

On Pilgrimage - September 1958

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1958, 1, 6.

Summary: Decries the city's eviction order and describes their futile search for a new house of hospitality. Tells of two weddings and four deaths during the month. (DDLW #742).

The letter from the AUTHORITIES about our impending move is followed by the advice of lawyers that we probably will have several months more to look for a place to live. The relocation people cannot find apartments for the 56 families next door so easily. We shall try to keep track of how this is done, what kind of apartments they are asked to take, and keep our readers informed as to how these dislocations work out.

For 25 years The Catholic Worker has been printed by Rogowski Press which is located on Pearl street near Brooklyn Bridge. They too have to move, and have had the same kind of letter from the city as we, and they too have had to pay rent since May of \$1250 a month on a building which they have owned for many years. From these owners we learn the startling fact that the higher the rent, the more money one gets eventually from the city. So far we are offered nothing, but our claims are to be submitted by the lawyers representing the property. But the sad fact is that The Catholic Worker is so broke now that we have no more money to pay rent. So we face the chance of eviction, true eviction, for nonpayment of rent on property which we thought we owned. If we borrow money from the city to pay the city the rent it asks, we still have to pay the city 6 per cent. Another business man says that the city pays us two or three per cent on the money it owes us!

There is no need for us to take business courses at the Bernard Baruch school of business. We learn by experiencing.

Other injustices come to light from day to day as we study our situation. We are classified under the Multiple dwelling law Class B. which I understand is for transients. But we are 95 per cent permanent residents, some of our family having lived with us, such as Slim and California George, and many others, for fifteen years. Anna, one of our latest arrivals has been sleeping on our hall floor for two years or so. "I haven't slept in a bed for thirty years," she says proudly. But that doesn't mean she doesn't want a roof over her head and a family around her.

During my recent visit to Minneapolis, I learned how James Powers, the famous writer, had been evicted twice, once from Collegeville, and once from St. Cloud, from property his family owned, for a highway first and then for a parking lot. He is now living in Ireland. It does not comfort us any to learn that these evictions are taking place all over the country.

We are a little better off than the other slum dwellers who are always having to pay under the table for apartments, or buy worthless furniture in order to get the rooms they need.

How long, O Lord, how long, will they grind the faces of the poor inasmuch as they have done it unto the Puerto Ricans and the Negroes and the Mexicans, they have done it unto thy Son. Look upon the face of Thy Christ!

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We went to press August 4th and this issue goes to press September 9. It makes us happy to get letters from our readers who are distraught with our delays and tell us that **The Catholic Worker** is like a drink of cold water in a desert land.

August 5

Today a visit from Ruth Florsheim of Germany and Jerusalem, a craftswoman, a scholar, a writer and photographer. She will give us a talk on Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher from whose work **Paths in Utopia** I have gained the most encouragement towards community. Peter Maurin would have adopted that work as a text for study for the "personalist and communitarian revolution" as Emmanuel Mounier called it.

Today I saw an ad in the Times about a house on Prince and Mott streets which seemed exactly what we wanted for our new home. There were three stores and a seventeen room one family house above, with a penthouse on a roof which was all railed in and would substitute for our present spacious yard where we hold our Friday night meetings and our festivities. There was oil heat and it was partially fire-proof. The price was within reason, if the city paid us what we had paid out for our house on Chrystie street. Beth Rogers, Robert Steed and I rushed over to see it and fell in love with it at once. The neighborhood was just right for one thing, three blocks from the Bowery instead of the one we are now, and as so often happens in New York, a completely changed neighborhood, a little Italian village in the midst of chaos. Across the street a bakery, a cheese factory, a wood working shop, evidence of the small crafts and business still fighting for survival in New York. On Prince street too there is a neighborhood clinic which treats everything including eyes and teeth, and half a block down a children's playground with a fountain in the middle, and instead of the sad rows of derelicts crowding the benches as in our park across the street, there were mothers with baby carriages and children playing. We need some little

contrast to the refugee type existence we have been living for the past eight years, crowded to bursting with the destitute single men and women, far more than we can ever take care of. All we can do is just be there practicing that presence which the French Catholics are calling attention to as so necessary today. We realize our own powerlessness and yet say, " In Him we can do all things." Practice hospitality and the works of mercy and leave God to do the rest.

