

On Pilgrimage - October/November 1978

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Summary: Snippets expanded from her diary: recollection of early Russian friends, visitors, the death of Pope John Paul I and election of John Paul II, books, and operas. Says sex is fundamental but religion transfigures it. (DDLW #593).

(My column " On Pilgrimage" is culled from expanding hints in my diary.)

Staten Island, Late September

Woke early with a cricket on my window sill, sawing away at his fiddle, and bringing back to my mind my very early happy days on the beach in Staten Island (long before there was a Catholic Worker), perhaps a mile away from our present little bungalow, where many of the Catholic Worker crew vacation now. One summer especially, the cicada sang in the trees during the day, and in the fall the crickets. Next door, the Maruchess family lived. Sasha came from Tula, where Tolstoi lived, and Freda, his wife, from a Russian-German background. Down the road, Mike Gold and his brother, Manny Granich, had a bungalow, and their kosher mother brought them her own dishes when she visited them. The Maruchess family had actor friends – the Bulgakovs, and Varya Bulgakov was learning a part to play at the Eva LeGalliene Theatre on W. 14th Street. The play was **Cricket on the Hearth**. Her husband was already in a Broadway Play–**Street Scene** I think it was. Both, I believe, were from the prestigious Moscow Art Theatre company. There was also Irinar Dzarjevsky, a “basso profundo,” who had become so rheumatic from his life in the trenches on the Russian front in World War I that he had to hold on to a fence in walking up and down the little lane to limber up in the morning. He sang in the Koshetz choir. (My memory and my spelling may be faulty!)

In late September, Freda and Sasha rented a big apartment, one flight up, across and down the street from the 14th Street Theatre, and cooked and served dinners to the theatre group. It was a family affair, a neighborhood affair, and in those early 20's quite common uptown and downtown, in or out of theatrical circles.

I remember very well the play, **The Three Sisters** by Chekov, which my sister and I went to see, and how we boasted of having a “Masha” dress, a dismal black affair, which we wore when we were in a somber, Russian mood.

For some reason or other, **The Cricket on the Hearth** was a play favored by this theatre group, and I coached Varya in her study of it. Hence these nostalgic, early morning thoughts.

I use the word nostalgic, because another book that came my way these last months was **So Short a Time**, an unbearably tragic book, because so true. It was a biography by Barbara Gelb of John Reed and Louise Bryant, and what they went through in the Russian Revolution. I knew Jack Reed when I worked for the old **Masses**, and I knew (slightly) Louise Bryant. Later, I worked for **The Liberator** when Bob Minor was the editor.

Stanley Vishniewski found this book for me. Stanley is our book finder. He bought me **The First Violin** by Fothergill, a very romantic novel I love. He also found **The Gadfly** by Vornick. It is fun to read old favorites.

Maryhouse, N.Y. City, October

A bright, sunny, cold morning . Last Night, I saw a film about Harlem on television, showing some of the beautiful architecture there, like ours here on Third Street. The sun is creeping down the buildings across the street. Elaborate carvings on the frames around the windows, different on every floor. I sit in my window often, looking at them, and watching neighbors on the street. On First Street, opposite St. Joseph House, there is an abandoned, corner tenement building from which the carvings of angels and flowers have been carefully removed.

Kassie Temple and Kathy Clarkson are back from a visit in Nova Scotia. They brought me a cassette tape message from Dixie McMaster. I had visited her in Montreal and later in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. With Dixie's help, I first became associated with Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus. Peter Maurin had told me of this new order (or is it association) of Charles de Foucauld, founded in our time. I have also visited the little Sisters in Washington, D.C. and in the desert in Arizona.

I read my morning Psalms in the Anglican prayer book and hymnal which Ann Perkins gave me—it is so much easier to find ones way around in. The words “ordinary time” in our own prayer book put me in a state of confusion and irritation. To me, no times are “ordinary.” C.S. Lewis did us all a great service in writing his book on the Psalms, a beautiful and most readable commentary.

The death of Pope John Paul the First was a terrible shock. We saw his funeral on television. My eyes are worn out from watching it.

Jeanette Noel, who had my father's Bible rebound for me, is visiting here from the Ammon Hennacy House in Bubbardston, Mass., which recently burned down.

Todd Gauchat, son of Dorothy and Bill Gauchat, was operated on in Minnesota, to recover his speech. Todd is a valiant student who has cerebral palsy, but has gotten through high school, and is going on with his studies. He got through high school thanks to a keen mind and a specifically-constructed typewriter.

Fr. Don Hessler visited and “healingly” blessed Stanley and me (who were the only ones around). He is very much into the Pentecostal movement in the Church. He is a Maryknoll priest who, with Fr. Meyer, spent the Second World War interned in Hong Kong when the Japanese took over. Food was so scarce, they ate every green—every blade of grass that grew on that border city.

