

Bernard (Bud) Scott

Bud Scott was an associate minister of Judson Memorial Church from 1957 to 1960.

I came to Judson in the fall of 1954, barely a week after commencing my student days at Union Theological Seminary, looking for a part-time job. In those days, all first-year seminary students had to take a part-time ministerial assignment of some kind as part of their training, and among other places I was sent to Judson for an interview. Judson was looking for someone to work a few evenings each week contacting students at New York University who had indicated a Baptist or Congregationalist affiliation. This job was the beginning of a fascinating, six-year association that coincided with the last years of Bob Spike's tenure as senior minister and the beginning of Howard Moody's.

I was a native New Yorker and had done graduate work at the New School for Social Research on Twelfth Street, so I knew the Village somewhat. Also, I had just returned from Asia, concluding a four-year stint in Air Force Intelligence. Somehow, all this must have helped qualify me, and before long I was spending several nights a week calling on NYU students. I do not think many of those I visited ever became connected with Judson, but I did manage to involve some in a discussion group I started in the basement of Judson House.

MINISTER TO ARTISTS

That effort led to my being hired, in my second year at Union, to work as a missionary to the artistic community about the church. The idea was that if the natives would not come to church, the church would go to them. I was to hang out and be the church in their midst. It was to be a *travail de présence*, an expression popular with French priests right after World War II. I was not sure what it meant exactly, but I soon began spending time in the streets, cafés, galleries, and bars of the Village. The Beat Generation was in its em-

bryonic, formative stage, and spontaneous poetry readings in the local cafés were starting to spring up.

This assignment eventually grew, after my three years of seminary were completed, into a full-time position at Judson as associate minister with dual responsibility as director of the Student House and as missionary to the local community. It was the latter assignment that captured most of my attention. The Student House and student involvement gradually became a secondary focus, not only for me but also for Judson Church generally.

I took the missionary assignment most seriously. Given the inclinations of my nature, I soon became a native Villager myself, a true bohemian—something of a convert in reverse. I grew a beard and spoke the white Negro jargon of the jazz scene, where money was “bread,” things were “cool, man,” and anyone who lived north of Fourteenth Street was “out of it.”

LIVING ON THOMPSON STREET

My wife, Gisela, our daughter, Erica, and I lived in Judson House in the main street-level apartment. Our large living room with its tall ceiling became a salon of sorts for gatherings of artists, poets, and musicians. I recall one such occasion when a gifted friend of ours was playing the upright piano in our living room. An incident occurred that more or less characterized our life in those days. It was an unusually warm day in late March, and the floor-to-ceiling windows were wide open. From where I sat I could see that several black men had stopped on the sidewalk outside and were listening to the piano. I recognized one of them, a local drug dealer who had been a hip jazz musician at one point in his life. The other two looked to be junkies already a little stoned. The dealer caught my eye and broke into a big smile. *All right*, he said, his whole body suddenly become alive. *I like that. Who's making that sound?* A friend of mine, I shouted back through the window. *He's alll rrright. Hey man, can I come in? Let me come in. I got to catch this man.* By this time, my pianist friend had turned around and was looking at the small mottled audience outside our window. *Hey, just me, man*, the dealer called through the window. *Just for a minute. I got to catch this. I ain't gonna cause no problem.* A moment later I found myself opening the door to this junkie, who took a seat with-

out a word as my friend resumed his playing, this time as if especially for him. The man first sat rather tentatively on a straight-back chair, but he soon got up and stood over the piano, his streetwise face lit up with pleasure. He did not stay long, but the encounter left a sweet taste in everyone's mouth.

