

On Pilgrimage - September 1966

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Summary: Diary-like chronicle of canning tomatoes, panhandling, use of a missal at Mass, evils of drink, murder of peace activists, a visit to her daughter and grand children, a peacemaker conference, and non-violent work in India. (DDLW #843).

September 10

I am in the city this week and some one came to visit with a great bag of good ripe tomatoes which had to be stewed up right away to keep them from spoiling. Marie in the back apartment came in with some clean jars and a sharp knife and announced she would help cut out any bad spots. After all she came from a farm in the Midwest and knew all about canning. Pretty soon the delightful smell of stewed tomatoes filled the air. My hands smelled of them. At the farm last week Alice and I peeled a peck of peaches to make what we called at home an upside-down cake and then too my hands smelled of fresh peaches. In the fall around Tivoli the wonderful smell of ripe apples fills the air. These are some of the delights of the harvest season, always a happy time around the Catholic Worker after the almost overwhelming work of summer months with its visitors, students, families and children.

While we worked at the tomatoes which Mike and Louis had brought from friends on Staten Island, Marie talked very frankly of panhandling. She enjoyed doing it, and she said the Bowery was the best place – people would always give you a nickel or a dime there. One man seeing her accept a nickel gratefully, handed her a dollar and hastened away before she could thank him. With this money she buys little extra treats such as sardines, evaporated milk and jars of apple sauce. On one occasion she came in one morning when I was about to leave for a trip and gave me a sandwich and an orange for my lunch, which she had bought from a man on the Bowery who was selling them both for a dime, a lunch provided him by the Municipal Lodging House and which he was probably exchanging for the first dime to pay for a 35c bottle, called Sneaky Pete by the man around us. Marie earns bits of money from the neighbors for whom she runs errands or does a bit of work, and this too is always spent on others. It is so good, everyone knows, to have a bit of money to spend and even if board and room and clothes are provided at the Catholic Worker, not having a penny to spend means an involuntary poverty which many of the young ones feel. So they go out to sell the paper on the streets, and such selling means a direct encounter and questions asked and countered or answered by the seller.

Today is the feast of St. Nicholas of Tolentine who preached sermons on the street corner, my missal says. I still use a missal because I want to hold fast to those prayers in the canon

of the Mass, and because I want to know the feasts, the saints and heroes we celebrate, also sometimes the priest is not a clear speaker. Yesterday was the feast of St. Peter Claver who is the patron of all the priests who work with the Negro and who struggle for civil rights, who hunger and thirst after justice, and the epistle and gospel are inspiring. The Maryknoll missal has all the psalms and here is prayer for every occasion, the prayer of the Israelite, the prayer of the Christian.

This morning I was inspired myself to preach a sermon a street corner, a strong sermon against drink which is the curse of so many of those we live with and sit at the table with. St. Paul talks of abstaining from what causes your brother to stumble. We concede of course that wine is good and lightens the heart of man, as Scripture says, but we live in the midst of the tragedy drink has caused, and to use the most difficult but the only potent means to help, inflict suffering on ourselves by sacrificing this little enjoyment, put to death that bit of self that demands this indulgence and justifies it as being harmless. We had just received an account in the letter from the mother of a young man, who with his wife and unborn child was killed in an auto crash caused by two young drunken drivers also killed. And there was the drinking and perhaps drug addictions on the part of three teen agers which led to the brutal beating and murder of Al Uhrie last month, on East Fifth Street, a young man who was one of the gentlest and most consistent pacifists in his daily life that we ever knew. His wife and five months old baby are now living with us in Tivoli. When one is surrounded by many sorrows, one's own is lightened a little, leveled off a bit perhaps by the way folks try to take care of each other. I cannot believe that people are so captivated by drink that they will not give up their own harmless indulgence for the sake of others around them. It must be that they do not have faith in the weapons of the spirit or recognize their power. How to explain it, to make it clear. St Ignatius said love is an exchange of gifts, St. Teresa said that we could only show our love for God by our love for our brothers. Jesus said for us to pray thus: **Our Father.** So we can say, Father, I love my brother and I love you. I want to offer you a sacrifice, and beg you in return to send Arthur or Louis the grace to overcome the most dangerous failing they suffer from. Give us this day our daily bread of strength to suffer for each other these little ways of sacrifice, as well as the daily pinpricks of daily living which can become martyrdom in a family and grow into hate and violence.

