

# On Pilgrimage - January 1975

Dorothy Day

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*Summary: Describes time spent at the beach house, and a retreat at Corpus Christi Monastery. Eulogizes two long-time Catholic Workers, Julia Porcelli Moran and Jim Rogan, who recently had died. (DDLW #546).*

**January 1975.** First of all let me apologize, as I am sure everyone else is doing right after Christmas, for not being able to keep up with all friends and readers of the **CW** who have sent me greetings and sympathy for my worn out state. Come to think of it, one **should** be well-worn at 77. The young people with great vigor, carry a tremendous burden, cooking, dish washing, taking turns at being in charge of the house, writing, mailing out paper, delivering it to the Post Office, filing, carding, making stencils, seeing visitors, etc. They don't like the words "being in charge." They prefer to say, he or she "has the house," this afternoon, or this evening. In the face of all this, my work, which is answering mail and doing a bit of writing, should be simple. (I get plenty of help with the mail, too.)

But in the words of St. Ephraim, "joyous I waste the day." To assuage my guilt feelings, "I beg pardon of God, and of you, my brothers and sisters."

## The Beach

Really I am to be envied. I am spending a good deal of my time at a little three-room house on the beach, not too far away, where I can enjoy the beauties of sunrise over the bay and the sunset, which, alas, comes all too early every afternoon.

To follow my diary for the month: On December first there was a terribly high tide which looked as though it were going to wash the houses along the beach out to sea. Actually many feet of shore were eaten away, and huge blocks of cement, the trunks and roots of trees; beams and timbers from other beaches were cast up on ours; a rocky shore was laid bare and a sand bar appeared, I suppose to be washed away again in some later storm. Winds were forty miles an hour and waves roared up on the beach. High tide was at nine-thirty in the evening but it took till midnight for the tide to stop eating away at the shore as it had been doing for many hours. Doesn't it make one feel warm and cozy to read about storms on a winter night? I enjoyed the warmth of the little house that night. For the next week, from December first till the twelfth, the temperature fluctuated between twenty and forty. To heat by gas is very expensive. I must look for a little pot-bellied stove to burn driftwood. No need to chop wood, plenty of it, stove size, all over the beach. My diary reads on December

11th: Not much ambition, little energy. Memory bad. I answer a letter and then find I am answering it over again the next week. I am indulging myself in reading Scripture and **about** the spiritual life, the lives of the saints—instead of living it myself. I must make a retreat.

**December 17th–20th:** Retreat at Corpus Christi Monastery where the Dominican nuns have perpetual adoration and are cloistered. There are only two guest rooms and outside in a small garden in front there are seven white weeping birch trees which are beautiful now, even stripped as they are of leaves. But there is no lack of green with the evergreens, and the ivy which covers the ground. It was a delight to find one of our former Rochester Catholic Workers, who years ago worked with Ed Willock and the magazine **Integrity** in New York, sitting beside the Mother Superior when I was introduced to them both on my arrival.

I have no illusions about the life of the spirit being an easier one than ours. Mental work is hard, and manual labor harder, but the spiritual labor of these nuns is hardest of all.

One day there was trouble with the boiler, and the chapel was stone cold. I learned later that from 1889 until 1964, that is, from the time the convent was built, there had been no heat in the convent during the winters. Then after a jubilee service, presided over by the Cardinal, he ordered them to put heat in. As it is, the place is only partially heated. One of the extern sisters told me that they had very heavy woolen clothes which they wore even in the summer! The Little Flower, St. Therese, told her Mother Superior on her deathbed that she suffered from cold more than anything else in her life and asked her, as a dying wish, that she would put heat in their severe Normandy Carmelite monastery.

That Friday night I returned to St. Joseph's house on First Street in time to hear Carmen Mathews give her traditional Christmas readings. We had midnight Mass at the house.

## Two Obituaries

This month, Julia Porcelli Moran died, and December 30th I got news of Jim Rogan's death. I like to write obituaries of such wonderful people as Julia and Jim. "They were accounted worthy to suffer." "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, but they are at peace." What a comfort Scripture is! St. Therese, whose biography I wrote years ago, one of countless others which have been written, promised on her deathbed—"After my death, I will send down a shower of roses." Jim and Julia will want to do the same, I'm sure.

Julia Porcelli Moran was sixteen years old when she first visited the Catholic Worker office. She was going to high school uptown on Fiftieth Street and her home was on 115th Street. She was entering her last year at Cathedral High School and wanted to give us her spare time. We were on Fifteenth Street then, near Avenue A, on the East side, and our visitors used to say, "Why do you live way down here? Nobody will ever come to see you." We were only a few months old but people had already begun to visit our little store where we had just begun to get out the **Catholic Worker** with its ideas about a personalist and communitarian revolution which Peter Maurin had started us all thinking about. Jacques Maritain, another Frenchman, said that our place reminded him of Charles Peguy's little shop in Paris.