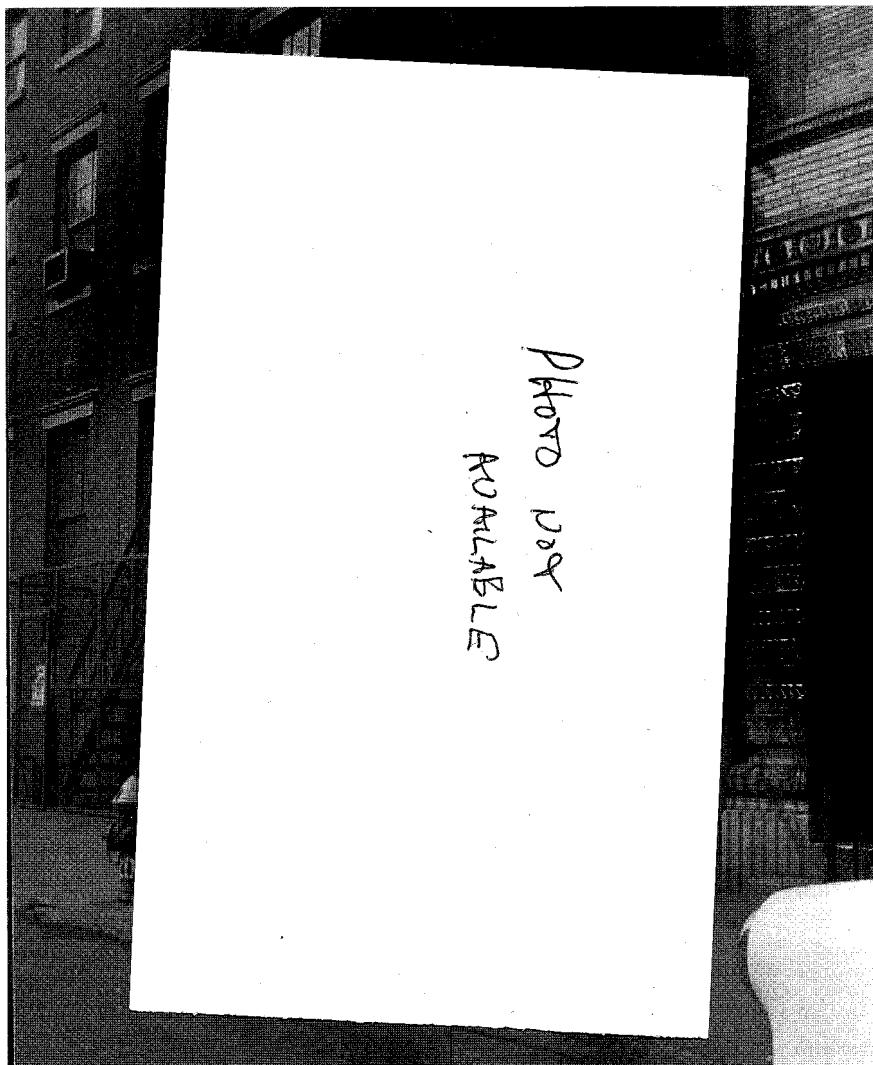
That's the way life was living on the ground floor on Thompson Street in the 1950s, right in the midst of Greenwich Village life, with all its complexities and contradictions, its art and poetry, its music, its problems, and, yes, its decadence (there were three strip joints on the corner of Thompson and Third, grinding away every night until three in the morning, one of them being Ernie's of *Catcher in the Rye* fame).

So many different people came through our Student House doors in the late 1950s—Jack Kerouac (he took a bath in our apartment), Paddy Chayevsky, Norman Mailer, Martin Luther King, Jr., scholars and commentators like Harvey Cox and Peter Berger, the legendary poet/artist DeHirsch Margules (known in his day as the unofficial mayor of Greenwich Village), and indeed many others, particularly in the world of art.

THE BEGINNING OF THE JUDSON GALLERY

Around 1958, as part of my so-called missionary activities, I started an art gallery in a suite of rooms in the basement of Judson House, directly beneath our apartment. One of the student artists living at the house, Marc Ratliff, helped me get it get started.

The Judson Gallery had a walk-down entrance off the street outside our windows and almost immediately became a center of activity. I developed a friendship with two painters in particular who would go on to become famous artists: Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine. Claes and I got to be good friends, and for a while we saw each other a lot. Some of the very first "happenings" ever, involving Allan Kaprow, the inventor of that unusual art form, were put on by this little gallery. Tom Wesselmann, who later also became a well-known artist, became one of our early exhibitors. For some of these artists, the Judson Gallery gave them their first New York show, and Claes and Jim Dine were intimately involved in making the gallery a happening in its own right. In fact, the Pop Art movement of the 1960s, famous for its turning away from abstract expressionism back to rep-



The Judson Gallery on Thompson Street, 1959. Photo by Grace Goodman. Reprinted by permission.

resentational, albeit often Dadaist, images, can be said to have had one of its roots in the Judson Gallery. This is how it happened.

Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Marc Ratliff, and I were in the gallery late one Saturday afternoon. We had just closed Jim Dine's one-man show and were sitting on the floor with our backs against the wall beneath Jim's paintings. We were wondering what to do next

when I suddenly had a thought. Let's have a group show, I said, and suggested some ideas for it. For the next hours we let our imaginations go free. The notion that I was working with was that of the interpenetration of art and reality. I suggested to Jim Dine that he create a painting that you could walk inside of. It was a long, spontaneous but somehow reflective meeting during which something seemed to gel.

RADICAL ART

One thing led to another, and before long we opened a show called *Ray Gun Specs*. It had a painting by Jim Dine that was literally a room you entered. On the outside, it looked like a small square hut that some homeless person might have put together under the Brooklyn Bridge. Inside, the three-dimensional space was packed densely with a plethora of painted objects—some found, some made, but all essentially just junk—hanging from the ceiling, projecting from the walls and floor, and blended with special lighting. A tape recorder emitted a flow of spontaneous sounds and meaningless utterances, including some by our own voices. The whole thing was not very memorable—just old stuff like boots and such, arranged and painted to take on the properties of art. Claes's work in the exhibit was a scene of lifesize paper maché figures and objects (a "paperbag bum," a fire hydrant, street litter) plus his wife (in the flesh) done up in painted burlap bags stooping among the litter. It was all done in flowing ribbons and patches of gray and white paint bathed in an eerie light.

This notion of a painting that was "entered" gave Jim Dine another idea. In conjunction with the *Ray Gun Specs* exhibit, Allan Kaprow organized an evening of so-called happenings or "performances" to be put on by this little band of artists. It was held in the Long Room of the church, which had its own entrance on Thompson Street. It was in fact a little theater. Jim's area for his own performance was to come on like a painter, dressed in beret and smock, and go up to this huge canvas and start to paint humming some zany song. As he worked, his motions would become more agitated until he flipped out and began tossing pots of paint first onto the canvas and then over himself. Finally he leapt forward and dove into the canvas. Jim did it twice in one evening, and the small crowd that

took in his performances that night went wild. (I chanced to hear Jim Dine describe this scene, with something of his original gusto, during an interview on NPR in 1999.)

The confusion of art and reality that underlay the *Ray Gun Specs* exhibit, and that Jim Dine parodied in his performance, seems rather amusing in retrospect. But the notion touched a genuine impulse in these painters. Some time after I became a Catholic and left Judson, Allan Kaprow was invited by Judson to continue the gallery. A painting, he told the Judson representatives, was “not something you look at but something you enter.” I am not sure that he or any one of us at the time could have explained to onlookers what that notion really meant. It was just the way it was in Greenwich Village and other such places in those days—artists and poets with their coteries looking for meaning in the most unlikely places, as in a pair of boots, seeking to uncover mystery in a consumer world that looked to them as if it had stamped mystery out, and finding hints of mystery in its refuse, like crumbs from a table of a time long ago when everything was colored with wonder.

LITERARY INITIATIVE

Around this time I also started an avant-garde literary quarterly called *Exodus*. There were only three issues, but the publication surprisingly made an immediate impression and today is a collector’s item. (I am told it was included in a 1999 exhibition of Pop Art at the Whitney Museum, mounted in a glass case.) I had picked the name *Exodus* because it was to be a magazine looking for a way out. There was nothing overtly religious about it, despite its title and the fact that its editor was an unordained Protestant minister. Indeed, there were pieces that could be considered scandalous to conventional mentality, but the magazine nevertheless had a religious preoccupation that was hardly concealed. Today it would be surprising for a so-called little magazine to have spiritual undertones, but in those days it seemed to fit in easily with the soul-searching tenor of things in places like Greenwich Village. The magazine attracted a fair amount of attention in its brief life; in one newspaper editorial it was described as “not *beat* but definitely far out,” meaning that the magazine was not seen as part of the Beat movement but that it took its own stance on the fringes, so to speak.