The neighborhood was right, the house was right with big rooms large and many windowed, stretching the length of three stores along Mott street. Also, it was in old St. Patrick's parish, a parish we dearly love.

August 6

Dorothy Tully, our lawyer, called to tell us that the house we are so much interested in cannot be changed to a Multiple Dwelling, type B House which is our classification. There is a law passed which is preventing the changing of houses, such as single family houses into multiple dwellings such as ours. It is to protect the Puerto Ricans, she said, because many houses have been renting rooms to entire families at exorbitant rents. How well we know that, what with paying rent for Catherine and John and other emergency cases at the rate of sixteen a week!

Dorothy has consulted everyone and there is no chance of our getting that house. (Next day it was sold to a sculptor.) We must look further. Also she says our generous city will loan us money on the assessed valuation of our house at six per cent interest, in order that we may have something to make a down payment on another house. All the condemned house owners must have lawyers and appraisers who get a certain percentage of what they are able to obtain in payment from the city for their clients. The city is also obliged to relocate all the 56 families it is dispossessing because of the new subway. They can offer them apartments in the far reaches of the Bronx, Queens, Staten Island which would be far from work and friends, and out of the group they have been used to living among, and if they refuse to take this shelter they can be put on the street. There is also the municipal lodging house and the "shelter" and many are the families being processed there who came to us for clothes. Try to relocate a family with eight children for instance. During the summer we had an Italian family at the beach who were living ten in a two room apartment and had been so living for four years. And this is the wealthiest city in the world.

We must relocate within the next few months and if we do not have a place, the city will have the tremendous added expense of housing in places comparable to ours, the scores we have been caring for over the years. In our struggle to illustrate by our acts the principle of personal responsibility and decentralization, we have saved the city hundreds of thousands of dollars, because we and our readers have taken less in order that others might have more.

Wednesday, August 6

Yesterday Dorothy Willock drove to the beach to pick up the little colored family she had left with us the week before. The Italian girls are coming tomorrow. Dorothy's car was so overloaded with eight children of her own and the family of four that the springs rubbed against the wheels and caused them to smoke. She was able to get down to us all right, but was not able to get home with the additional load so she left her two oldest girls and they stayed with Johannah and Mary at the beach house. The fifteen-year-olds stayed up all night drinking tea and went swimming at dawn. They had a wonderful time.

Thursday, August 7

One day I am in New York, another day on the beach, and with the activity, I am getting some writing done too—new chapters on the Therese book and a couple of articles. And there is always this column every month which takes a day, in spite of following my diary. I always add to the notes I've taken

Much preparation in New York for Roger O'Neil's and Mary's wedding on Saturday. Roger has worked at the Catholic Worker for the past ten years, a prime example of the personalist. (I think he prefers that term to anarchist.) A wonderful example of kindness and patience and devotion to the poor. We will miss him mightily.

August 8

In our Italian family who are guests at the beach the mother works in a candy factory, the father is a mechanic, the oldest girl at the dime store, and the next oldest cares for the younger children. There is enough money earned for better housing but no housing available for so many children.

August 9, Saturday

Today was the wedding day of Roger and Mary; the whole house participated. Charles McCormick had to rush the groom out to buy a suit in the morning and the bride was dressed by all the women in the house of hospitality. Anne Marie Stokes arranged the veil. If ever a house was filled with joy and good wishes it was 223 Chrystie street today. Mary is from Nova Scotia and had come to help us and stayed for the last year. She has a tender face and a radiant smile and everyone loved her. Celia Freeman came at six to start making salads, someone else decorated the yard with streamers and the library with white ribbons and bells and a table in the center for the wedding cake (there were scores of extra cakes). Charles Butterworth and Roland Gosselin, and Albert

all made sandwiches and Anne Marie made the punch which filled hollowed-out water melons and was dipped out with inelegant soup ladles.