People came in for a meal from our soup pot which had already begun to simmer on the back of the kitchen stove. They came for clothes, too, which began to pile up in the bedroom between the store and kitchen. There were Greek children, nine girls, I think it was. Their mother was dying of cancer and the father was out of work and giving his blood to his sick wife. Julia “took on” this family and in addition to her after school work with us, went to work in a five and dime on Saturdays in order to help out the family. We mentioned this family in the paper which somehow fell into the hands of Alice Lautner of Tell City, Indiana, another school girl, who also began to collect clothes for us. Within a few summers she came to work with us and ended up by walking off with one of our best workers, Joe Zarella. (Julia’s romance came later.)

It was Julia who became most intensely interested in Peter Maurin’s synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation. A **new** synthesis, he called it, “so old that it seemed like new.” Every day he tacked up on a wall three sheets from a looseleaf notebook, each containing some quotations relating to Cult (religion), Culture, which blossomed forth from religion and had to do with man as an artist in every field of endeavor. (Even Peter’s beautiful script showed it. He quoted Eric Gill, “Every man is an artist, and artisan, or maker.”) And Cultivation, which to Peter meant the Land, and agronomic universities, or farming communes, where men built their homes, and in their exuberance carved in wood or stone, and made their gardens, raised their food and studied and worshipped. (I am thinking that **only now** the peace movement, the youth movement, are seriously following this path Peter followed. But Julia Porcelli Moran was worker and scholar and wife and mother and artist, and her whole life was an example to us all.)

She worked with us on East Fifteenth Street, on the west side at the Charles Street house, the Mott Street rear tenement, the use of which was given to us by the House of Calvary, a hospital for the poor administered by a group of widows and a religious order in the Bronx. The tenement was a house of ten apartments of two rooms each, and one toilet on a floor and had neither heat nor hot water. There were open fireplaces and one could heat water on the gas stove and take what we called a pail bath behind an improvised screen. Julia had charge of the fifth floor, for older women. There were two pregnant girls on the fifth floor, one a beautiful southerner who had had an affair with a German waiter who was a Nazi. She hung a swastika on the wall and talked often of her handsome blond lover. The other girl was a Jew. It was in the later thirties when anti-Semitism polluted the atmosphere. Somehow, Julia kept the peace between the two girls “in trouble”, and the swastika disappeared. Julia was working full time with us then. Sundays she sold **The Catholic Worker** in front of many churches where the parishioners’ feeling was definitely pro-Hitler, and many a time they would snatch the paper from our hands and tear it up and throw it into our faces. Julia was frail of body but of an indomitable spirit and faced up to these encounters valiantly.

## Julia, the Artist

We moved from Mott Street to a house entirely for women on the upper floors of another rear house on Bayard Street near the Tombs. Julia worked full time there and when we had our second farming commune at Newburgh, which was also a retreat house during the

summers, Julia took charge of the children and gave them little retreats, teaching them to make their own crucifix and statues and little paintings as well as rosaries, which they brought to the priest to be blessed on the final day of the retreat when adults and children joined together. She also worked with the children in a cabin we had on Staten Island at Princess Bay, and when the building inspector came and objected to our summer cabin, and also to the interracial aspects of our work, she told him seriously they were all one family and that we all had colored blood. (Good red blood from that strong heart of Julia's.)

I do not know exactly how many years she was with us before she went to Newport, Rhode Island where Ade Bethune was taking in apprentices. She worked there for a number of years and when she came back she had already obtained her first commission to do a sculpture for a church in Buffalo. While she stayed with us at the old Manhattanville Settlement on Chrystie St., which we had bought on leaving Mott Street, she not only helped with the women, but organized a choir so that we would have one sung Mass each week in Nativity Church, which is still our Church. It was there she met Philip Moran, and married him. She was married from her parents' home in Westchester, and my sister and I went to the wedding.

Philip Moran has been editor and writer for several Westchester newspapers, a man of great integrity and highly respected in his profession. There were four children and Julia continued her work as a sculptor through the years. The obituary which appeared in the **New York Times** last week lists a number of Catholic Churches which had given her commissions and where her work can be seen. She died of cancer of the spine in Phelps Memorial Hospital at the age of fifty-five and we mourn her passing. But I should not say mourn; it is a conventional phrase. She had a full and happy life, and we were blessed to have had her for so long during those beginning years. She was a true follower of Peter Maurin and his teachings and will now know truly those who went before her, Eric Gill, G.K. Chesterton, Emmanuel Mounier, and all the saints, Francis, Benedict, Vincent de Paul and of course, Peter Maurin himself.

## James Rogan

James Rogan started a house of hospitality in Baltimore just at the outbreak of World War Two in Europe. He had tried the seminary there, and left it, I think in 1939, when war changed the depression into employment for all. It was Europe's war we were then profiting by. **We** were not yet in it. But conscription was coming up in Washington legislation, and huge barracks were being built somewhere near Baltimore. A greater influx of unemployed from the South were piling into Baltimore and were sleeping around the docks. That made the house of hospitality larger and more crowded than our houses in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and those on the West Coast. The depression was over but poverty, homelessness, and hunger were not over, never would be, and Jim had his hands full. Jim Doeble from the Chicago house came to join him and another fellow from Connecticut whose name I forget, but who worked valiantly on a job and brought his money in to help support the house. He too refused conscription, but was not accepted as a c.o. as Jim and John were. He served a sentence in prison for his refusal, and we have lost track of him since. He did not try to get in touch with us. (Jail does things like that to you.)

