

# Day After Day - July/August 1941

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*Summary: Diary-like account of a trip to Catholic Worker houses and farms through the Midwest. Ends on retreat in Pittsburgh given by Fr. Hugo and says they left renewed, with a new perspective. (DDLW #373).*

## August 1

It is the end of a long month, long because I have been traveling all this time, covering CATHOLIC WORKER houses, farms, all over the county, and the Civilian Service Camp for the Catholic Conscientious Objectors at Stoddard, N.H. It is actually two months since the paper came out, since we issue only a July-August paper in the summer, and there has been constant traveling since June.

**June first.** This was the feast of Pentecost and Jon Thornton, one of the leaders of the Baltimore work, was confirmed in the cathedral. Members of the New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore groups were present. The confirmation was at night, and at midnight we drove back to Easton in the station wagon. How we bless the benefactor who gave it to us, and on how many works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, has this station wagon taken us. It was beautiful driving back through the warm night, and there was not much traffic along the roads. Quite different from a night trip we had made a few weeks earlier, when we picked up a few soldiers, home on furlough, one of them from Trinidad and one from Texas. They and we became quite stiff with the cold.

**June six.** Paid the installment on the mortgage on the farm at Easton. There is two thousand still to go. We do some heavy praying this time every year and God rewards our reliance by moving the heart of one of our friends to send us five hundred dollars.

**June 7.** Miss Tracy from Santa Barbara, California, was in for a visit. She told us about a strike out there of lemon pickers. It is the largest lemon grove in the world and there are hundreds of Mexican families living on it. They have been there for a long time, but now they are being dispossessed and Okies hired in their place. This issue of ownership is a tremendous one. No matter what the wages, the conditions, people are not going to be content to be under a paternal system, under a form of serfdom. It is a denial of their human dignity. Property is proper to man. "How much land does a man need?" is the title of one of Tolstoi's short stories. Certainly not 298,000 acres.

**June 10.** Spoke at the American Jewish Congress Women's luncheon in New York.

**June 11.** Started on my trip, first stop being at Sister Peter Claver's retreat house at Gillette, New Jersey, for one day. Here there are retreats and days of recollection for Negroes,

and we can bring anyone we wish, no cost and our Lord will feed us. “If He doesn’t send us food there is always bread and water,” Sister says. But we’ve never had to go on that yet. As a matter of fact, last time we were there, Julia felt it necessary to make a day of penance, she had so enjoyed the good meals the sisters provided, and she fasted from both food and drink all the following Friday until sundown.

## Soap and Soup

**June 12.** Arrived at midnight at St. Joseph’s House, Pittsburgh, where Father Rice is the head. This is the only house we have which has a priest in charge. Some years ago, Bishop Boyle turned over an old orphanage to our group and beginning with a few rooms, the men in the house have cleaned, painted, furnished the entire house so that in the depths of winter as many as 250 have been accommodated in one night. It was a terribly hard struggle at first, even to provide soap, let alone soup. I remember one visit when we were having parsnip soup and sassafras tea for a week, than which there can be no more mortifying diet. And all the while Mr. Lenz, who from the first has been one of the most faithful workers in the house would sit and tell us how good it was for us all. He cannot bear to hear me describe some of those meals now. It was never as bad as I painted it, he rebukes me. But it was pretty bad. Now, thanks to Father Rice’s energetic begging, everyone sits down to three good meals a day.

## Run and Overrun

There is daily Mass and rosary and benediction in the evening. There are meetings, people in the neighborhood are being affected by the work, children are taken on picnics and swimming every Saturday, there is growing up a community spirit. The atmosphere of the house, while orderly, is of such informality, that Father’s sitting room is always being overrun, his books walked off with. Donald McCarthy is in charge of the house and authority is delegated to many others in charge of different departments of the house so that everything runs with great smoothness. The entire place has been built up by the men who have come in on the line, and Father Rice’s job has been to direct and coordinate activities. Which means that he gets all the blame and all the criticism. His interest was originally with organized labor, but he has always recognized the greater need of the unorganized and the unemployed and has done a great job to keep members of the unions reminded of their poorer brothers.

## Man’s Dignity

One of the successes of the labor movement has been to make men recognize their dignity as men and their responsibility to their fellows, but one of the mistakes of the organized worker is his class war attitude, his recognition of his dignity on the basis of power and strength of the union. This comes out clearly when a man loses his job or his union card because

of his inability to keep up with dues. His dignity as a worker evaporates. Instead of that consciousness of his dignity being derived from the fact that he is a brother of Christ; that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a creature of body and soul, it is derived from a sense of power over the bosses. First of all, we must have Christians before we can have good union men. There will be no true solidarity or unionism until workers realize the Fatherhood of God.

## Laundry Worker

**June 13.**Had lunch with Amy Ballinger, vice-president of the laundry workers' union which has a membership of 1,400, seventy-five per cent Catholic and eighty per cent women, and hundred per cent organized. A great deal needs to be done for the laundry workers in New York. Spoke to the men in the House of Hospitality after supper. Meant to speak ten minutes and probably spoke an hour. A stimulating audience.

**June 14.**Visited Brother Matthews' St. Francis House, which is a center on the top of a high hill, looking out over the city and surrounded by various institutions belonging to the Passionists. The group at St. Francis work with families in the neighborhood, and is a center rather than a House of Hospitality. We could do with many centers in many towns. Groups come in for discussion, books and pamphlets and papers are kept circulating and Peter's favorite work of "indoctrinating" goes on apace.

