

# On Pilgrimage - April 1960

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*Summary: Diary-like account of a journey through Minnesota, South Dakota, Oregon, and into Canada telling of the work being done by the people she visits. Admires the life and beliefs of the Doukhobars group, a seventeenth century Russian sect dedicated to non-violence and simple Christian living. (DDLW #763).*

Somewhere along the road, I will stop long enough to write more detailed stories of some aspects of this trip I am making, stories about the Sioux Indian Mission school I visited in South Dakota, about the work in the Franciscan Parish of St. Boniface in San Francisco, about Father McCulloch's mission to the braceros, and the organizing of the agricultural workers going on in Stockton, Tracy and Modesto and other cities in California.

In this account, I can only synopsise my trip, to indicate the ground covered and to give a report to our readers. The purpose of the trip is of course to communicate ideas, to talk about the aims and purposes of the Catholic Worker movement in schools, colleges and parishes, wherever one is invited. It is also to learn, and I have learned many things on this trip, and have seen much that is happening in the Church which is encouraging: eleven students from Gonzaga pledging a year to the Indian missions of Alaska, 15,000 high school students in the San Francisco area pledging themselves to more work among the agricultural workers, and showing a film the students made of their living conditions, a growing social consciousness among the young and a desire to give themselves to the lay apostolate,—these are some of the good things I have encountered. I have met with many families, many groups of families, and groups of students. (One way a school disclaims any responsibility for inviting one is by having a student organization sponsor the talk. It avoids controversy.)

The theme of many of my talks was, “Christ came to make the rich poor and poor holy.” and “The works of mercy and their opposite in war.” Pacifism was practically unknown to the students, who are expected, of course, to be pacifist in the class war and race war.

I ended my last article with the promise of an interview with Archbishop Roberts and an account of my visits with the Sioux, but there is no time to do justice to these interviews now. So I shall just copy this article from my diary.

There are some demonstrations and meetings going on among college youth, picketing of Woolworth's, giving out of leaflets to acquaint students with what is happening to their Negro brothers in the south, activity about ROTC and whether it should be compulsory in the colleges.

## Phillip Hagren.

Here is a wonderful quotation from Good Work, which is the new name of The Catholic Art Quarterly.

“When are laws, customs, institutions right? Only when they tally with the natural and revealed law that God has given us. Our laws are human decrees for applying God’s law to our social life, just as the clock is the human device for making the sun’s course known and accessible at night and in a cloudy world. If a clock goes fast or slow, its error will accumulate until it will tell us that it is bedtime at dawn. We need to set our clocks by the sun, that is what Greenwich is for. So with our laws and customs. They need to be tested and set again by the sun of justice. As Carlyle said, ‘If you will have your laws obeyed without mutiny, see well that they be pieces of God Almighty’s law.’ To say that we must fall in with a state of things that is manifestly at variance with God’s law is to say that we must rule our lives by the clock even when it tells us that night is day.”

## Superior, Wis

Monsignor Shannon, president of St. Thomas college in St. Paul loaned us a car and Mary Hiebain of Maryhouse and I set out for Duluth and Superior. We made it to Superior but snow interfered with our visiting Duluth. I spoke\*\*\*\*to the Franciscan Sisters one evening. They are teaching at the grade and high school, in a co-educational school, and they are housed in the old chancery office, in such crowded conditions that whoever is responsible might be convicted of being a slum landlord if he were in our stricter district of New York. They are truly Franciscan in their poverty and work very hard indeed.

Sister Bernice gave me a wonderful book to read, **Maria Montessori, her life and work**, by E.M. Standing, a convert to the Church who worked with her for many years. It is published by the Academy Guild Press Box 549 Fresno, California, a new publishing house on the west coast – only Catholic publishing house that I know of in California.

## Fr. Paul Judge remembered

According to some seminarians, our dear friend Fr. Judge, who is buried at Wilmar, Minnesota, used to feed about 20 or 30 transients a day. They came in on the railroad and knew where to go. There was a Clothes Room in the basement of Fr. Judge’s rectory and always food for them. He knew them. He knew them all by name, he told the school children. They were all Christ.

St. Mary’s, Winona.

Mass at six thirty in a beautiful chapel, masculine, strong and simple people in design. Yellow and russet flowers on either side of the altar. A black iron crucifix. Stained glass windows reaching from the ceiling to floor. Many at Mass. Brother Basil is president. Brother Luke, a librarian, asked us to pray for a new library. He is scattered over three floors. He knew Bob Steed when Bob worked in Memphis with Helen Caldwell Day at the House of Hospitality

there. Brother Luke loaned me **The Devil's Advocate** by Morris West which I enjoyed reading on the way.

