpernickel bread. Good for hot weather lunches.

Orchard, Ludlow and Essex streets, we report to former East Side residents, remain the same but further east on Grand street there is one great cooperative apartment house after another. A few blocks down Grand is St. Mary's Church, and a few blocks down Essex past Canal and East Broadway there is old St. Teresa's surrounded by privet hedges and fronted by small sycamore trees nursed and cherished by the old monsignor who has presided there for many years.

SUMMER

I sit in front of this typewriter to finish a column or so for the CW before going on retreat over Labor Day with the Charles de Foucauld secular fraternity at Mt. Saviour, Elmira, New York. It is only grim necessity which keeps me at this writing. I think longingly of the farm and the green fields and woods, the cool porch where Classie May sits with her infant Brenda Lee and sews. Or of the beach where four mothers and their children are enjoying the salt breezes and bathing, fronting directly on the water as they are. Here is a delightful letter I received from one of the Puerto Rican grandmothers who accompanied her daughter and the children for a ten-day holiday while the poor father had to stay in the city and work.

"Excuse me for the lateness in writing you this letter. I hope you are well. I thank you very much for the summer vacation we stayed at your country. We were there as if we were in Portorican countries. I think since I am old it is the best week I have gone. I am very glad since I knew you and if in any time you need me for something, call me."

She wrote letters also to Marge Hughes and to one of the other mothers, Beverley. Summer is our busiest time with visitors from morning until night and much mail to answer, and it is hard to write articles or do the rewriting necessary on the book, **Loaves and Fishes**, which must be in by November first.

Or perhaps we feel overburdened simply because we would like to be sitting on the beach with the children collecting horse shoe crabs and whelk's cocoons and other delightful things.

Walter Kerrell lives with the sea in the city by painting the horse shoe crabs so that they look like masks and he hangs them over the desk where he works in Chrystie Street. Ed Forand gets his taste of the country by transporting families to and from the beach every other week. Stuart Sandberg who has been cooking

in a hot steamy kitchen all summer takes nine boys to the beach for a week end on one occasion, and to other points about the city for a day's excursion once a week. These are the small boys who come in to sing compline at night, and who are always wanting to assist him in the making of stew or soup or dessert. He is beginning a new project in October. We are renting for \$75 a month what is really a large first floor store house in back of us which is almost large enough for roller skating or a basket ball court to be used exclusively for the children, for games, for craft work, and we hope for catechetical and scripture classes, when we have the accredited people to teach. Compline itself may be class enough. Dianne Gannon, who does everything, editing, writing, copying, cooking, taking care of the little girls who run in and out, is at present at a retreat for the next ten days at Grailville, Loveland, Ohio. . . . But it's no use trying to account for everyone on the staff. There are so many comings and goings.

We went to press August 2 and the next day when the paper was delivered to be mailed out, it poured rain. Wrote letters all day. Had a visit from an old Italian doctor from the Bronx, a Waldensian from Florence who had originally wanted to be a missionary to Abyssinia but had come to this country instead. He knew the old Italian radicals Arturo Giovannitti, and Carlo Tresca. He himself recently wrote a book in which he used many of Ade Bethune's cuts and a chapter about the **Catholic Worker**, the reprint of the McCloskey article which was part of a thesis for a degree at Harvard. While the doctor was there, Fr. Plante, S.J. who is vacationing in New York by giving another priest a vacation elsewhere, came in on his afternoon off and as usual we had a most mixed group of visitors. Sometimes the acquaintances made at the CW become lasting friends. August fourth was the first Friday and I went to Mass with Mary Hughes and my own grandchild Sue who visited us for two weeks this summer. Becky had had her vacation on a summer job of a month at Winooski Park, Vermont where she helped the nuns feed a summer school for foreign students conducted by St. Michael's College. Vacation! I can hear her exclaim. But she did have fun. She earned sixty dollars which came to her all in a chunk since the sisters, French Canadian, would not let the girls out of their sight to spend any money or go to the movies. But she saw **Death of a Salesman** played by the troupe from the Catholic University which had a workshop there, and she, and Mary and Sue and I who had come to call for her, heard a pre-Mozart opera, **The Servant Mistress**, which was completely delightful.

