
Juell Krauter

Juell Krauter was a participant in the 1959 Church in Urban Life project. She was also Al Carmines's secretary for several years. _____

I grew up happily in a small central Texas town, with a nice balance of achievements, rewards, and romances. In 1959 I received a bachelor of arts degree with a major in English from the University of Texas at Austin. During my last semester I lived at the Austin Christian Faith and Life Community led by Joe Matthews. I was beginning to suspect that something was amiss. I had not found the man to marry, and my spiritual life was confused.

I wanted to spend the summer after graduation in a large city and had applied to several projects. I was accepted to be part of Judson's Urban Institute. I arrived by bus on a Saturday morning at 2 A.M. A taxi took me to Thompson Street. At first, we could not find what looked like a livable building. Eventually I rang the bell at 237. Steve Andre opened the basement door and let me in. We had coffee and had the most wonderful conversation on aesthetics. I had just completed John Silber's aesthetics course, and Steve was writing a paper on the topic. We walked around the Village and even down to the Hudson piers. The intelligence and openness with which he talked gave me an exciting first impression of New York City. I was sure all Village people were like that.

Judson House was a beehive of activity. Below the window of my room I could see artists exhibiting their paintings. Across the street was Café Jolie, a strip joint. Night life flourished within the house. Even the preachers and our project leaders could be found in the back yard at all hours discussing some stimulating subject. I began the process of getting my New York teacher's license. I could not imagine returning to Texas in September.

Howard Moody offered me a part-time summer secretarial job at the church, which I readily accepted. (In 1965 I would become secretary to Al Carmines.) Our project leaders, a handsome young couple, were students at Union Theological Seminary. Our program was filled with unique activities—a wonderful foundation from which to learn about New York City and to explore all the theologi-

cal questions that plagued me. I reveled in the exposure to liberal intellectuals, modern religious writers, and the various forms of New York culture. We studied Paul Tillich, Erich Fromm, Martin Buber. Each night we had speakers or discussions or went to plays or movies (there was a foreign film theater around the corner). One unusual event was a banquet at Father Divine's church in Harlem. (His followers, who considered Father Divine to be God Personified, did not believe in marriage, and all the young girls, "Rosebuds," had a V on their uniform, for Virgin.)

After the summer, three project members—Barbara Bailey, Margaret Underwood, and myself—decided to stay in this Fabulous City and got an apartment on 16th Street. We had a constant stream of visitors and we talked late into each night. It was a wonderfully expansive experience. (A year later, Margaret and I teamed up with Beverly Bach, who had been part of the 1960 Urban Institute, and moved into the large apartment in Judson House that was later occupied by Al Carmines.)

The wondrous summer of 1959 punctuated the end of my innocent childhood and was the springboard into a deeper, although more painful, level of existence. I began teaching at a girls' junior high school in Harlem but discovered I could neither teach nor control these streetwise girls. Over the next year, I experienced bitter defeat for the first time in my life.

I fell in love with a black teacher. It was an ambivalent romance that could only end badly. When he decided to marry someone else, I lost control over my emotions. My journals of these years give a clear picture of breaking down piece by piece until nothing was left.

For ten years I lived in New York City, and Judson Church remained my community center. With therapy and by regaining confidence by becoming a social work supervisor, I had a year of relative rest in Berkeley, California, where I became a masseuse. Back in Texas, a man with six motherless children gave me a family, to which I added my son, my only non-ambivalent relationship. We divorced after six years. After one other failed relationship, I returned to my hometown in Texas in 1991. I could go home because I had finally learned to cope with negative tensions, both internal and external.

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lives in Comfort, Texas.