## **Exceptional Children.**

In St. Paul I also visited a school for "exceptional" children which was started by Sister Annette Marie, a sister of St. Joseph who carries on her work in a motorized wheel chair. After a bad accident which permanently crippled her, she started to work with children who had speech difficulties and this work led to the building of a school. Students from St. Thomas drive the children to and from school. There are 105 in this school for children who have various mental and physical disabilities. It is a beautiful place and should be a model for many such schools in the country.

## **Josephine Drabek**

I was happy to meet Josephine Drabek who after starting one educational establishment in Central Africa is now commissioned to start another. Josephine has spent the last ten years or more in Uganda where whites are forbidden to hold land. It is an agrarian economy. There were four European and three African teachers, and no English spoken. She has learned the language which is a very complicated one. The new school is in the country south of them and she has to start from scratch and with no funds either. In the other school the women helped support themselves by planting ten acres of bananas and building up a good garden. I had met Josephine at the Grail some fifteen years ago when she was in charge of agricultural there. These schools are training schools for the young African women. Anyone wanting to contribute to the African work can send money to Josephine, Grailville, Loveland, Ohio.

## **Wayside Inn**

This is a house started by Sally, a woman of seventy and by the brothers of The House of Charity for women in need. Sally had retired a few years before from Honeywell where they make precision instruments, and is starting this new apostolate.

Within an area of a few cities, St. Cloud, St. Joseph, Collegeville, there are a number of families I always visit when I come west, the J. F. Powers, the Joe O'Connells, the Eisleers, the Cottons, the Doyles, the McKibbens, the Palmquists and the Petters, the Thersens. Emerson Hynes and his family are now in Washington, where he is aide to Senator Eugene McCarthy and where one of his sons is page boy, going to the page boys' school. Emerson is on a committee travelling around the country investigating unemployment. This last year he was named His Brothers' Keeper for 1958, by the district of Minnesota League of Credit Unions, on the 112th anniversary of the credit union movement. He has served on the board of directors of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference helping to spread credit unions and educate the public in regards to them. He and his family (there are ten children) have

been engaged in rural life work, and 4H work, and all are members of credit unions themselves from the month of their birth.

I stayed with Mary Humphrey and certainly Don is sadly missed. The last time I saw her was when I sat with her at his dying bedside at the hospital in Minneapolis a year and a half ago. Now there are Michael, Susie, Paul, Tom, Mary Ellen and Martha at home and Rachel and John away. Michael being the oldest is beginning to make chalices as his father did, and also wedding rings at \$65 the pair. They are beautifully engraved with the vine and the branches, or with Chi Rho, or with the two words, Christus and Ecclesia, the former standing for the husband and the latter for the wife. There is another beautiful ring with the words, **Where love is, God is**, carved in the gold. While I was there, he was learning to polish stones found throughout Minnesota, agates, obsidian and jade. Mary Hmphrey weaves, sews and makes baptismal robes for St. John's Abbey where they can be obtained with candle and booklet.

## **Doyles and Cottons**

The Cottons have eight children, all boys I think, and the Doyles have seven and one who died in infancy. It is hard to realize that there is also delinquency, as they call it, among high school students in such a rural area, but Leonard told me of how the students stoned his car and beat his young son on the school bus, just because they are "different," on the intellectual side. The boys showed great courage and made no complaints.

It is hard too to think of any destitution in this area, but Mary took me to see a family living in a box car, ten boys, two girls and another baby coming. The mother looked very young and cheerful in spite of the congestion in her small quarters.

## **Ted Le Berthon**

When we visited Jim Powers, who is known for two books of short stories, most of which have appeared in the New Yorker, we talked a good deal of Ted Le Berthon whom I had counted on seeing when I reached Fresno. We did not know as we sat there talking that Ted was to die within the week. Jim admired him greatly and told us of the days they had lived together in the past and tried to write. Ted was always going to write the great American novel, a dream shared by most newspaper men, and used to leave his desk and typewriter and go out to spend an hour in Church. They had both made "the retreat."

But Ted now has "gone to his reward" which he earned with his fearless reporting of the agricultural situation in California and his life long work for the Negro in the South. And now I learn that the Academy Guild Press is planning to bring out a book of his writings.