But I am ahead of my diary which informs me that on Saturday August 5 I drove to Pottstown, Pennsylvania to speak at Fellowship Farm, which with Fellowship House of Philadelphia was started by Marjorie Penny. (It was there I first met Charles Butterworth, who now bears the burden of managing the House of Hospitality in New York.) I spoke two hours Saturday afternoon, two hours Sunday morning and two hours Sunday afternoon, roughly speaking. The drive home at night to Staten Island over throughways which made night driving simple was exhausting but a night at the beach was a renewal of strength, and a delight to wake up to the sound of little summer waves and the smell of the shore.

LLEWELLYN SCOTT

One of the highlights of that week end was meeting our dear friend Llewellyn who has been running the three houses called Blessed Martin House of Hospitality for almost twenty years now in Washington, D.C. He is looking for another center as the city is taking over the houses in a slum clearance program. He told us about an incident in his youth when he with two other government employees had been driving through the south on a vacation. We had been talking of Freedom Rides and that was how he came to tell us how they had tried to sleep in the car, not being able to get any other accommodation, and when a white policeman shone a flash light in their faces and called them “niggers” Llewellyn’s first reaction had been to shout “Kill ’em,” very vociferously and repeatedly. His two companions calmed him, and the three had to submit to arrest and confinement for a few days in a local jail until they could be identified as government employees from Washington.

“And it wasn’t only the white man I wanted to kill,” Llewellyn said with a big grin. “It was also the colored woman who brought us our meals and treated us worse than the policeman did. I just threw those meals back at her.”

Llewellyn has achieved such a position of prominence in the mind of the Church, and has been given honor by both secular and religious press and we were enchanted by this revelation of high spiritedness. “It’s taken me a long time to learn to love my brother,” he laughed. “Yes, the **Catholic Worker** ideas changed a lot of things for me. I don’t call myself a pacifist yet but I guess I am.”

Another good meeting at the farm was with Fr. Albert Clappert of Belgium, a member of the order of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who is most interested in interracial work and who would give anything to go on a Freedom Ride. But it is a layman’s work, it is for us to fight such battles. The priests will have the suffering and sacrifice they crave soon enough and meanwhile they can preach and teach and cry out against injustice and break the terrible and long silence of acceptance.

GETTING LOST

One enjoyment on that trip was getting lost in Mennonite countryside because I came off the Turnpike too soon. Pottstown is near Ephrata, and the music of that small communistic society is written about Thomas Mann’s **Dr. Faustus**. The program at Fellowship Farm is most enjoyable and includes much music. After the Saturday meeting and a barbecue supper half way up a hillside, we went on to the hill top and the sixty or seventy people participated in a period of silence, looking out over the fields and woods of the Mennonite country stretching out on all sides of us. Saturday evening some of us went to the usual country fair at Boyerstown road and later there was folk dancing. Marjorie told me about the work of Father Divine in Philadelphia where he is still most active, running hotels and helping African students too.

Fellowship Houses have become so widespread that folks come from all around the country to their meetings, and it was good to meet Susan Herrmann, a psychology student of Whittier College, California, who had just come back from one of the Freedom Rides and who told me of the violence inflicted on women also who had joined the others in this protest from all over the country, (We are hoping that Philip Havey who has worked with us since spring here in New York will write of his imprisonment at Parchman, Mississippi for the last month. He is out on appeal now and may have to go back to serve another three months.)

PERKINSVILLE

The following Friday I had the joy of a trip to Vermont, returning not only Sue to her family, but Ellen Paulson to Massachusetts who had been visiting us for ten days. A bicentennial celebration was going on at Perkinsville and there was great gaiety, dancing in the square at Perkinsville and in the basement of the church at Weathersfield which is just up the road from the Hennessy's. The girls had a good time and one woman, middle aged, said Susie, danced until she fainted. Such square dances, four in a row, are violent affairs. But old and young both danced. Tamar was making pickles and canning and getting food ready for the deep freeze. Jim and Willi Baker came with all their children and the three they were taking care of besides while their mother had treatment in the State Hospital for a short period. There was a picnic supper, and in addition to the hot dogs and marshmallows (strange combination), there were a half dozen squirrels taken from the deep freeze from the hunting season the fall before. The boys have had no time for fishing, since the last two weeks they had spent at generous Bishop Joyce's camp at Laka Tara. The priests and seminarians made it a retreat as well as a vacation, I am grateful to say. The Bakers are one of my favorite families, and have always exemplified personal responsibility in acts of loving kindness such as that of caring for these extra little ones. And all on a modest teacher's salary!

