

Introduction

During the summer of 1998, while on vacation and with time to think, we conceived of the idea to put together a book that would consist of reminiscences by people who had lived and/or worked at Judson House. During the first half of 1998, the members of Judson Memorial Church had been debating, with great emotion, what to do with the building on Thompson Street. It was falling apart, and the church did not have the money to fix it up. The church certainly did not have the funds to bring the building up to code in order to house new programs. It looked as if the building might be sold to a developer, who would tear it down to put up something new.

At the time of our vacation, we were both reading *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), a French philosopher. Bachelard talks at length about the meaning of spaces we grow up in and how these spaces have a lasting influence on the rest of our lives. The book convinced us that the memories of a space are just as important as the space itself. If we could not keep Judson House, then at least we could preserve the collective memories of what went on inside.

At the end of that summer we took the idea of a book to the Judson Board, which endorsed the project enthusiastically. We mailed about twenty invitations to people we knew had lived there—staff and former staff, some former students from New York University, a few program associates. It was going to be a fairly thin book.

Slowly the contributions came in. And then people began telling us about others who had lived at the house. We followed up with more invitations, and invariably more names surfaced. This whole process took far longer than we had anticipated, but with each new piece, the book became that much more complete.

Still, we were unable to locate some former residents we would have liked to include. Foremost among these are Betty and Richard Murphy. Betty served as housemother of the Student House while Richard completed his medical studies. The many references to Betty in the following pages attest to her great warmth and charm.

A visit to the Judson Health Center on Spring Street, which had been the main occupant of Judson House from 1921 to 1950, produced a treasure trove of old documents and photographs, which enabled us to cobble together the history of that long-term tenant.

We have grouped the chapters into several sections. Each starts with an introduction of the program, followed by individual reminiscences. We have made a strong effort to double-check the spelling of names and the dates offered in various contributions. What we have not done is to tinker with people's memories of what happened. Certain events are described by two or three people and never quite sound the same. After all, one person may have experienced them as very different from someone else who was there. One story that is told with three or four different endings is that of the chickens that were or were not killed in a "happening" that did or did not take place in the Judson garden in 1967.

Since we first made plans for this book, the Judson congregation voted to sell Judson House and the garden to the New York University School of Law. Judson House is no more. It is our hope that the stories in these pages will keep the memories of the building alive.

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