## **Wisconsin and North Dakota**

I spoke at the Newman clubs at both Madison and Fargo, and it was good to see the work done by both. In Fargo Fr. William Durkin is not allowed to wear his clerical garb when

he teaches religion at the State College so he has a mighty fine variety of colored shirts to wear! A cyclone hit his old Newman club house and that meant a new center, which has a beautiful chapel, and fine meeting halls and dining room and living quarters. The Newman clubs are active everywhere and well used by the students. There are great numbers of married students and Father had a number of baptisms the Sunday I was there. In Madison Fr. Brown met me with a Chinese student eighteen years old and homesick. We visited the Martin de Porres center with John McGrath of the Progressive staff, then to Ed and Kathy Bardulls for dinner. Bernard Arcanz called, who had been with us at Maryfarm at the time that Peter Maurin died. He is terribly crippled and is married to a crippled girl and they have two children and another coming. Mrs. Burdulis heard me speak at Grand Rapids when she was in high school. That night I stayed with Helen C. White who has written so many famous historical novels, besides heading the English department at the University. In her sisterly fashion she gave me a dress and three blouses to supplement my wardrobe on my trip.

## South Dakota

After an all night trip I arrived at Rapid City, South Dakota and spent the day at the Mother Butler center for Indian girls who are working in town. The house is run by a group of women whom I had heard called Nardines, and who are really Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. They are an order founded during the French revolution, of women in secular garb but in truth religious and it is only recently that the hidden congregation has been made known.

Father Edwards, S.J., called for me at dark and we drove the 115 miles to the Holy Rosary mission, passing the Black Hills which are really mountains. The highest of them is 8000 feet and the roads are impassible in winter. I slept the next two nights in a trailer while I visited the school and trading post and Pine ridge which is the nearest town. South Dakota is so big that all of New England could be tucked in with space left over. The east is farming land and the west grazing land and there are eleven reservations for the Sioux Indians. I will write about this further another time.

## Rapid City

At Rapid City, prosperous because of all the military establishments, airfields, rocket bases, etc. round about, I stopped overnight at the St. John's McNamara Hospital, where Sister Edith and Monsignor Boyd are good friends of ours and where I met also Mother M. Romaine briefly.

Early the next morning I took the bus for Butte and Spokane, going right through and enjoying every minute of the trip. When you have been making many stops and visiting many people, a long ride through desert and mountain country on a bus, in the dead of winter, is a most delightful and restful trip. I arrived so late in Spokane that I could indulge in the luxury of a hotel, a block away from the Cathedral, and there I spent some hours in the quiet of the Church to make up for the "hours" I had not been able to make on the trip. Guitton's **Genius of St. Therese**, paperback, 90c, was good spiritual reading on the

bus. (I am delighted to say that as far as I know, God willing, my book on Therese will be published in the Fall by the Fides Press of Notre Dame, Ind.)

It was here in Spokane that I met Archbishop Roberts and had a good evening at the Osborne's home with him, and the next afternoon at Gonzaga University also.

I visited the House of Charity, which is an old hotel down by the railroad yards, still in the process of being torn apart and rebuilt. But the chapel and dining room are finished and in use now. Brother Martin needs help badly in his works of mercy here, where he works in carpentry, cooking, baking bread and many other things. A good place for manual labor, and a chapel right there where the Bishop himself says Mass, and a Bishop too who serves the poor himself, dressed in a long white apron! Monday morning I took the bus north for British Columbia.

## **The Doukhobors**

Ammon had instructed me to take a bus from Spokane which would bring me into Thrums British Columbia around four in the afternoon. We drove through the most magnificent scenery north, through the customs, and on into Trail, a city tucked down between the mountains, with a smelter which I understand employs 5000 men. Zinc and silver and I do not know what other metals are smelted there, but it is a huge vision of hell set down in the midst of the great scenery of the Canadian Rockies. The lover of the machine age and technological advances would rejoice of course, and see great beauties in the complicated machinery of the smelter but all I could see was the defacement of the landscape, and I was assailed as soon as I got off the bus by the fumes.

There was quite a little wait in Thrums, but still not long enough to take a walk. The bus to which I was transferred was a through bus coming from Vancouver and going on to Winnipeg, St. Paul, Chicago and ending finally at New York. It seemed strange to be sitting in another Greyhound and turning east for a bit again. But Thrums was not more than an hour away. Up again, high up over the mountains, and out of that particular pit of a valley, and then down again, along precipitous flanks, until we reached the shore of the Kootney river where the heavy bus rolled on a flat raft of a ferry and was guided by cables to the farther shore.

There were a few stout, old women in the bus, clad in full skirts and kerchiefs or babushkas, and they got off on the other side of the ferry. And we rolled on for some miles until I passed a store which I noticed was marked Thrums.