Peggy Scherer is back from several months in Guatemala and Mexico. She brought me a beautiful, little, wooden Cross on a fine chain, and a little, woven purse, bless her!

John and Margaret Magee called from the airport, on their way to Rome. What a wonderful time to be there!

Tom Cornell brought a visitor from Germany, Werner Dierlamm, who represents a coalition of a German groups—Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, Ammon Hennacy also wrote about them.

“Happy are the people the Lord has chosen for His own.” The Jews are indeed God’s chosen, and **God does not change**. I read a long interview with Chaim Potok. My heart warms to him. His books are all beautiful, bringing to my mind the high esteem in which Jewish men hold their wives, mothers of their households.

Watched a documentary on television, “The Chosen People” with Ellie Wiesel. (I am reading his book **Night**.)

To have lived through the Fr. Coughlin era is indeed to have seen something of the persecution of God’s chosen. Msgr, Edward Lodge Curran, the Brooklyn anti-Semite, wanted to buy *The Catholic Worker* for \$2,000. Naturally we refused. To Fr. Coughlin’s credit, he did, with the contributions of his immense following, build a great number of rural churches in the deep South, which I came across on my speaking trips around the country. But his talk of international Jewish bankers stiffed up a wave of anti-Semitism.

Columbus Day—Stanley went to the parade on Fifth Avenue. He has always distributed **The Catholic Worker** at parades. It was often taken as a Roman Catholic “cell’s” work of the Communist Party (boring from within, as the saying goes).

Read some of the Golden Notebooks by Doris Lessing. She seems to make a religion of sex. Sex is, of course fundamental, but religion transfigures it. Dostoevsky’s “love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing, compared to love in dreams” is a half truth. Or rather, love is a cross-transfiguration a necessity.

The house is cold this morning. Sometimes, the water is hot enough for an immediate, hot drink, but nothing works this a.m. St. Therese of Lisieux said there was nothing she suffered from so much as cold, and since then Carmelite convents have been heated in the winter.

I listened to Richard Wagner’s “Lohengrin” on the radio last night. Tom Hoey had been given eight tickets to the New York City Opera’s production of “The Marriage of Figaro”—Deane Mowrer and others went. I prefer Wagner, pagan that he is.

There has been much discussion about closing the farm at Tivoli. The three houses there make squatters a problem. John Filliger, our farmer since the 1936 seamen’s strike. And George Collins our saintly hermit and pot washer, since he came from jail after World War II, have been with us for many years. We must pray to St. Therese—“All things work for good to those who love God.” Reading old diaries, I find the same unrest as the last year I was at the farm. Our human condition—our discontent. “Now is the winter of our discontent.”

Ed Forbrand sent over to me the **Collected Works of Teresa of Avila**, and also Michael Minihan’s translation of Dostoevsky by Konstantin Mochulsky, which he had dedicated to

Helene Iswolsky. While she lived with us at the Farm. She gave him and others much valuable help.

Went to noonday Mass at Nativity Church, and then lunch with Anne and Steve Kaune at their beautiful apartment on First Street, many of our young people can make beauty in the dingiest slum.

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the man who brings tidings of peace, joy and salvation.” On Friday, October 20th, Danny O’Shea of the Rochester, N.Y. Catholic Worker House (formerly here with us in the city) was ordained in that diocese. Many from here have gone up to the ordination. St. Joseph House, Rochester, was the third house of hospitality to open (after New York and Boston) and is a very good one. There have been many vicissitudes, but many happy meetings there, and not Father Danny O’Shea is running it. The Trappist monks nearby Piffard, N.Y. bake bread and supply the Rochester house.

On Saturday, October 21st Hilaire Hennessy, my youngest grandson, and Erin Schuerger were married in Perkinsville, Vermont. Tamar and all of her nine children and 14 grandchildren were there. Hilaire and Erin, and also Katy, my youngest granddaughter, went to the East High School, Chester, Vermont. Maggie Corbin, who lived with my daughter these last years, is going there now also, teaching spinning and weaving for her tuition. Katy is going to travel around the country, to keep in touch with former pupils of the school.

On Sunday, October 22nd, the inauguration Mass of our new Pope John Paul II (Karol Cardinal Wojtyla of Poland, the 264th Pope and the first non-Italian Pope since 1529) was televised from Rome. I sat at the TV from the early hours until it was time for our Sunday Mass here at Maryhouse. Nina Polcyn Moore of Minnesota is Polish, and we visited Warsaw together on our trip to Russia in 1972.

Sunday afternoon, I had a visit from my granddaughter Maggie and Bill Ragette and their two children, Oak and Hickory. They were on their way home to West Virginia from Vermont, after weeks of apple picking and celebrating Hillaire’s wedding.

Fr. John J. Hugo used to remind us that “He who says he has done enough has already perished. . .” and “You love God as much as the one you love the least.” I recall his words often. He has been a great influence on the lives of our Catholic Workers.