
Christopher Holt

Chris Holt was a full-time student living at Judson House in the mid-1960s.

What was it? It was Honeymoon Hotel (with a liberal pinch of Nightmare Alley). The nuns across Thompson Street wagged their index fingers at us. We were rutting in febrile nuptial fervor. There was no window curtain; there was no shame.

Who were we? We were a pair of shit-soled country boys fresh off the trolley from Hooterville in 1965. Judson Church on Washington Square was a doorway to a larger and more luminous life than we had ever dreamed of in our philosophies, and we were very hungry to start living.

I had come to New York as a seventeen-year-old starting my freshman year at the Manhattan School of Music to study the flute. Not long after I had moved into Judson House I met Donald Gallagher, another freshman at the Manhattan School. He came to visit me at Judson House and spent the night—and ended up staying two years. This happened not without some grumbling. Beverly Waite, our housemother, was wonderful in leaving us alone, but the year before there had been several rowdy incidents at Judson House. Jackie Curtis, who was to become a famous drag queen, lived there, as did several other wild people. The church did not want the house to become unmanageable, and the Judson Board was afraid that two guys living together might set a bad precedent. However, Howard Moody saw no reason not to allow Donald and me to live together, and that was that.

During our first year, most of the other residents were foreign students attending the New York University School of Law. In 1966 the church decided to make space in Judson House available for an artists-in-residence program. Most of the new residents were students at Cooper Union. These students were under great pressure to perform, and a few had nervous breakdowns.

A building stores the lives of its people—the “if these walls could talk” thing. Singular people made Judson House a good home, not just a dingy dorm. There were Miss Willie Mae Wallace, the Reverend Jack Matlaga, fabuluscious Sandy Padilla, elegant Damaris Low, lovely Paul Richter, foxy Beverly Waite, glamorous Jimmy Goodson, so serious Bena Shalit, exemplary Tom Roderick, and dear and glorious Al the singing clergyman to come home to after school. Favorite people—how lucky we were!

Will the walls come tumbling down? No doubt. Will they be forgotten? Nope.

CHRIS HOLT

and Donald Gallagher live in Jersey City, New Jersey. Chris works at the Parsons School of Design in New York City; Donald has his own company of decorative painting.