In addition to the supplies for supper and the old fashioned ice cream freezer which is always the climax of these wonderful cook-outs, they brought two new comfortable chairs for Tamar's living room. They had already, in another year, brought her extra beds. The Bakers have bought a new house already furnished near Mt. Carmel, New York and may they have a long, happy and healthy life in it.

THE ASSUMPTION

It took eight hours to drive home, and a leisurely drive at that, coming down Route five which is the quickest way. The next day was the feast of the Assumption, which always reminds me of that saying of St. Augustine's "The flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary," and emphasizes to me the dignity of her humanity, just as the feast of the Sacred Heart emphasizes the love of God for man. The

feast of the Assumption together with the doctrine of the resurrection of the body makes heaven real, and goodness knows we need to grow in faith and in hope of heaven in this perilous life which we nevertheless so treasure and cling to.

READING

I read Edwin O'Connor's **On the Edge of Sorrow**, a truly beautiful book. If he is as politically perceptive as he is spiritually so, I shall certainly read his former book, **The Last Hurrah**. It is a far better book than **The Devil's Advocate** though not so colorful.

When it comes to recommending a book which is fascinating in the light of the present history of Brazil and Cuba, not to speak of all the other opening-up areas of the world, where men are beginning to realize they are men and not slaves – I can heartily recommend **The Missionary's Role in Socio-Economic Betterment**, edited by Fr. John J. Considine, M.M., \$1.75, paper back, published by the Newman Press in 1960 and given me on my last trip by Fr. L. J. Twomey, S.J. of the Institute of Industrial Relations of Loyola University in New Orleans. If this is the kind of teaching he is handing out in his Institute I hope he gets the support and backing to widen his work in this field so important in our day. Here are a few quotations from it.

“Communal land tenure in Africa.” said Joseph Blomjous, Bishop of Mwanza, Tanganyika, “is a form that in Catholic philosophy is classed as private ownership of land because it is the ownership of more or less the extended family living on the land. It is not at all ownership of land by the State. Naturally with the changing economic and social conditions in Africa there will be changes which I hope will be slow. . .”

“What we find in many papal documents,” states Fr. Edward Murphy, “is not so much an insistence upon private property as we understand it but rather an insistence upon some kind of ownership which gives security. The type of ownership may change from culture to culture. It may be a communal ownership, which is a perfectly legitimate kind of ownership if it guarantees the individual farmer security, a means of subsistence and opportunities for improvement.”

There is a good deal of discussion in this book, which is a report of four days of meetings at Maryknoll in 1958, of “forty Catholic specialists in problems confronting the less developed areas of the world. They will seek ways to integrate religious and cultural efforts in those areas with action in the social and economic fields.” The initiative for the Easter Week Conference came from Rev. Frederick A. McGuire, G.M., Exc. Sec. of the Mission secretariat of the Catholic Sending societies, Washington, D.C. and Monsignor Luigi Ligutti. The Catholic International Rural Life Movement and the Fordham Institute of Mission Studies were the two sponsoring organizations for the conference. The participants were twelve lay specialists, thirteen non-missionary priests and sixteen field missionaries chosen for the experience. We were glad to see our dear friend R. Marion Ganey, S.J. among them. He has built up the credit union

movement in Honduras, the Figi Islands and in Samoa.

As one acquainted with the problems of destitution in our own country, in both cities and rural areas, a great many of these techniques could be studied to advantage to help sharecroppers, migrants and youthful delinquents in the cities where the great problem is unemployment and lack of leadership. I am thinking especially of Puerto Rican and Mexican peoples who are generally considered Catholic.

CUBA

If such directives as this book contains had been used in Cuba there would be no or should we say, there would be less of a problem about Church and state in Cuba. We are printing excerpts from an article either in this month's CW or next, which has already appeared in **Esprit** in Paris, and was reprinted in translation in **Cross Currents** in this country, and in **World View**. In view of our 70,000 circulation, and the smaller circulation of the other papers which reach intellectuals mainly, we are glad to be able to reprint some of this article which may answer some of the questions of our readers.