I thought these things at Mass this morning, and I had to say them when I encountered someone for whom I thought the words were important.

But I will continue my journal. We went to press last on **August 10.** There was a conference going on at the farm, Negro and Puerto Rican problems were supposed to be the subject of discussion but we had no Puerto Rican representation. **August 11** I spoke at the Dominican Retreat House in Schenectady where there was a week's meeting to study the documents which have come out of Vatican Council II. A most interesting meeting and I wish I could have spent the week there. One of the things I enjoy about traveling and speaking is that I learn something each trip. The 95c edition of these documents with generous commentaries and footnotes practically an encyclopedia of information and I can guarantee that anyone picking it up will not lay it down in a hurry. A good index at the end too.

August 19. News of Al Uhrie's death, his brutal and senseless murder only two days before as he was returning to his home on East 5th street at eleven o'clock at night. Streets are

crowded even then and if there were any witnessed to what they might have considered another brawl, we do not know of any. Three boys, 14, 16 and 17 were later arrested and are being held now but who knows if they had anything to do with it. Fr. Dan Berrigan went to see them in prison. They deny any guilt. There has been not a line in any New York newspaper about this murder and considering the fact that Al was one of the leaders of the peace movement and of the Fifth Avenue Parade Committee which brought out the greatest radical anti war parade in the history of this country, it is strange that there is no mention of this death. His wife is a young and beautiful girl, a former student at Barnard College and will continue her studies when her baby is older, is she can get a scholarship or loan to go to Bard College which is near us at Tivoli.

August 15. Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a feast which recalls the teaching in the creed that Jesus rose from the dead in his humanity and divinity, from which teaching the belief in the resurrection of the body follows. And since the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary, her body too was “assumed” into heaven, a presage of the life to come.

This was the day that Al Uhrie was buried from the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle. Was he the doubting apostle? And I like to think of this faith of ours expressed in the creed which we say each day, each recitation of the creed being an act of faith by which we hope to grow in faith. In the words of the Old Testament, “In the sight of the unwise, they seemed to die but they are in peace.” For him, “life is changed, not taken away.”

On **August 19th** I went to Fairfield, Conn. where the priest friends and advisers of the Christian Family Movement, regional group, were gathered together. The two hundred and fifty families registered for the meeting were to come that evening. I spoke to the priests in the afternoon, and to the families Sunday morning at ten o'clock before the Mass which ended the two day meeting. Someone said there were also three thousand children, and it might have seemed like that to the little novices of Notre Dame de Namur who took care of the children during the conferences and the workshops. The families had them during the meals and they were much in evidence all over the campus. But everyone seemed relaxed and the children were happy, and in general it was a wonderful meeting, and I enjoyed it too. While I was there in Connecticut I spent the night with Sally Schilthuis in Westport and the next night with Marguerite Tjader Harris in Darien, and the two of them combined forces to pay for a 1961 station wagon which will hold nine passengers and luggage besides. May the Lord bless them both.

On **August 22** I spoke to the Christian Brothers novices who were about to be professed and who had been for thirty days on retreat at St. Joseph's in Barrytown. The Christian Brothers have been good friends, and our near neighbors since we arrived at Tivoli. They loaned us tools, they ploughed up our kitchen garden so that we could get an early start that April we moved in two and a half years ago, they loaned us beds, and they have sent us plenty of clothes for our men. They are unceasing in hospitality and when a crowd of farm people go to eleven o'clock Mass on Saturday, they are always invited to break bread with them, and of course it is much more than bread.

Right after speaking that day I started out with Hans Tunnesen and little Dorothy Corbin, my godchild, to pay a three day visit to my daughter in Vermont. Hans needed this vacation, such as it was, after his labors of the summer. He is always up at five-thirty in the morning

to cook the dinner, and Marge Hughes has given him a hand a good part of the time. Indeed she has done much more than that this summer, what with taking dictation from me and reading to Deane, and taking care of a most active small boy.

Hans enjoyed his trip and either Tamar or I drove him around Vermont to see the beauty for which that state is noted. I almost ruined the VW when Nickie, my sixteen year old grandson came with us when we were going to see a beautiful birch grove where a Lithuanian hermit had lived out his days and which is now a little a mountain-top park.