The wedding took place at Nativity Church on Second Avenue with Fr. Janner, S.J. officiating and the reception lasted until evening. Everyone who came in was welcome.

And then sadness! Roy Duke, who had been cooking in our House of Hospitality for the past four years, and who had bossed the job all day with the utmost patience, supplying knives to the Hughes children to cut up the fruit, and mayonnaise, to Celia for the salads, and himself cooking for the house and line, went quietly upstairs to his bed to rest and lay back and died. Mike saw how pale he was just before the end and called us quickly and we sent for the priest. Margaret relayed the news so that Larry who was his partner in the kitchen was at his bedside at once. We were both on either side of him when he breathed his last. We were praying the prayers for the dying, the ejaculatory prayers which were all we had time for, and then the priest was there to anoint him and give him final absolution.

Later Bob Steed and Ann Marie and some of the others recited the vespers for the dead there in the little dormitory which he shared with California George and Gordon.

In the case of a sudden death in a house like ours, the police come and then the medical examiner and the policeman went through all his belongings to find out if he had any assets and the name of his nearest relative. Roy had only a sister in New Hampshire. His own wife had died of a heart attack many years before. They had no children. He suffered badly with arthritis and preferred to work with us where there was no tension, he said, and he could take off when he wished. He and Larry usually arranged to work between them. It was humbling to see how little he had—just one good suit, his work clothes, a change or so of underwear, nothing else. He accumulated no belongings, no books, no papers, no unnecessary clothes. "The clothes which hang in your closet belong to the poor," the fathers of the church say. "You take to heaven only what you have given away," Peter Maurin was always quoting and he too died as bereft of goods as Roy. What Roy had given, and richly were man's two most precious possessions, his work and his time, and he gave them both with loving kindness.

August 10

This morning to the Russian liturgy at St. Michaels on Mulberry street, with Ammon. Helene Iswolsky was there, and Anne Marie, and this morning Frank and Maise Sheed. Visited Marge Hughes who is at St. Vincent's Hospital and brought her *Master of Hestviken* to read. Coming home I met Jack, our Russian

anarchist friend and we talked of social and ethical principles and the supernatural life as we ate a bowl of schav at a Jewish restaurant on Second Avenue. He was much struck by the statement “God be came man that man might become God.”

August 11

Today is Jimmy Hughes’ birthday he is nine years old. There was a party on the beach with a storm threatening, but it held off while we roasted hot dogs and marshmallows. Shorty, our Mohawk friend built the fire, and it was cold, drizzly weather so it felt good. Stayed up late with visitors talking about community. The latest community is the Eric Gill community at Brookfield, Massachusetts where George and Mary Gulick and their children and Bon and Pat Rudolph and one single man are living.

August 12

Wrote all day and went in to the city for the wake of Roy Duke. It poured rain all evening. Many came from the St. Joseph’s house and we said the rosary. When I returned to the house I found a telegram from Mary Humphrey saying Don, her husband was dying. If I leave tomorrow after the funeral I can get there in thirty hours, and it is fifty-five dollars a round trip by bus.

August 13-22

Fr. Queredo offered the Requiem Mass for Roy at nine o’clock. Thirteen from the house went out to the cemetery. In the evening I took the 6:45 bus for Minneapolis. The bus travels by turnpike straight through with no city stops until it reached Chicago at 11:30 the next morning. There was time to go to Mass at St. Peter’s church at noon before the 1:15 bus left for Minneapolis. The rest of the trip was on a two lane highway and through many towns though we did not stop for passengers. I got in at midnight and slept before going to the hospital to see Don and Mary. He had been stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage or with Collingens’s disease, I am not sure which and was paralyzed on one side, blind and could not speak. But he was conscious of his friends coming to him, and could nod his head yes or no, and he wanted the psalms read to him and showed his attention by the way he pressed the hand of whoever was sitting by him.

