
Arthur A. Levin

Arthur Levin has never officially been part of Judson's staff, yet he has run more programs than any other person alive. _____

When I first became involved with Judson Memorial Church in the early 1960s, I don't think I even knew that there was a Judson House filled with resident students. The only part of the building I knew was the Judson Art Gallery, which occupied the northeast corner of the building and had its own entrance.

Although I had known Howard Moody through reform democratic politics, my immersion in Judson took place through the arts, primarily the Judson Dance Theater. After college and a stint in the U.S. Army, I returned to New York City. Through friends I had come to know a number of the dancers who eventually formed the core of the performers at Judson. For several years I put up with the crowds and bad sight lines to watch dance history unfold. Sometimes I even became involved in performances—usually at the back of the house but a few times as an “extra” in performance. I also viewed all the art shows at the Judson Gallery.

In 1966 I left the world of business and came to Judson to run a pilot project aimed at the hundreds of teenagers that crowded MacDougal Street on weekend nights. Howard, Al Carmines, and I conceived of a storefront arts project that would use Judson artists and performers to teach kids from the street five evenings a week. The Judson Teenage Arts Workshop, around the corner from Judson House on West Third Street, was one of the first of its kind using art and artists to serve the teenage street population. Unfortunately, it was too new a concept to attract funding, and after about six or eight months the program had to close its doors.

I next volunteered to help reorganize the administrative side of Judson Church. The office was overwhelmed with the demands of a hyperactive arts program, a growing church community, and the assorted civil liberties activities that became a hallmark of the church's work in the larger community. As a result, I continued to be involved

in the Judson arts programs. I even designed lighting for a few plays and helped out where needed—and even when not needed.

As I became friends with some of those who came to Judson to fulfill their conscientious objector (CO) status and lived in the Student House (Jon Hendricks and Reathel Bean, among others), I actually became more familiar with the building and its history. At about this time, Judson Church was deliberating whether to continue the housing of students or whether the space at Judson House might be put to meeting other needs.

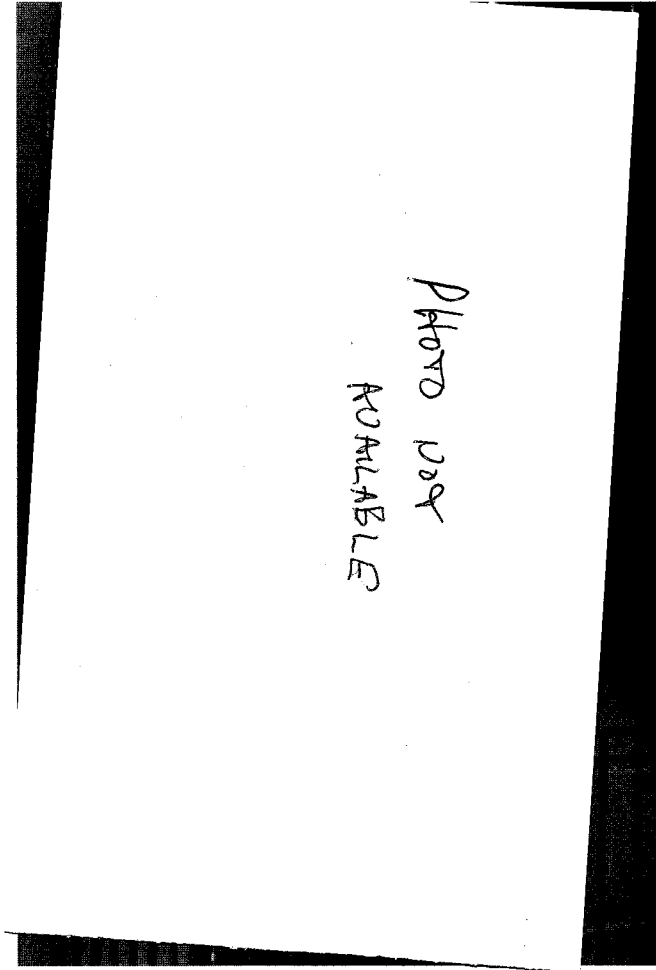
RUNNING WITH THE RUNAWAYS

In 1967 Howard and I were approached by a consortium of progressive charitable foundations who wanted to support some safety-net activities for the growing youth culture that had flocked to the Lower East Side and who were hanging on the every word of Abby Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. Judson's history and Howard's reputation were an attraction to the foundation directors, who enjoyed being part of the hippie culture but who worried about giving money directly to Abby and Jerry.

Howard and I worked on a proposal that incorporated several programs. The first was to be a crisis center for teenage runaways. It would be only the second of its kind in the country and would use Judson House as its base. (The other, Huckleberry House, was located in San Francisco's Haight-Asbury section.) The second program would be a free medical clinic for teenagers and young adults to be housed in a construction trailer and relocated several times a year throughout the Lower East Side.

After Judson received a sufficient commitment of funding from the foundations, Howard and I went about planning for the opening of the runaway house. This meant first ending the student residence program. We then started preparing the house for its new function. At the end of the school year in 1968, the last students moved out and we began to prepare for the crisis center's opening. The project hired Nancy Katchel to work with me and we hired a few more COs as well.

Howard and I visited the police commissioner of New York City to inform the police department of what we were doing and to plea for some flexibility so that we would be able to work. We wanted to



The modest sign of the Center for Medical Consumers in a window of Judson House, 1999. Photo by Alice Garrard.

be able to assure runaways that they were in a safe place when they came to Judson House. Our commitment to the police department was that we would work to resolve whatever problem had caused the runaways to leave home.

Judson Church had once again been able to move into an area of need and construct a programmatic response. Judson House took on all of the colorations—literal and figurative—of the 1960s, including bizarre repainting of spaces. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was Judson's tradition of not making programs into a

permanent agency, the runaway program ended after a few years, and so did my involvement with Judson House, that is, until 1978.

CENTER FOR MEDICAL CONSUMERS

In 1976 Howard and I had started the Center for Medical Consumers. We housed it in available space on East 62nd Street, where I was administrator of the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health (CRASH) on behalf of the church. After two years, after the decision to close CRASH, we moved the Center into Judson House, using the renovated space that had been occupied by the Moody family during the renovation of Grace House. I found myself back in the space where the office of the crisis center had been located and where I had slept every other night during the runaway program. The rooms on the upper floors were still covered with graffiti and symbols of the 1960s.

Maryann Napoli joined me soon after the opening of the Center. The Center for Medical Consumers still occupied the space twenty-two years later.

BRICKS AND MEMORIES

My head is filled with a variety of images of all that has gone on within the walls of Judson House and in its garden. I helped organize and carry out the laying of used brick in the garden. Amateurs all, we somehow constructed something that lasted to the end. The bricks are only one of many memories. People who lived in Judson House as students still stop by just to look around and tell us of the wonderful experiences they had when living there. Perhaps we should offer a garden brick to each and every person who lived, worked, attended meetings, or worshipped at Judson House as a tangible reminder of all the communal activities that took place in this space for almost a hundred years.

ARTHUR LEVIN

continues to be involved in the work of Judson Memorial Church.