
Carman Moore

Carman Moore needed a place to stay, rang the doorbell at Judson House, and moved in.

My first encounter with the Judson Student House was on the sunny fall afternoon of my first encounter with Judson Church. It was 1961 or so. I had just blown in from Ohio, a graduate of Ohio State University, where a few years before Howard Moody had been pastor to students. I did not meet Howard there, but Mary-Ellen Pracht, a mate from the OSU Music School, swore by him and advised me to get to know Judson.

Actually, I was stuck in the Bronx without a piano on which to compose and, desperate, came to beg Assistant Pastor Bud Scott to let me use the church's instrument. Bud lived in this strange red-brick construction abutting the yellowish brick of the church. I rang the bell and Bud stuck his head out of the wooden door. I began to beg and offer a deal that would involve my singing in the choir, mopping up after services, anything. Bud, in a hurry, shushed me and handed me a key to the church. Wow, just like back in Ohio, I thought, what a kind dude, or maybe he is a New York weirdo, or maybe he reads auras and catches my basic, honest naïveté.

As my daily gig was at the New York Public Library on 42nd Street, I soon realized that the Bronx was nowhere for a self-respecting, Manhattan party-appreciating, deep-concentrating student composer to seriously reside. Sleeping through my station at White Plains Road at 2 a.m. was devastating and was becoming a habit. So I cleared out, and for about a year I shared an Alphabet City apartment with a fellow Judson choir mate, Steve Andry, until the experience of returning from work to find we'd been burglarized again began to get old. Back I went to Judson, this time to beg for living quarters behind that wooden door. I got in.

The Village was pulsating ... it was probably the heat center of the world. Washington Square Park was like a big, cultural laboratory working on some juxtapositions, mixes, quirks, and behavior patterns that would not reach the rest of America for another five

or six years, if then. Hair of all nations flew. Shirts were doffed. Music never ended.

The Student House itself was in part an international living space based on one bedroom per person, a group kitchen, and a downstairs living room with a recordplayer and beat-up furniture. But mainly, the house was a haven in the storm of sixties living. This was especially true for those of us from the hinterlands: Margaret Underwood and Bob Sargeant from North Carolina, Juell Krauter from Texas, Beverly Bach from Alabama, Reathel Bean from Missouri, Anne French from Massachusetts, Susan Stern from Queens, and others I can't remember from Illinois, California, and Michigan, not to mention Hyun Duck Shin and Grace Liu from South Korea, Masayoshi Katsuta from Japan, and Kala Pant and Vir P. Daka from India. We learned so much from being together that the training from whatever schools we were attending paled by comparison—we all basically stopped inquiring about each other's studies.

Among my best teachers were our house parents, Beverly and Ralph Waite and their three daughters, Sharon, Kathleen, and Suzanne. Bud Scott was no longer there. He had "run off and joined the Catholic church," as it was explained to me. On the fall afternoon of my moving in I went to Beverly to request my linens, whereupon she gave me a pile consisting of about ten pillowcases but no sheets, towels, or blankets. Fearing I had encountered rampant amateurism portending a hopeless future at the place, I returned to find that Bev did know how to make a bed but was not so accomplished in running complex operations. It all worked out in time.

I came to spend many evenings with the Waites, typically watching the girls' costumed theatrical improvisations amid torrential giggling (by them—I was just being polite—and, of course, I adored them). At some point during my two-year stay at the house Sharon, the oldest, developed leukemia. Watching her very young beauty fade and sharing the ups and downs of Bev, Ralph, and the girls even from a respectful distance was one of the major lessons in human relations I had experienced up to that time.

The other major training ground at the Student House was the living room. I don't remember if we called it the living room or the parlor ... we certainly were too cool to call it the rec room. If memory serves me, not one cool or hip person lived in the Student House in my two years there. Many a hip person visited, though: Chuck

Gordone, the stage director and future Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright; Richard Tyler, the merry, mustachioed ex-jazz drummer who manned a cart selling Gnostic tracts and calendars for pennies; the almost starving pop artists Jim Dine and Claes Oldenberg; various misunderstood Judson Dance Theater pioneers; and the occasional East Villager who somehow got past the door masquerading as some resident's friend. Mainly the place was just for residents and close friends, with the lights always low (I don't remember anyone spending much time there during the day).

I played records there—jazz items by Sonny Rollins, Horace Silver (one featuring “Señor Blues,” “Song for My Father,” and “Filthy McNasty”), and the all-powerful, mega-important, and now-forgotten Mississippi blues album featuring John Lee Hooker singing “Wednesday Evening Blues” and “The Flood at Tupelo,” self-accompanied on folk guitar (not the electric one that made him famous)—and wore them totally out. I probably wore out my house mates, too, although no one ever complained. Maybe all those blues depressed them so that they could only climb up to their bedrooms and cry themselves to sleep—or maybe some of them actually cracked a book or prepared a paper.

Of course, the main function of the living room was to hold the Friday night parties. Constructed around gallon jugs of red wine that cost maybe \$2.50 (beer was for Middle American frats, and the grass was between weak and oregano at the time), these gatherings sometimes had lots of people and sometimes just a few. I do not recall invitations, only expectations. I do remember long hours of experimental dancing to basically unremembered music. Juell Krauter was my sturdiest and best dance partner, one who had great rhythm and a great laugh and one who did not mind pirouetting across rickety furniture. While I mostly don't remember the music (maybe Ray Charles), I do recall around midnight feeling the floor reel and undulate like some pirates' caravelle out on the bounding main (had to have been Ray Charles).