Don and Mary have been close to **The Catholic Worker** for twenty years, living first near the Milwaukee House of Hospitality, then at St. Isadore’s farming commune at Aitkin, Minnesota with the Reser’s and Martie Paul and Fr. Cordes and others, and then moving to Robbinsdale, St. Joseph, and finally to St. Cloud,

Minnesota. Don earned the living for the family, (he had eight children) by making chalices and his house was filled with his paintings and carvings. Wherever you go in Minnesota you find the work of Don Humphrey. At the Newman Club chapel of the University of Minnesota it is his chalice, his monstrance that Fr. George Garrelts, national president of all the Newman Clubs of the country, shows you. He and Don had been friends for years, and had gone on vacations together, hunting with bow and arrow, painting trips to Mexico and so on. Don knew many priests and his house was the center for the laity too. Whenever I was in that part of the country, the meetings of all the families and friends of the Worker were at his home. And Mary presided over all, the valiant woman, herself a weaver, and maker of baptismal robes, and other things for the altar. Fr. Harvey Egan, Fr. Marion Casey, Fr. Garrelts, Fr. Fehrenbacher and many others came to pray for him. The University of Minnesota Hospital is one of the best in the country, and he had a round-the-clock care. But after a terrible struggle, just to keep breathing, he died two weeks after his stroke. Mary spent all her time with him, the hospital generously allowing her to use the other bed in the room. She was spelled by her daughter Rachel, and by her sister-in-law Joyce and others, so there was never a minute when he did not have a friend or relative by his bedside. He was a dearly loved companion to many, and a great craftsman. He and Eric Gill and Peter Maurin and all those who have gone before are together now, in the heart of the Trinity, knowing as they are known, loving as they are loved, and since there is no time with God, no separations, no space, we are together still, they do not have to wait for us, we are already there, family and friends—provided of course we are faithful to the grace God gives us.

Another Death

As I write this, there is another marriage tomorrow morning, Kieran Dugan and Sheila Johnson, and there is another death too to report,—that of Chad Smith, father of the family who lived with us for two years at Peter Maurin farm. He died after an operation for some kind of pressure on the brain, and he too leaves a wife and nine children. David will be released from the Army, Bernadette will go on to Loras College where Bishop Hagerty, O.S.B. arranged a scholarship for her. The Smith family were from the Bahamas and are converts of the Benedictines there. One of the children is named for Fr. Quentin. Thelma is married, so that leaves Lucille, the sixteen-year old girl to be at home and help her mother in her spare time from high school with Edmund, Charlie, Paul (my godchild), Quentin and Mac. Chad was buried by the side of his little son Charlie who was drowned four or five summers ago at the age of six. Our group helped sing the Mass, and we are proud too that our own helped dig the grave, in our Catholic Worker plot in Rossville, where Fr. McGraph is our good friend, and where the church is dedicated to St. Joseph.

Fr. Sheehan

And Fr. Sheehan also died this month, and his funeral is today as I write. He was a Josephite, a teacher in the seminary at Newburgh and had been the confessor and advisor to our Maryfarm group there. He was a faithful and good friend to all our group there, and we will be singing a Mass for him Labor Day at the Peter Maurin Farm.

This has been too crowded a month by far, with its two weddings and four deaths and with them all, the work must go on, –the hunting for a home and the caring for those who are with us at St. Joseph's house and Peter Maurin Farm and the two little houses, Maryhouse and Nazareth at the beach. In a burst of efficiency, after many distractions Bob Steed, who is in charge of the House of Hospitality now, paid off so many bills that he overdrew at the bank and we had to get in touch with our more friendly creditors to ask them to hold the checks. (Even the bank covered some of them for us.) But one does not receive favors from the utilities and we cook a great many meals, for seventy five three times a day, and for the breadline twice a day. We are down to nothing and it is not time to send out the appeal until the feast of St. Francis in October. We are praying St. Joseph to keep us going and we are hoping too that you will send us some loves and fishes, or their equivalent, so our dear Lord and Saviour can multiply them for us as he has done these twenty five years past.