

# On Pilgrimage - December 1976

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*Summary: Describes work around the farm at Tivoli, the peaceful death of a companionable worker, and her Winter reading about religion in Russia. (DDLW #575).*

It is a beautiful sunny day, midwinter in Tivoli. No wind to chill the bones, and the children, those who are not napping, are out playing on the lawn. Only Tanya goes to school and she will be home soon.

The men are hauling wood down from the hillside, clearing out dead trees, and Check Matthei and Charles Goodding have brought loads of driftwood from the Hudson which flows majestically by the three houses which make up Tivoli Farm.

The Indians called the Hudson “the river which flows two ways.” It is a tidal river and driftwood and later ice flow down and up stream with the tide. I’ve probably written this before but I cannot get over the wonder of it. There is no ice yet, but I just saw a wagon load of drift wood, tree trunks and logs go by the window towed by John Filliger’s tractor, which he bought and fuels with his own money. He had worked during all the W.W.II years and only now is collecting his unemployment benefits. A tidy sum came to him, and besides helping out many needy brethren he bought a tractor. The machine eats up the oil from the earth and gives nothing back! But John will use his own money for oil. Men love machines!

Once, on the Newburgh farm we had two white horses. They had done well on the Easton, Pa. farm but when we arrived at Newburgh, some miles inland from the Hudson, the shale was too much for their poor feet. They were not much good for farming. “Let’s give them a bag of oats and send them off down the road,” Tom Sullivan said heartlessly. I think we sold them to a neighboring farmer who had good soil. (Some day the story of our farming efforts – our farming communes which became retreat houses, which became hotels on the side of the road – will be told in detail little by little.) Peter Maurin wanted Agronomic Universities, and we can boast of a certain synthesis we have at times achieved of cult, culture and cultivation, as he termed it.

Our chapel is beautiful. Four windows behind the altar look out on the river, clusters of evergreens, blue skies and the sun pouring in all day, since the room faces south. Tina de Aragon’s statue of Our Lady, carved from Lignum Vitae, the heaviest wood in the world, is almost four feet tall and stands on a table surrounded at the moment by dry corn stalks. There is also a white bowl of flowers, and green and bright pink give a tender touch to the sculpture. On the other side of the altar is the tabernacle where the lamp glows day and night. Above is a photograph of St. Therese, the Little Flower. On the altar, at present, is

a gorgeous bowl of chrysanthemums, sent me on my birthday by Tom Sullivan, one of our former editors.

A score of people can be accommodated in this one room and an equal number in the room adjoining it, which is a library of spiritual reading. Both rooms really make one large, open chapel, the quietest place in the house.

## Work-Work-Work

All the past summer and fall was a time of all kinds of work - repairs to the roof and the ceiling of the large living room which had fallen down. Repairs cost altogether \$25000. How we got the money to pay for that (and a lot of the work was done by our own people) is an interesting tale. A group of Puerto Ricans had purchased together some acreage a few miles up the road and were not prepared to settle on or work it. So they offered us the use of their vineyard, four acres of grapes which our young people, in February, pruned and tied and later cultivated and harvested. It was hard work and handled by a disciplined crew. That work brought in the two thousand dollars necessary to pay for our new sewage system. The leaking roof was paid for by the same group, only this time it was strawberry picking in June. Stoop labor, indeed. Peter Maurin was surely right when he said there was “**no unemployment on the land.**” If you have land!

The extensive repairs of the ceiling were accomplished by two students from Iowa, who spent their strength and the three hundred dollars donated by their friends, and by Jean’s parents. Al and Monica Hagan. Just before they left, they hauled in a beautiful, large rug (a villager discarded it!) which is a warm playground for the little ones these cold wintry days. How can we thank them – Jean and Greg! May their lives be long and happy!

## Gordon

A very deep sorrow fell upon us in November. Gordon McCarthy who had worked with us for the last fifteen years, at least, died very suddenly and peacefully. He got up from a quiet and companionable lunch, went into the living room to his favorite Morris chair, and putting his head back, quietly died. It was so sudden there was no time for grief. We called the emergency squad at Red Hook and the priest, and both arrived almost immediately. Gordon was anointed as he lay on the stretcher. He lies now in our cemetery plot beside Helen Iswolsky and the others who have died with us these last twelve years.

How many long and companionable evenings we had spent together in our own dining room, where Rita did some of her drawings, Stanley played chess, or some classical music on his tape recorder, and some of us read and exchanged detective stories. (Our latest enthusiasm is for the Australian ones, the “Boney” books, named for the aborigine detective, Napoleon Bonaparte, who to my mind, surpasses Sherlock Holmes.) Gordon always kept track of our choice selections.

His other enthusiasm was the World Series. It was relaxing to talk to him. He had a most sympathetic understanding of peoples’ problems and needs! How we miss him.

Farmer John, Marcel, Gordon, are the three who could take care of any emergency of furnace, plumbing, electricity. How old was he? He seemed young to me, and strong, and dependable. We miss him. He died in peace. May he rest in peace. He is added to the list of my missal who are remembered daily.

## Winter Reading

Detective stories relax and distract one's minds but I have had some stimulating reading this month - a long and heavy book published by the University of Chicago Press in 1971 - **Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union 1917 - 1967**. It is made up of 20 articles by twenty authors. So far I have only had time to browse around in it - especially one chapter - "Religious Themes in Soviet Literature."

There are many quotations from Pasternak's poetry both in Russian and English and they are of incomparable beauty. There is much of Marine Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) and Anna Akhmatova (1888-1966) quoted. A. Sinyavsky, who wrote of Pasternak's poetry, speaks of the "vitality of nature" . . . . "All conquering and saving," bearing witness to the "greatness of life, to the immeasurable value of existence."

These words "spoke to my condition" as the Quakers say. It is wonderful how such a weighty piece of the history of our times falls into one's hands, just when there is time and quiet to read and relish it. It was probably sent to us to review in 1971 and I certainly recommend it heartily, though I am quite incapable of giving it the review it deserves

Wear, tear and breakage have depleted our supply of sheets, towels, blankets and cups at St. Joseph House, Maryhouse and the Tivoli Farm. If you have any to spare, we can use them.