

On Pilgrimage - September 1977

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Recounts a visit by her daughter Tamar and granddaughter Katy. Other friends visit as well including Nina Polcyn and Dorothy Gauchat. Day remembers Nina's involvement in a protest in 1934 against the landing of the German liner, Bremen. She also remembers fondly Dorothy Gauchat's husband Bill, of whom Peter Maurin thought highly as well. (DDLW #580).

Autumn, 1977

In many ways, this has been a good summer for me, since I spent most of it on the beach in Staten Island, where we have two small bungalows, where the workers at St. Joseph's and Maryhouse can go for rest from the hard life in the city.

My daughter came down from Vermont for a spell, and even here she occupied herself with spinning. As soon as she arrived she got some pieces of wood from the beach, carved herself a spindle, and spun enough yarn to weave me a pair of bedroom slippers! I had wool on hand with which I was going to stuff some small pillows - - for the small of the back, or the back of the neck, while reading in bed. No sooner had she arrived, when her youngest of nine children, Katy, came in with a school friend she was visiting in New York.

There were other visitors too, this busy summer - - Nina Polcyn Moore and Dorothy Gauchat, both of them a generation removed from me, but working with the Catholic Worker since its beginnings. Nina was still going to college (Marquette) when she visited us in the summer of 1934, just in time to join in anti-Hitler protests. One of them was against the docking of the **Bremen**, a German liner, on the upper west side of New York City. When a protester climbed a mast to pull down a flag flaunting the swastika, and was shot in the leg by a guard, a riot ensued on the docks. We fled down the street, together with other protesters to escape a squad of police, and witnessed some police brutality, which we later protested against too. It was time of urgent protest against a wave of anti-Semitism, which was breaking out here and there in those days.

One of the reasons this occasion is vividly in my mind today is because I have recently read Chaim Potok's books - - all of them - - with the greatest interest. I encountered the first when I was on a renewal retreat last year, and picked up *My Name is Asher Lev*.

Last night I read **In the Beginning**, which is a vivid account of the Depression and the time of World War II. I have also read Potok's **The Chosen** and **The Promise**.

Peter Maurin used to say, “We should study the past, and so live in the present, as to make the future different.”

Nina and I have kept up our friendship over the years, and even made a brief tour of Russia together, (a guided tour with Dr. Jerome Davis) some years ago. Now she is living in Sauk Center (“Main Street”) in Minnesota. Her life is still as full of variety as mine is!

Dorothy Gauchat has also been long a part of the Catholic Worker family. As a high school student, she was a volunteer at the Cleveland House of Hospitality (and Farm at Avon, Ohio), and later married its director, Bill Gauchat, who died a few years ago. They gave up the work in the city and concentrated on the Farm, where Peter Maurin used to go, to conduct “summer schools” for a number of years, attended by Catholic Workers from all the Houses of Hospitality which sprang up around the country.

Peter Maurin felt a great kinship with Bill, because the latter had attended the Institute of Medieval Studies at Toronto, and Peter always felt Bill understood his ideas better than anyone else. Peter used to declaim, “When the Irish were Irish a thousand years ago,” and to tell how they started universities all over Europe, and kept alive what Peter called a synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation.

Bill died a few years ago, and Dorothy Gauchat has built up the work they started early in their married life, when they lived on this farm. It is one of boundless hospitality, taking care of “the lame, the halt and the blind” children God has sent them. Dorothy has written a book, **All God’s Children**, which is still in print. We have a box on hand of their beautiful and happy story - - how it first began, how it all came about.

There is an old saying, which I have used often in sending out an appeal when funds are running low, and there are, even now, requirements by state law (and often common sense) as to repairs and the running of a house of hospitality. That saying is - - “A baby is always born with a loaf of bread under its arm,” which delighted me with its simplicity. Dorothy Gauchat lives by this principle and her work has grown.

After visiting me both on the beach and in New York, where I now am at Maryhouse, Dorothy went on to Newport to see Ade Bethune, who has been one of our artists for many years. Ade is making a study of solar heating, and the two women are putting their heads together to figure out the winterizing of a large swimming pool built at Avon for their crippled little ones (who swim daily, or float - - with life preservers, of course!)

Gratitude

During the month, many friends have sent me large print Bibles, one of which is now in our chapel downstairs, and one each at the beach, Maryhouse and the farm at Tivoli. I am truly grateful to those who sent them. I like to use one of my favorite quotations from St. Teresa of Avila - - “I am so grateful a person that I can be bought with a sardine” - - but I apologize at seeming irreverent, and I promise to pray for the donors as I do my daily reading.

One line in Potok: “I wonder if gentiles clasp Holy Scripture in their arms and dance with it, as we Jews do?” Well - - I’ve often seen people kiss the Book before and after reading it, and I do myself.