The most startling moment of Judson House dance history has to be the night when two unknowns showed up with music by someone called Chubby Checker and started moving to something they called The Twist. The event occupies a special niche in my memory. The two dancers were both white and cool- to poker-faced. He was tall and thin; she was short, well-dressed with heels, and gorgeous.

They were totally absorbed in the music, paying no attention to us or each other. Without any sweating they floated glamorously on this fabulous new rhythm and clear tenor vocalizing to the gasping delight of all—or was I the only one impressed? Was I the only other person there? Time past can make you stupid. Anyway, it did happen.

PARTIES, PARTIES, PARTIES

Another characteristic of the parties was their shapelessness. Larry Kornfeld might be in a heated discussion with Al Carmines, Mei-Mei Hull (always wearing black before it became hip), or Chuck Eaton. The main public interest of these talks might be discussion as a form, it seemed to me, not content. This notion was confirmed by the fact that they always ended in gales of laughter. I might have stopped dancing to join in, but that would have been too great a price.

Of course, the parties were also the occasion for a certain amount of wooing appropriate to the sixties (supposedly the Age of the Pill, but all I ever saw were diaphragms). And yet my memory of Student House romance was at best a within-the-family kind of curiosity fulfillment and a feeling that basically this feels like incest, so let's do our serious hunting outside these walls. Maybe I should reconsider this last sentence since... well, among other things, I ended up married to a Student House girl and had some long and sweet relationships with several extremely fine female housemates. We're just airing some perceptions here, so I'll leave the topic.

Occasionally, one of these parties just stopped and somebody just started performing. Usually it was late, people were full of bad wine, and Chuck Gordone (who did not live there but did not miss many parties) would borrow someone's guitar—say, Reathel's—and cover some Harry Belafonte tune, usually a croonable ballad to heat up the ladies. He was worth stopping a party for. Most memorable to me was the night when Mr. Shin, as I called him, went up to his room and reappeared with his flute. Hyun Duck Shin was an ex-Korean War fighter pilot and martial arts expert who, though slight of build, was known to be able to bust the heads of any three thugs at a time. Charming, he was a great conversationalist, but I did not expect the flute. But when he floated and moaned his way through the

"Intermezzo" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, I was bowled over, partly from the playing and partly from the realization that the intensity of feeling probably also derived from horrors of war I could hardly imagine.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Raging in America at large at the time was the civil rights movement and the whole question of race. Typically, the Student House and the Judson community in general had their own special style around the issues, one that allowed important learning to proceed in relative psychic safety. Basically, we were all pretty intent on healing the nation's madness. Most of us, black and white alike, did freedom marches, demonstrations, and even some jail time for the cause. Reathel Bean came to Judson as a conscientious objector, already having protested virtually alone in his Iowa college town square, probably in danger but too young to fear it.

Susan Stern and others went off to the March on Washington. A bunch of us went on a bus down somewhere dangerous in Maryland to integrate an amusement park (how appropriate for Judson) and ended up getting booked at the jailhouse. It was fun for a while. In the Judson community there seemed to be an unusual number of whites from the South, but the ones I knew seemed ready and even eager to experience real equality. And while one white house mate tearfully admitted to me one day that her southern upbringing was giving her a terrible time with the notion of blacks being equal to whites, she did say it to my face and truly seemed to try and rise to something more human.

Black/white/Asian dating was regular and pretty casual, as I remember it. There was a wonderfully light, almost Shakespeareanly breezy romance between a white southern woman and a Nigerian man, both of them charming and bouncy characters. There was a very proper Hindu woman, vocally very critical of all the sexual revolution stuff going on in the house, whose diaphragm and supporting paraphernalia fell out of her bag in the crowded kitchen one evening. There was the planned marriage of Peggy Eaton from Cleveland, Ohio, to the lively Trinidadian Roy Watts, for which I composed a wedding cantata. (I suspect they never heard it because they could never decide when to get married until we were all long

gone from Judson.) In the Judson community at large, there was the wedding of Isa Hermann, born in Germany, and Howard Irving, my soul brother and extremely popular director of the Judson gym youth program for teens from Little Italy. There was Chuck Gordone and Jeanne Warner. And certainly not least, there was black, nominally Christian Ohioan me marrying Susan Stern from White-stone, Queens, and spawning two fabulous boys. The inspired Master Cook and Philosopher General of the Judson House kitchen, Willie Mae, contributed an enormous carrot cake that she mixed literally by hand—no spoon big enough—in a scrubbed (she said) garbage can. Today I am happily not married, but I also was happy for much of the time that I was.

These are some of the things I remember about Judson House, at least what I feel comfortable divulging. After all, I am a Grandpa now. The true Judson story is that it was one of the most successful human relations environments I have ever experienced, and I'd give plenty to re-experience one party night with the best of the gang that I remember there. In lieu of that, I do appreciate having made this mental excursion, flawed and inaccurate as it probably is. I am a creative artist, after all, and old habits die hard. But the spirit of it is right on.

Those red bricks may be on their way toward the great melting pot of Landfill, Detritus, and Effluvia, where they will languish at the bottom of some pile along the Hudson or off in Tidewater Virginia. However, they will never be forgotten by this old Judsonian. What those bricks have seen and what they held inside was some of the best music, dance, and real-life theater anybody has ever known, and I for one will always honor and gladly salute them for it.

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