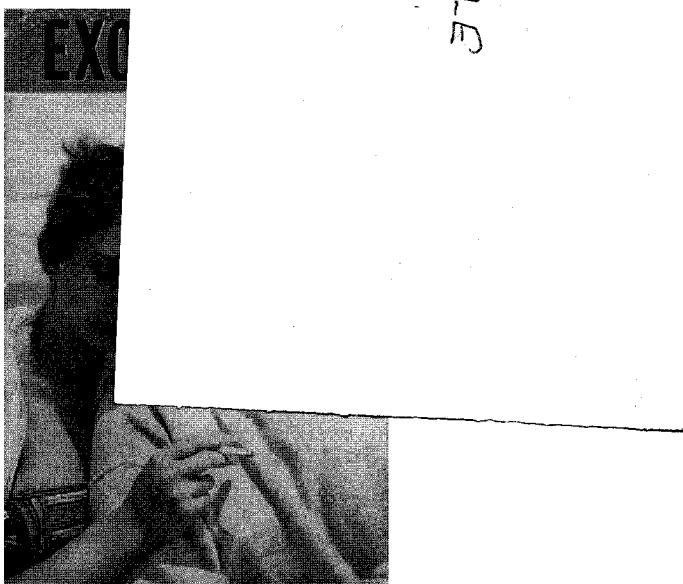
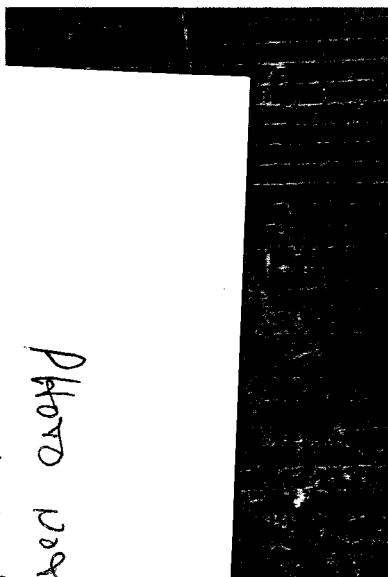


Photo
AVAILABLE

ues of Exodus.

Unfortunately, almost simultaneously with the appearance of our first issue, Leon Uris's novel by the same name hit the bookstores and became an instant best seller. This upset us at first, but the respective readerships were so different that no one seemed to notice. Conceivably, the name even helped us. *Exodus* was great fun

and the quality of writing, poetry, and art was actually quite good. Daniel Wolf was co-editor, Howard Hart poetry editor, and Marc Ratliff art editor. Dan was the founder and editor of the *Village Voice*; Howard Hart was a poet of considerable skill and sensitivity (Jacques Maritain called him the "best Catholic poet writing in English today"); Marc was a gifted young artist who afterward made it big as a designer in the New York commercial art world; he finally also gained recognition as a serious artist.

Money for *Exodus* came from Whitey Lutz, who was married to the heiress of the Lilly pharmaceutical fortune and who took an interest in the Village culture. They kept an apartment on Twelfth Street. I went there one day, through the agency of Dan Wolf, and told them what I had in mind. Not long after, I received a generous check that got us started.

Launching a little magazine had its unexpected obstacles, chief of which was the difficulty in getting it circulated. Circulation is usually so small that distributors do not want to bother, especially with unknown startups operating on a shoestring, as ours obviously was. Financially, such magazines are almost always losing propositions. There was one lone distributor in the East, out of New Jersey, who handled "little magazines."

One day at my request he came by in a stationwagon filled with bundles of every variety of little magazine imaginable, some recognizable, like *Partisan Review*, most unheard-of. It was clear that he worked hard for a living. He explained that he was already overcommitted and could not take on any more business. After some persuading, he agreed to take three hundred copies on a one-shot basis. Hoping for more success than that, I printed fifteen hundred copies of our first issue. It was not long before this distributor came back asking for additional copies, first a few hundred more, then another five hundred. Finally, he wanted five thousand more. More people than we had dare dream were picking *Exodus* off the literary-magazine racks in cubbyhole bookstores all over the country.

Unfortunately for us, we could not supply the demand: The typographer's lead had been melted down right after the first printing. No matter, it cost us more to produce the magazine that we could sell it for. *Exodus* could not last very long on that basis and it did not, although the immediate cause for the quarterly's demise was not finances but my sudden departure from Judson in the spring of 1960.

My years at Judson were a vivid, fascinating time, and to this day they are never far from my consciousness. The friends I had then, both in Judson and in the surrounding community, continue to mean a great deal to me. I am very grateful for the experience.

BUD SCOTT

lives in Florida.