
Robert Boyd

Robert Boyd is the earliest staff member represented here. _____

In the summer of 1947 I arrived in New York City to begin teaching organic chemistry at New York University. I was staying at the Y on 23rd Street and had not yet found an apartment. One day, as I was walking down Washington Square South and passed Judson Church, down the steps came a young woman who had been one of my students at Antioch College in Ohio. After our initial surprise, she said, "Well, come in and meet my mother. She is secretary to the church minister, Rev. Elbert Tingley."

At that time, the New York Baptist City Society, and specifically Mrs. Melissa Russell who was running things there, was trying to set up a program to provide living arrangements for students at New York University that would also involve community service. The students would live at 81 West Third Street, which at the time was called Edward Judson Hall. The City Society was looking for a manager for the house who would also keep an eye on the students. I was interviewed by the Judson Council, and Mrs. Russell took a liking to me. Actually, they were desperately looking for somebody and hired the first sucker that came along! It was absolutely the most fantastic combination of events for me to have landed there.

My wife at that time, Carol, was working at a summer camp on Cape Cod, and unbeknownst to her I made the decision to take on the management of the building and move in. Then, of course, I had to persuade my wife, and apparently I did because soon we were living at 81 West Third. It was a great way to get started in New York. We were not paid a salary but had rent-free housing for taking care of the place.

There were two steps going up from the outside door, and we lived on that floor. In the back, looking out over the garden, was our bedroom. There was a kitchen in front. We did our own cooking and were not part of the students' meals. There was also a room that could be used as an office, which the City Society outfitted with a very nice desk from Wanamaker's. The City Society was very interested in getting things established.

My responsibility was to run the dormitory. The program was starting from scratch. I had promised we would try and see what we could do. In this building, a very strange combination of people had been occupying some of the rooms. One of them was a woman who soon retired from something or another related to the Baptists. Another was an elderly woman who was not in very good shape. One day she tumbled down the stairs. She was a great, big, husky woman. Her daughter came and fetched her one day and we never saw her again. That took care of two of them. That left the place open for what Judson wanted to do, namely, create a dormitory for students with an interest in community service.

NYU STUDENTS IN THE DORM

Now they had to get the students. By the end of the summer they collected a number from New York University. The students paid very little rent. Most of them were men. Some were army veterans; but all in all they were an unusual bunch of people. Many were already employed. Some of these finally agreed that they did not fit in and moved out. One was a night clerk for the New Yorker Hotel. He would come in every morning with the New York Times and leave it on my doorstep. He was a great guy but he knew he wasn't cut out for this kind of communal thing.

My wife did a damn good job. She had to handle this college bunch of kids, war veterans mostly, get them to do stuff around the house, and I don't know how she did it. I don't know what the heck I was doing, to tell you the truth. There was no real job description, but it was pretty obvious that certain things had to be done. And the City Society was determined to make the program a success, so we received a lot of support.

The students were supposed to do certain things in the church and in the community, but Carol and I did not have to ride herd on them. If they did any community service at all, they did not tell us.

One of the young men who lived in the house was Charlie Croghan from Florida, another was Lou Reale. Another was Nocito. He worked for some furniture company in the swanky end of the furniture business, near Bloomingdale's. He managed to get a set of Eames chairs for the house.

Our heat and hot water came from New York University. All I would do is tell them we needed some heat. I made a point of becoming friends with the engineer at NYU. After that we had no more complaints about the heat.

DEAN AND MARGARET WRIGHT JOIN THE STAFF

In 1948 Dean and Margaret Wright moved in. Dean had been hired as associate minister to work with students. Dean and Margaret were a godsend. Danny Novotny was an interim pastor when we were there. I believe he was still a seminary student.

Carol and I were part of the Judson congregation. I remember being part of a pageantry honoring Adoniram Judson. We were a very small congregation. Some of the women were marvelous singers. Mrs. Cavalieri was the organist. We still had a baptismal font then up on the stage. The minister had rubber boots and a rubber gown: walk them in, walk them out. I have never seen anything like it since. I am a Presbyterian.

There were some memorable events and incidents during our stay. In 1947, during our first winter, there was a big blizzard. We had twenty-seven inches of snow. There was a young man who used to come around cleaning sidewalks and things like that. He shoveled snow for three hours and then quit without finishing the job.

Judson Church had an arrangement with the Election Board, which used the Long Room to set up the voting machines. I remember early one morning in November 1948 when someone was ringing our doorbell and banging on the door. It turned out to be two policemen: "We want to keep an eye on the voting machines." This was the Dewey-Truman election, and it was promising to be very close. So I let them in.

We lasted two years, and I had a great time. I hung around Judson for a while longer after we moved out of 81 West Third, singing in the choir. Then I stopped coming, and it was not until almost forty years later that I began attending Judson services again. In 1994 I became a member of Judson Memorial Church, finally.

ROBERT BOYD

continued to live in New York City, close to Judson, until his death on July 16, 2000.