Fortunately I saw the store, and fortunately I was near enough to the driver to call out "Is this my stop," and without slowing up he cried back, "Where do you want to get off. This is all Thrums for the next five miles." I had no idea where to stop, Ammon had not mentioned this, so I begged him to put me down at the next gas station which happened to be a British American station, I think, and there with my one small bag I stopped to ask directions. Fortunately I had checked my other suitcase at Trail through which I would return. The girl at the gas station was helpful. Yes, Pete Maloff lived right down the road and she would call him. I was fortunate to have gotten off at just the right stop. In a moment Pete Maloff was there, a tall handsome man of perhaps sixty, strong and vigorous, who welcomed me

and walked me back some hundred yards along the road to the farmhouse where he lived. Probably he has not more than five acres, but on this five acres he has stock and fruit, and there is milk, butter, cream and cheese products from his work, and plenty of fruit to sell in the nearby markets of Trail and Nelson. His wife too was a beautiful woman and they were at ease and happy with visitors. Pete Maloff, as I found later, is a man of the world, in the sense that he has travelled and worked in San Francisco and has been writing these last years a detailed history of the Doukhobors. He gave me half a dozen chapters to take with me and read along the way, and I am making notes from them now before I send them back. He says in his introduction:

“I have never held any position among the Doukhobors and have never appeared as an official spokesman of any kind. Many have been indignant with me that I enjoyed the good will of the deceased leader of the Doukhobors, Peter Petrovich appeared to like me for my straightforwardness, my simplicity and my alert responsive soul.” And he goes on to talk of the different kinds of men, those whose egotism is fed by the social movements which they espouse and those who give themselves to an ideal. And he tells of his own struggles for the last twenty years, in which he “gave all, and spared no one, neither my wife, my children, nor myself.”

He refused registration in 1943 and was arrested and jailed and it was at that time, after the most acute suffering which tempted him to leave the Doukhorbor community and settle in South America, that he decided to remain among his own people and write of them. He has written one volume and there are two others in preparation. One has been printed in Russian and I found it later in the library of the Russian Center in San Francisco.

One of his friends has translated the work in San Francisco, and Anna Brinton, famous Quaker leader, has helped him prepare the manuscript for publication. But he has not yet found a publisher. Perhaps some university press will bring it out. It was Tolstoi who gave the royalties of his book, **Resurrection** to help the Doukhobors get to Canada from Russia to escape persecution, but also Almayer Maude, the translator, and the Quakers also, always interested in those who struggle for conscience' sake.

## History of a People

Pete Maloff's autobiography is very much apart of his history of the Doukhobors since he confessed that he never intended to write a complete history but he performs his work with the hope that by recalling the past and trying to understand their experience they will again reach the spiritual heights and the unity they occasionally had in the past. He appeals to the youth of his community which is settled all through the fertile lands of western Canada, but also to “the youth of other spiritual wrestlers, the Molokans, Quakers, Mennonites, Tolstoyans, Gandhians.”

It is certainly not possible here to recount the long and complicated history of this Russian sect but their saga certainly deserves a place in an account of Russian spirituality. Pete Maloff states that they appeared for a long time in Russia under different names, calling themselves spiritual Christians. They appeared as a separate movement in Russian history

at the end of the seventeenth century. There are accounts of their exiles and wanderings to Siberia, to Finland, to the Canary Islands. The emphasis was on preaching, as they had no books, and many could not read. The scriptures and tradition were handed down by word of mouth, and "whoever heard their words would at once give up all his evil deeds."

According to Pete Maloff, the Molokans were part of them back in history, and the difference between the Doukhobors and the "milk-drinkers" was that the latter kept the written scriptures which the former rejected as distorted and rewritten.

The chapters Pete Maloff gave me to read have an account of his work as a young man in California. He was influenced by his grandmother who remained a practicing Doukhobor, though his family, as many others fell away from it. There are chapters on the life of Peter Vasilievich Verigin, called "God's own Verigin," or "Peter the Lordly Verigin," a chapter on The Sons of Freedom, the most extreme members of the sect who live in a separate colony of their own on a plateau, and the Independent Farmers.

## **Another Visitor Who Remained**

Tony was a visitor at the Maloff's and in the morning he took me after a good sleep under one of Lusha's wonderful comforters made of five or six pounds of wool, down through the fields, and down a steep hill to the little house he has built on the river. The bank is so steep that he has contrived an ingenious hoist to bring up water for his garden and house work. There are terraces where he has planted all he needs to eat, and the little house with its basement for the storage of food is beautifully constructed and comfortable. Tony spins, and after reading in the Catholic Worker about the Indian portable spinning wheel, he sent for one and has added that to his collection of hand tools. He has a flax and wool wheel, and he cards the wool on a board studded with nails which are as long as ice picks. The board is on a bench like that of a shoe cobbler, and the contraption which the Doukhobors learned how to make in the Mongolian wilds during one of their exiles, can card quite a quantity at a time.

