
Norman O. Keim

Norman Keim worked as a minister to students at Judson from 1955 to 1958.

When I came to work at Judson Memorial Church, the Student House was a coed co-op of some thirty-five students, of whom about one-third were overseas students. Half were undergraduate, half graduate students. They represented all the schools in the metropolitan area.

The students were expected to help in the kitchen and in the maintenance of the house. If the walls of the hallways are still green, it is from a paint party, with the paint contributed by a kind contractor.

We had a Sunday evening forum where we would have distinguished professors and guests from the community. Probably the most famous guest we had was Pete Seeger, who came down to us hopping mad after his afternoon concert at the Museum of Natural History was canceled at the last minute because of his leftist leanings. He sang for us until the wee hours of the morning.

WINTER STUDENTS, SUMMER STUDENTS

The 1950s were an exciting time. We had a couple of Gold Coast students in the house, and when the Gold Coast achieved its independence in 1956 we had a grand banquet of goat meat and toasted the Queen. The African students brought down their drums from Columbia, and we had a great demonstration of “talking drums.” There was also the war between Israel and Egypt in 1956. We had both Arab and Jewish students in the house, and the war led to lengthy debates.

Probably the most famous student living in the house at the time was Eva Hesse, who went on to become quite a cult figure in art circles. Not so long ago a friend sent me an article from the *London Times*, which reported that one of Eva’s sculptures in an auction was valued at between \$400,000 and \$600,000. We used to have her art hanging all over the house. Eva died very young from a brain tumor.

There were at least three marriages that came out of the house. The only couple I have kept in touch with over the years are Sally Lem and Bob Simon. They now live in County Clare, Ireland. We visited them in their house that they built right on the ocean. He is a retired psychologist.

During the summer we had a different group of students living in the house. They came to New York to attend the Church in Urban Life program. During the day they held jobs in the city, and at night and on weekends we had distinguished people coming to speak to the students: politicians, union organizers, artists. One name that comes to mind is Gus Tyler of the ILGWU. Bill Rogers, campus minister at the University of Georgia, was leader one summer; during another summer it was David Mitchell from Trinidad, graduate student at Union Theological Seminary. They lived with their families in the corner basement apartment off the kitchen.

One night we had Art Blakey, the jazz drummer, playing for young people in the gymnasium. As we were cleaning up, Thelonious Monk walked in, and we all went over to the Student House for a couple of beers. We had a jazz symposium at the church and had our planning meetings in the lounge. The panelists were Marshall Stearns, Rudi Blesch, and the jazz pastor at Saint Peter's Lutheran Church.

In my student work I worked closely with the NYU Law School. We were able to establish the Clarence D. Ashley Lectures in Law and Theology. Again, we had some of our planning meetings in the lounge. Our first lecturer was Bishop James Pike, and during the second year we invited Paul Ramsey of Princeton University. His Judson lectures provided two chapters in his book *Nine Modern Moralists*. William Stringfellow was a great help in getting that lectureship established.

The lots across Thompson Street were then tennis courts, and on the corner of Third Street was a soda fountain that apparently was a drug trafficking point. The police used the bathroom at the Student House as a surveillance point and would bring in young people to frisk them in our hallway.

As director of the Student House I was on a committee of the Protestant Council of directors of Protestant residences in the city. We once had a meeting at the United Nations, where Eleanor Roosevelt addressed us. Mrs. Roosevelt, of course, knew Judson well. She

lived right across the park, and during the 1956 presidential campaign she and Tallulah Bankhead addressed a political rally in the church.

The *Village Voice* of July 31, 1957, described that year's Urban Life Project as "an unusual group to find gathered in a church." We *were* pretty radical, trying to learn from jazz and Bishop Pike how to make Christianity relevant to urban dwellers.

NORMAN KEIM

lives in Syracuse, New York, where he is chaplain at Syracuse University.