## Midwest Houses

**June 15 and 16.**Visited the three Houses of Hospitality in Cleveland and the farm. The good work of Tom Marrigan at Blessed Martin House and of John Carmody at St. Anthony's house, makes it possible for Bill Gauchat, the leader of the work in Cleveland, to spend a good part of his time at the farming commune (Our Lady of the Wayside) where they had summer school this year.

**June 17.**Visited the Toledo house and farm (the latter is an uncertainty as yet). Bernard Duck and Jim Walser were keeping everything going with the help of a committee.

**June 18.**Stopped for the first time at the South Bend house, operated by Norbert Merdjingski and Julian Pleasants, both of whom graduated from Notre Dame this June. There were about seventy-five men a day being fed and cared for on the upper floor of an old house. Father Mathis and a few other priests at Notre Dame have been helping in the work, and come on Sundays to offer Mass right at the house.

## On the Mississippi

**June 21.**The past three days were spent in Davenport, Iowa, where there were a few days of discussion on social action, during a summer school at St. Ambrose College. Ade Bethune

and I were both on the program speaking on a Philosophy of Labor, voluntary poverty and the works of mercy, farming communes, etc. Father Catich and Msgr. Hauber gave me a little Ford coupe to drive back to New York. 1930, good condition, unobtrusive looking, but noisy sounding. Fr. Catich and Ade painted on either door the insignia, The Catholic Worker, and what with the Iowa license plates, people will be misled into thinking we have an Iowa house or headquarters whereas in reality we have not, only friends. Ade and I were taken out fishing on the Mississippi.

## Milwaukee

**June 25.** Visited the new Milwaukee House for the first time. It is nestled between railroad tracks and the river, and trains and the lake boats keep the night alive. The house is a good one, large dormitory upstairs, huge meeting room downstairs. So much food is contributed that they cannot dispose of it all at times. There has always been a large and faithful group who come to the meetings and keep the work going. There are scholars who teach at Marquette, workers interested most in the labor movement. C.O.'s headed by Frank Bates and although there may be differences of opinion, there is no dissension.

**June 26.** On to Libertyville, with Nina Poley, to spend the day with the Ladies of the Grail. There is a good story of their work in this month's *Orationes Fratres*. Here is a place of retreat which has been used by the Milwaukee group and by friends from Chicago. There is constant discussion on the lay apostolate and techniques of action. A stimulating crowd.

## Peter in Chicago

**June 27.** Met Peter in Chicago and a crowd of us sat on Al Reser's back porch and talked until midnight. Fr. Hugo said the "creature" to which the CATHOLIC WORKER adherents is most attached, is talking. Which is true of course, but then it is not often that a group from several houses get together with Peter.

John Cogley has written a play which is being put on this summer. The Chicago Catholic Worker has not come out for a few months and everyone is missing it and asking why. Finances for one thing, summer also, and I suppose John's play. It had better be good!

## Lou Murphy

**June 28.** Arrived for a few days' visit at St. Benedict's farm, run by Lou Murphy of the Detroit C.W. It is a place of beauty. The chapel is in the house and before I had caught my breath after my all-day trip Don Coughlin had dragged me in to admire the new marble altar, constructed by one of the men from marble slabs from a bank. It would take an edition of the paper to tell of the work in Detroit, in the two houses and on the farm. Eventually we are going to try to bring out a paper-covered book, a history of all the houses so that others

throughout the country will be encouraged to open hospices in their cities. After this war they will be more needed than ever. Even now, though most of the younger men have found work, there is still a tremendous need since relief rolls and WPS rolls have been cut. There are not only those older men, the injured and sick, the incapable, but also the transient, looking for work. Our breadlines are as long as ever.

## **Fr. Hugo**

**July 3-11.**Spent this week at St. Anthony's orphanage, just outside of Pittsburgh, on a retreat given by Father Hugo. Eighteen members of our groups from the middle west were there. St. Anthony's village has about two hundred children but room was made for us in the gymnasium and one of the classrooms. We spent this period in complete silence, the day beginning at six and ending at ten. For spiritual reading at meals we had the entire life of St. Francis by Jorgenson, and there were five conferences a day. These were so stimulating that not a moment dragged. We read nothing but the New Testament, and we all took copious notes. It was a time of real study, to put off the old man and on the new, and we came out with a real sense of renewal, a feeling that we obtained a perspective, a point of view that gave balance to our outlook. Fr. Hugo follows the retreats given by Fr. Lacouture, a French-Canadian Jesuit, who has given many to priests.

## **Bishop Boyle**

I had a good visit this time at both St. Joseph's house and St. Francis Center. Also Bishop Boyle kept me conversing for almost three hours one evening on rammed earth houses, on Mexican friends from the steel works at Homestead, on cooperatives and the craft movement, and other aspects of the work of social reconstructions. He has been always a good friend to the Catholic Worker movement.

Before I left, Fr. Rice bought me four new tires for my car which made us venture the mountains of Pennsylvania with more confidence. After all the little car was used to the plains.

Only two days were spent at home, at Easton and Mott street. Then the traveling began again.

July 19 I spoke at St. Bonaventures, at Olean, and met many of our friends there. July 21 I visited and spoke at the Cooperstown camp for Conscientious Objectors, which is run by the Quakers. And the rest of July I spent at our own C.O. camp and at the Houses and farms in Vermont.