Tony spins flax, and has woven himself enough strong material to make trousers which will last forever. He spins cotton and wool also, weaves scarves, and makes felt shoes. He came to visit the Russians from Vancouver, after a year of working in the shipyards there, floating down rivers until he reached the Kootnay, in a hand made Kyak like that of the Eskimo. He is a Jugo-Slav, raised in the Alps and well used to the mountains. He too is a master of the ascetic life, an example of simple living and hard work, a true personalist. It is when the personalists learn to be communitarians that they will play a great part in the world.

## **Helen Demoskoff**

After my visit with the Maloff's their son and his beautiful young wife drove me down the road a few miles for my visit to Helen Demoskoff. We have corresponded with her for many years, Ammon and I, I felt already as though we were old friends. To get to her place, we had to cross a field of deep snow where the path was marked only by a single file of footsteps,



and then over a swaying wooden bridge, built by the Demoskoffs with cables and lumber and which made me dizzy indeed as we crossed over a turbulent river. On the other side there was a sign, “unsafe for crossing” and I was glad young Pete Maloff found another way back. We drove down a long lane, passed a number of wooden houses, sturdily built but small, and at the end of the lane, there was Helen Demoskoff, running down the icy path to meet us. Helen is a grandmother, in her forties, and she was younger and more beautiful than her pictures. She has such a warmth and friendliness, and one felt too, such strength! She was baking bread and just bringing the first batch of half a dozen large loaves of whole wheat bread from the oven and putting a second batch in. And it made me homesick for our own farm kitchen on Staten Island.

The women of the Doukhobors wear full skirts, aprons, blouses which come out over the top of the skirt, and felt shoes. Their long hair is plain, drawn back behind and of course their faces are free of cosmetics. They sing a great deal and I imagine a great deal of their religious services are made up of song, and while I was there, not only the Maloff children and adults had sung for me, but also the Demoskoffs, singing not only their hymns but the songs they had composed in jail. They had burned some of these community houses, and then set fire to their own, or perhaps they burnt their own first; and when they were arrested for arson, they removed their clothes as though to say – “you have forcibly taken our children away from us for public school education, your ways have perverted our religion, and you may now have our clothes also.” Perhaps a St. Francis gesture, since he too had removed his clothes in the presence of the bishop and his court and had handed them over to his father, telling him that from now on he had none but a heavenly Father.

But there are other meanings to their cult of stripping themselves and my repulsion from this aspect of their rebellion they would interpret as the result of man’s fall, when he became ashamed of his nakedness and hid himself until he could be clothed. When they stand naked and unashamed, they feel they are doing this as a religious gesture, returning to the innocence of paradise.

Pete Maloff deals with this more completely in his book. Another aspect of the cult is the practice on the part of some of their members of a community of wives. Like the Mormons, they feel that there is nothing contrary to the natural law in this – Old Testament institution. How they reconcile it with the words of Christ it is hard to see. But they say that when they repeat the Lord’s prayer, and say “Thy Kingdom Come,” they are helping on God’s kingdom by doing away with the institution of marriage, since there is, in the kingdom of heaven, no marriage nor giving in marriage.

They use these texts, but at the same time they do not believe in reading scripture since they feel that many translations and tamperings over the years have mutilated it and they prefer to convey by word of mouth the sayings of Jesus. Even now there are so many groups, so many rifts among the Doukhobors that it reminds one of the many sects in the Protestant church, and the many divisions in the Communist party.

Ammon loves the Doukhobors as lovers of freedom, as freedom fighters, as wrestlers with the spirit, and admires them because they have been to jail so often in defense of their beliefs. Helen Demoskoff herself has spent eleven years of her life in prison. And I love them, not so much for their militant aspects but because they are a simple, hard working, devout people,

trying to walk in the way of the early Christians, following Christ, despising earthly goods, loving the family, and praising God in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles.

## **Departure**

The next day I took my leave of them all, and Helen told me that from now on we were indeed sisters, and her husband and her brother who had sung so beautifully the night before, saw me off to the Maloffs. I said goodbye to them, being admonished by them that meat eating was not a part of the Christian life, since it involved the taking of life no matter how humble. "One would not even eat a little piece of a Turk," Mrs. Maloff told me gravely (the Turks being the traditional enemies of these Russian people!)

The bus I took went right by the Maloff's door, and it brought me into Trail where I took the bus for Vancouver.

Next Issue: down the west coast.