
Reathel Bean

Reathel Bean participated in the 1963 Church in Urban Life Project and returned to Judson in 1966 to fulfill his duties as a conscientious objector.

I first came to Judson in the summer of 1963 to participate in the Urban Life Project. This program was intended to give students an introduction to the city by having us find summer jobs and living and eating together in Judson House. Our group leader was Joseph Duffey, then a minister fairly new out of seminary, who later served in Congress as a representative from Connecticut. His wife and two young sons were also living in the house, as were Beverly Waite and her daughters.

We met rather informally at first—usually at dinner—and compared notes on our job search and impressions we had of the city. Later on, as we all settled into whatever jobs we had found, we began a series of meetings with people who had been asked to speak to and with us about the Village and the city. Howard Moody was probably the first speaker. He was certainly one of the most helpful for a group so new to everything, since he had been in the city less than eight years and was still able to remember what it was like to encounter the city for the first time.

Later we heard Paul Goodman and Margaret Mead. Another highlight was Peter Berger, the sociologist, who had not yet swung to the right as he was to do in a few years and who had been a sort of mentor to Joe Duffey. David McReynolds of the War Resisters League, Harvey Cox (whose *Secular City* had just been published), and Carman Moore, a year-round resident of the house and a composer, all talked with us during the summer.

Carman and I became good friends over the summer and, this being the middle of the civil rights era, both had our first experience of being arrested during an attempt to enter a segregated amusement park in Baltimore. I suppose that was my most memorable Fourth of July to date, and Judson House was responsible.

Except for a few visits to Judson when I was a student at Union Theological Seminary (1964–1965), I did not have any real contact until I returned there in the fall of 1966. I had applied for my conscientious objector status and had not heard from my draft board, just as I had written to Judson about doing my alternative service there and had not heard from them. I had come to New York anyway and stayed with a friend, not daring to unpack in case I had to leave for Canada on a moment's notice. I was perhaps being a bit dramatic, but it was an uneasy time. After a week or two, I got a positive letter from my draft board on the same day that Howard Moody returned from vacation and told me I could work at Judson. Since that assignment included a room in the house, all my problems were taken care of at once.

I was given the center room near the staircase on the third floor and received \$50.00 a week, both of which were great with me. Jon Hendricks had served his stint as a CO by then, but he had decided to stay on and live and work at Judson. During my first year, the house was used as a residence for artists, and Jon was a sort of supervisor for that program. I was simply living there, my work being primarily that of a handyman and sometime janitor for both the house and the church.

Most of the residents avoided any contact with the church, the one exception being the time some of them were involved in the rescue of chickens slated for execution in a destruction art event. A couple of them presented the chickens in the service the following Sunday and explained why they had interfered with the event. This was in the spring of 1968.

Destruction art was a large part of what was taking place in the Judson Gallery in 1967 and 1968. Since the gallery was located in the same building, the residents were sometimes drawn to the events. One I remember best was staged by Charlotte Moorman, the famed bare-breasted cellist, who invited us to cut her dress into pieces with a pair of scissors. I may remember this largely because some time later Carman Moore presented a number during a concert at the church in which I was cast as a cellist wearing only boxer shorts who was finally apprehended by a cop played by David Tice. It ended with him chasing me around the piano.

The highlight of destruction art, for me, was an event just before Thanksgiving during which a piano was smashed and a chicken

killed in the gallery. Jon Hendricks then went to Vermont for the holiday. I got a call soon after telling me that one of the dancers from the Judson Dance Theater had a rehearsal scheduled in the gallery, and I needed to go clean it up. The chicken had been there a couple of days by then. This was the most profound effect that the destruction art movement had on me.

The final phase of my involvement with Judson House had to do with the experiment with runaways. This began in the summer of 1968. The plan was to provide temporary housing, counseling, and other help for teenagers who had left home and ended up in the Village. After a few weeks, though, a pattern began to emerge, with the kids showing up on Friday evening and managing to work things out with their parents by late Sunday. The news was obviously out that Judson was a good place to crash for the weekend.

By the fall, the decision had been made to screen the kids more carefully and set the place up as a more permanent residence with more active intervention whenever necessary. The residents who ended up there that year must have come partly from among those who had come over the summer and from referrals.

Art Levin was active in this project, as was Beverly Waite, who still lived in the house. Mike Parker and Bob Lamberton were counselors, and there was a lawyer who was available for any legal work that was needed. A cook was hired, and when she left I was hired to replace her. My term of alternative service as a CO had ended, but I was living in the apartment off the kitchen, so it was a convenient arrangement.

My menus were pretty limited, which was just as well, since the previous cook had tried a bit too hard. It was difficult to get kids that age to try anything very new—in the area of food, that is; they were ready for any drugs that came along. I remember one of them being brought back one night after he had tried heroin for the first time. It was the sixties, of course, and the counselors walked a fine line trying to maintain some rules and restrictions without being judged too uptight to have any rapport with the kids.

We muddled our way through a fascinating year. My cooking got a little better, and I learned what to keep supplied for school lunches. I think the counselors began to figure out what they were doing. At the end of the year, the project ended and we all moved on.

I often wonder about the kids and hope the experience was as good for them as it was for me.

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an actor, is still an active member of Judson Memorial Church.

He and his wife, Holly, live in Montclair, New Jersey.