

On Pilgrimage - July 1979

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Jotings about many things—nuclear protest, phone calls from old friends, childhood memories, the weather. Includes a letter from a friend about facing fear. (DDLW #260).

Diary Notes

Went to the ten-fifteen a.m. Mass at Nativity Church. Spent the afternoon following the anti-nuclear demonstration at Shoreham, Long Island, on the radio. Deane Mowrer and many others from the Catholic Worker are there, and all were arrested.

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Humid, breathless weather. Little patches of green are pushing out through the cracks in the sidewalk. The sturdy ailanthus tree! My one, large tree, which I can see from my window, just reaches to the third floor of the beautiful old buildings across the street. There are five windows on each floor, arched and pillared and decorated most beautifully, one graystone building between two red brick structures, each six stories high. Beautiful little children live in the graystone building. The fire escapes serve as porches for the little ones.

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Father Geoff Gneuhs has gone to Michigan and Illinois to visit his brothers and sisters, and Dan Mauk went with him to visit his family in Michigan.

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Awoke thinking of Manny Gomez (Charles Philips), Milt Weinhandler and others who had an Anti-Conscription League in 1917. There is talk now of having men, and women too, registering for the draft. Hence, this morning meditation.

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Had dinner with Deane. She told of her adventures at the nuclear plant at Shoreham and her overnight stay in jail there.

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At tonight's Mass at Maryhouse, Betty Dellinger was there. She stayed with us at Peter Maurin Farm in Staten Island while Dave was on the San Francisco to Moscow march many years ago, and gave birth there in the big room off the kitchen, with my moral support. Later, I was visited by health officials, who threatened me with arrest for helping deliver a child with no license as a midwife!

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Talked to my sister, Della, on the phone. I'm sending her our mother's two diaries which our brother, John, brought me; one of her trip to Riga, Latvia, and to Finland, to visit our brother, Donald, who was correspondent for the **Chicago Tribune**, for Northern Europe. The other, when she lived in Florida. How our mother did know how to enjoy life! Even on 37th Street, Chicago, when she read to us as we ate an unappetising meal at supper. In Florida, it was racing at Hialeah and bridge parties. Aunt Jennie and I visited her there one winter. We also visited Cousin Clem on an island off the coast of Florida: There were two hurricane shelters—one for blacks—one for whites!

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There was a fire at Macy's Department Store. In our early days, a friend who worked at Macy's book department obtained all their leftover pastry for us. Now every Friday night, we have pastry again, from a bakery uptown.

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The Feast of St. Anthony. Father Vincent Hovley, S.J. celebrated Mass in our auditorium. After Mass, I visited with him, Eileen Egan, Margaret Lloyd and Paul Melton. Paul, one of the Detroit Catholic Worker Group, is a travel agent, and he arranged my granddaughters' trip to Spain years ago. I gave him a copy of my book, **Therese**, to take back to Father Don Hessler of Maryknoll, who is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of his ordination.

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Felt exhausted all day. Visitors are too much for me. Not even strength enough to answer letters.

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Sampson Raphaelson phoned, author of **The Jazz Singer**, about a cantor's son, he married my friend, Rayna Simons (Rayna Prohme, when she was written about in Vincent Sheehan's **Personal History**). She died in Moscow years ago. We all met at the University of Illinois, so many years ago.

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Mother Teresa of India and Eileen Egan visited.

My daughter, Tamar, arrived unexpectedly from Vermont for the weekend. She and Mary Lathrop went out shopping, and Tamar brought back a large ice cream cone, which cost seventy-five cents! It used to be a nickel (or a dime for a double-dip).

Father Bob Hovda brought a huge bouquet of tiny, pink carnations. We'll have them for the altar on Sunday. He is teaching in a Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago. He was a conscientious objector in World War II.

Execution in Florida was postponed. I had prayed all that Saturday morning. Ammon Hennacy and Mary Lathrop used to vigil outside Sing Sing Prison whenever there was an execution there.

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One of the women in the house gave me an Agatha Christie mystery story. I had mentioned in last month's column my "addiction" to detective stories since I was twelve years old in Chicago.

Mother had been icing a cake, as she did every Saturday night, and the doorbell rang, and, in rushing to the door, I tripped over my brother's foot and broke my arm in three places. Our dear Dr. Lunn, a horse and buggy doctor, was telephoned for and came at once. I was laid out on the kitchen table. My mother administered chloroform and Dr. Lunn set the arm. My father, who was working nights on the **Chicago Inter Ocean**, came home at two a.m., bringing an **OZ** book in one pocket, and in the other, a little white poodle. Thereafter, my Aunt Jenny back in New York sent me a Sherlock Holmes mystery once a week. Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard were my favorite writers when I was twelve. Now my favorite detective stories are those by Dorothy Sayers and the Boney books and the Rabbi books. Very relaxing.

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Talked to Tina de Aragon Feldman on the phone of Dostoievsky's **The Idiot** and Chekhov's **The Three Sisters**, and of the cicadas, which come every seventeen years. They're back this year in the trees at the beach house on Staten Island.

The beautiful black Madonna that Tina carved for us many years ago, from a wood called lignum vitae, is now in our chapel at Maryhouse. Tina, who is suffering from cancer of the spinal cord, returned home again recently after a stay in St. Vincent's Hospital. She wrote me this letter:

Dear Dorothy and Workers in the Vineyard,

Three times in my life I have been saved from fear. The first time, I was five years old. I ran into my parents room, crying "What will I do if grandmother dies?" It was explained to me that there was no final parting; that my grandmother would then wait for me in Heaven.

The second time, I must have been about ten or eleven. I read the story of the lepers of Molokai. I went into a kind of shock. It seemed to me prudent, to say the least, in a world where such fates were possible, to find a way of escape. All summer long, I haunted the swamps of Staten Island, dropping large stones into the ooze to test the door of life. The stones sank and disappeared, and gradually the obsession faded. One day, I took the book from its hiding place under the mattress and read it through. Somehow, Damien's heroism overshadowed the horror of life, and I was made to feel the Love that casts out fear.

The third time is now. I was given the verdict at Saint Vincent's Hospital. For two hours, I was in mortal terror. Then, a thought came to me. Not an experience, just a thought out of St. Teresa's wanderings along the roads of Spain. "The mules are packed, they are kicking, the road will be very rocky, but the destination is sure."

St. Teresa encourages familiarity. This descendant of converts, very female, very stormy, very valiant, does not want us to fall back from the quest in awe of greatness. She asks that we join her in all our failing humanity, since there is nothing to disturb or frighten us except, perhaps. vermin in uncomfortable inns.

Love to all from what Stanley Vishnewski used to call a Catholic Shirker,

Tina de Aragon Feldman