Nickie guided us down strange roads from the mountain top, gravelly, stony, narrow and very steep, in our quest for deer. This prowling around in a car is what the boys call deer watching, and we saw much beauty but no deer that evening. Eric had counted more than twenty the night before and the day before that on the way from the soap stone quarry he and his boss had encountered a bear. I had seen two beautiful doe at Tivoli and in Perkinsville three more early in the morning.

Two of the days Tamar was off duty and we had a good visit while the children played from morning till night and when they were exhausted from swimming or playing in the sand pit down the road, they sat like little angels and did embroidery on fine linen. It was presented with a tiny cushion.

But the great news we received on this visit was of the approaching marriage of Becky which will take place on October first at St. Mary's Church in Springfield at a ten o'clock Mass, to John Houghton, of Newport, N.H. Becky is my oldest grand child, twenty-one. I can scarcely believe it and all Hans could say was "It seemed only yesterday I came to the farm at Easton and she was a crawling baby then."

Peacemakers

On Saturday we returned to Tivoli and to the Peacemaker Conference which had started on the 20th and was to continue until Sunday the 4th of September. Wally and Terry Sullivan were in charge but Terry was in jail, a year's sentence at Danbury, Conn. and Wally had to manage alone. I had known Wally and Juanita Nelson some years ago at the Koinonia Community when we all went to volunteer our help, Juanita in the office—a twelve hour day, me in the kitchen and Wally everywhere. I remember one of his jobs was to drive around in overalls and make like a share cropper and try to buy peanuts for seed and various other things needed by the community. What with the dynamiting and shooting, his life was in danger a good part of the time.

There were meetings morning, afternoon and evening and some afternoons there were demonstrations such as Vigils in front of Danbury Federal prison where Terry was, and the New London jail where seventeen year old Suzanne Williams is confined for contempt of court ever since the demonstration at the launching of the Polaris submarine at Gorton, Conn. She is fasting for ten days, and had previously fasted and vigiled in Boston where the violence against pacifists and conscientious objectors has been extreme and of such violence that on one occasion a young man beaten by Catholic High School students was all but killed. There is little publicity about this continuing violence and little attempt by the police to keep order.

The New Order

But the talks were not all on pacifism, but also on the new order which the Pope too has made clear must come about before any peace can come to the world. Dr. McCrackin, Ernest Bromley, Bob Swann, and many others gave talks and led discussions and there was much talk of community, non-cooperation, tax refusal and the work of small industries and cooperatives, and the Poor People's Corporation of Mississippi in the South. Bob Swann's talk, out under the trees in the shade of the old mansion was one of the most interesting to me.

He told of plans for an International Independence Foundation, a conference for the planning of which was held at Woolman Hall, Deerfield, Mass. in August. Ralph Borsodi told of his meetings in India and his suggestion to Jayaprakash Narayan that the Gandhian movement, at present led by Vinoba Bhave and Shri Narayan be internationalized and that a foundation be started which would make loans available to farmers and villagers at reasonable rates. At present the farmers are paying money lenders an interest rate of 37 and a half per cent per annum up to 10 per cent a month. The Gandhian movement is called Sarva Seva Sangh and has already 20,000 village workers. Peter Maurin was profoundly interested in Ralph Borsodi's ideas and it is good to see how they are spreading, We will have a longer article about this movement later, and hope that Bob Swann himself will have time to write it. Many years ago Jacques Maritain told is to study the chapter in his book, **Freedom in the Modern World**,

Correction

I very much regret having mistakenly reported in September in the "On Pilgrimage" column that no Puerto Ricans were represented at the conference on inter-cultural problems which was held at our farm in Tivoli on August 10. The conference was attended by Sister Thomas Marie, a Trinitarian sister who is a native of Puerto Rico and is presently working in the Brooklyn Diocese. About seven Puerto Rican youngsters and an equal number of Negro teenagers from St. Ambrose Parish came with Father John Highland. Others attending included: Monsignor Robert Fox, coordinator of Spanish Catholic Action for the New York Archdiocese, Father John Powis, of Brooklyn, and Father Jeff Cuffee, and Anglican priest working in the lower East Side. D.D.