Before Jim and John were sent away to a c.o. camp in Chicago, they served valiantly in

the house down by the waterfront which used to be a longshoremen's union headquarters. Men slept all over the place, upstairs and downstairs, in beds, on benches and on the floor. Smiddy came to join them. He had been driving a truck which peddles sandwiches and coffee at factory gates and he was bringing the leftovers to the house, and then, converted by Father Pacifique Roy, S.S.J., decided he was not giving enough, so gave himself and truck to the house. The truck was useful in picking up food at the hospitals and restaurants and bringing sick men to the hospitals. The young men gave their blood many a time to sick ones, or to the blood bank.

"Were you ever afraid?" I asked Jim once, and he confessed that he had suffered that humiliating and dangerous emotion on a number of times. (I once wrote a 38-page speech on Fear which Marty Corbin, then our managing-editor, boiled down to six pages for use in the **CW**.)

Several times, he confessed, when he had been assaulted, he certainly had experienced fear, especially one night when he was sleeping on a bench and awoke to find one of the men urinating on him!

Several times Jim was brought into court on charges varying from running a disorderly house, to being a public nuisance. Finally, Jim and John were drafted, and were sent to one of the conscientious objector camps to do the alternative service required. Both received training in the Alexian Brothers hospital in Chicago, an Order started by a predominately German group who showed great courage and real hospitality in taking the young men in. Jim had his complete training as a nurse.

## **To Africa**

After the war, when they were released, Jim came to Maryfarm, Easton, Pa., for one of our mid-winter retreats, and while there met Grace Gallagher, sister of Donald Gallagher who had started a house of hospitality while he was a student at St. Louis University. While he visited us that winter he helped us begin a bakery in one of the basements on Mott Street which had been an Italian bakery and had a great stone oven built in which Jim, who was a slender youth, crawled into and cleaned out for us. Wood was burned in these ovens to heat them. What adventurous courtships the young people around our houses of hospitality have had!

The marriage was a happy one. Grace had training at the Grail, Loveland, Ohio, and it was the Grail which broadened Jim's outlook to include the needs of the Third World. Long before the Peace Corps, Jim and Grace went to Durban, South Africa, where he worked in a large hospital serving Indians and Africans for three years. One could say that he was giving his life for the poor, a long martyrdom. He came back from Africa an ill man, and Parkinson's disease set in, yet he continued working as a nurse while his two children were growing up. He and Grace remained very much part of the Grail community over the years.

In one of the translations of the Scriptures there is a strange phrase, "lovers of beautifulness," and Jim was certainly one of these, a poet, a scholar and a faithful follower of Christ and His teachings. He was one of those St. Paul speaks of as having "put on Christ." My heart swells

with thankfulness as I think of these helpers God has sent us throughout the years to work for “a new society within the shell of the old” as Peter Maurin called it.

**December 31.** Today I set out at eleven for a visit with Maisie Ward in Jersey City where she and her husband Frank Sheed have a little apartment where they live between their world wanderings. Sometimes they are off to England and sometimes to Australia, and Maisie has a great love for India and has taken trips these last few years to that distant land, where she has many friends and where she has helped many a village and parish project in Kerala, in South India.

No one can list or estimate the good Maisie Ward has done, travelling, speaking, writing, with her husband keeping the publishing house of Sheed and Ward going over the years, up until now. We had no sooner started our own work on Fifteenth Street in 1932 when she visited us, and many a tea we enjoyed at their first publishing offices on Fifth Avenue.

They were the first to recognize Peter Maurin and bring out the first edition of his **Easy Essays**, both in the United States and England. A few years later they brought out my book, **House of Hospitality**. (It will be Chuck Smith, in West Virginia, who will be writing about agronomic universities or farming communes—that aspect of Peter’s program that we New Yorkers have never been able to get off the ground, being too overcome trying to keep up with hospitality.) How Maisie Ward kept up with everything I don’t know. The first plank in Peter’s platform was “clarification of thought,” and both Maisie and Frank as street speakers at Hyde Park Corner were superb at that. In fact, it was what brought the Australian and the Englishwoman together. Writing books has taken up a great part of their time. (The story is that Frank made a running translation of St. Augustine’s **Confessions** on ship between New York and Southampton.)

It was a delightful day, from lunch to tea time, with Maisie and Frank and their son Wilfrid and his wife. Coming back to New York there was a snow storm. It was a good “Christmasy” adventure.

And now as you read this it is mid-January and the days are getting longer—and there are always spring-like days in February, and I always talk of planting radishes as I did once on my daughter’s birthday, March fourth. This is a sketchy **On Pilgrimage**. I am writing this at St. Joseph’s House on First Street. Then off to the beach again to work in the silence of these winter days at correspondence, in peace and quiet. My New Year’s greeting to our readers is from St. Paul to the Philippians:

“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice . . . Be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ . . . Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”