



# at the door

the quarterly newsletter of St. Francis Catholic Worker House – Chicago, IL

## Rick's Uptown Memories

Remembering the Uptown neighborhood of 40 years ago entails not only visiting another year, decade and century but re-entering another era. In the later 1970s and early 1980s much of Uptown – the quadrant roughly formed by Irving Park to the south, Foster to the north, Clark to the west and Lake Michigan to the east—was a magnet for for internal migration.

Uptown was home to several hundreds if not thousands of Appalachians from Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Tennessee, and Native American Indians, largely Ojibwa, from Wisconsin and Minnesota. There was even a colony of African-Americans who were descendants of refugees from Jim Crow Tennessee in the early 1900s.

At the same time, Uptown was beginning to assume the nature of what could be described as the Ellis Island of the airplane age. Immigrants began arriving from Southeast Asia (primarily from Vietnam), from the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe.

Entire courtyard apartment buildings housed Assyrians from Iraq, Cambodians, Bosnians of Muslim background and Jews from the Soviet Union. Intimate international restaurants and grocery stores numbered in the dozens,

representing just as many different nations. Visiting them was like entering the dining room of a family from Lebanon, Colombia, Somalia, Iran, Sweden or Nigeria.

Conducting voter registration and canvassing work throughout the area for several years in the 1980s,

I never knew what fascinating cultural encounter awaited me when I rang the next doorbell. One person I met right around the corner from my own apartment was Khachatur Khachaturyan. He had been born in Jerusalem when it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Working for decades on the night shift in a box factory in the suburbs, he had never had the opportunity to register to vote. Registering to vote, for him, was almost the equivalent of becoming a citizen again. Although an ethnic Armenian, he lent me cassettes of music by Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum and other Arabic-language singers.



*Photo by Bob Rehak, "Chicago's Uptown: 1973-77"*

Memory revives these images like a kaleidoscope. Hues and shades and shapes merge into each other, gently blending into a mythical world that none but its residents knew, and that now exists only in the mind's eye – and in the heart's. ☀

*Rick Rozoff is a longtime resident of Uptown, friend of the Catholic Worker and volunteer at St. Thomas of Canterbury soup kitchen.*

# Letter at the door

I'd like to add a thing or two to the memories of St. Francis House. I lived there in 1991 and 1992. Some of the names from that time are: Love, Rosalie, Jack, Victor, Sam, Katey, Mike, Paul, Carolyn, Ruth, Phyllis, Tim, David.....and Guillermo...and Bob Bossie, Lynn and Mark's sunshine juice farm, Father Colleran...and the handsome priest from France who during mass at the house said just before communion, "If we don't love our neighbor.... this bread.... and this grapefruit are nothing." Smiles all the way around the room.

Phyllis is a guest who wrote a letter to the house saying that she had seen the Lazarus story happen again and again in the house.

I remember one night, a homeless or near homeless friend came to the door, about 9 or 10 at night. He asked for Ruth. Then he asked for some government cheese. Ruth gave him the sad news that the kitchen was closed. He was pretty ruffled and when he was walking down the block he let us know that he wasn't going to believe in God because of that. Today, I'm looking back thinking God probably got a kick out of that.

The first thing that came to mind when I thought Worker... stories...is of a scene that involved Jack on a ladder outside the house, propped on a ladder with a mop. It was a beautiful summer day and there was Jack poking at the bathroom window with a mop that had a red bucket secured to it. He was trying to get the attention of Effie who was taking a shower on the second floor. Effie had the shower curtain outside of the tub and water was dripping through the floor to the kitchen. Effie is deaf, so we needed to get creative to get her attention.

Lastly, one of my proudest moments was having a home that had a giant banner on it that said, "100,000 people killed is not a victory." The House was still and listening to the radio when the U.S. bombed Iraq. Lots of us got arrested and had a satisfying time when we went to court. I remember Paul K. saying that the lawyer was being beaten by a bunch of folks in jeans. Someone went up there quoting U.N. law. It was glorious. All of our cases were dismissed.

There is one more tender memory. One of our guests was given an anti-psych medicine without her getting another med that is needed when taking the first one. Her body was locking up and freezing. I remember walking with her and Ruth, tiny steps at night and getting help. That's a night I felt the Holy Spirit helping us out.

Happy 50th St. Francis House. Thank you Dorothy and Peter.

– Colleen Blaney (June 20, 2023)

PS. Thanks for keeping the fire going. ☀



"Root Head"

Woodprint - Gary Thomas (2014)





# House News & Notes

By Sam Russo

It's been an eventful summer at the house, with many goodbyes and hellos. Stephanie Held is moving out after three years of living in the community. She'll be starting full-time at Mary, Mother of God parish as their communications coordinator, and living nearby in Andersonville. Stephanie plans to remain involved at St. Francis House, as she can, by cooking dinner on Monday nights and picking up food donations from Trader Joes. After a summer of research in Jerusalem and South Bend, Renée Roden also moved out in August. Renée will be living down the street at Jesus People USA while continuing to write her book and remaining involved in the neighborhood. We are grateful to Stephanie and Renée for their contributions to the house, their commitment to hospitality, and their dedication to living out the values of the Catholic Worker movement.

In the midst of these changes, the community welcomed back Daniel Justman, who lived at Francis House as a Catholic Worker in 2017-18. We're happy to have Dan back after he spent a year at the Denver Catholic Worker.

The community has also welcomed the support of three friends of the house who have begun taking a more active role. Dani, Ben, and Justin are each taking regular shifts during the house's open hospitality hours. Their participation has been a breath of fresh air, for community and guests alike, and has helped the community provide better coverage when the house is open. If you are interested in learning about how you can take a more active role at the House or our broader hospitality network, please reach out – we'd love to hear from you!

The beds for long-term guests at Francis House have been full throughout the Spring and Summer. Recently, we welcomed Jaia, Tia-Lynn, Diamante. We now have nine live-in guests at the house.

A few weeks ago, we enjoyed a visit from Martha Hennessey, who was in town for the Parliament of the



Stephanie & Dani celebrating our new boiler!

World's Religions. During her time in Chicago, Martha led a roundtable discussion at Canterbury House on Eucharistic Revival and shared some reflections on the writings of her grandmother, Dorothy Day. We look forward to her next visit!

In July, the House hosted a summer benefit that was attended by both new and long-time friends of the house. **Our fall fundraiser will be a spaghetti dinner on October 15th from 1- 4pm. Mark your calendars!**

As a part of our ongoing fundraising efforts, we received an extremely generous donation from a friend (who wishes to remain anonymous) to replace our very, very old boiler. While our old boiler continued to pump out steam each winter, this relic of the Bronze Age broke down frequently and was starting to cost the house a lot of money. We are so grateful to have a new boiler and we hope it will last another 50 years!

**Aside from our specific fundraising goals for the new roof and boiler, from January 1st to June 30th 2023, Francis House raised \$6,702 while spending \$12,957, for a negative balance of \$6,255 during the first semester. For all the work that Francis House does, it costs slightly more than \$2,000 per month to run the house. If you feel able to give to the community, especially as a monthly donor, we accept checks or donations through our website.**

As you may know, St. Francis Catholic Worker House turns 50 next year and we are looking for people to help us plan this 50th anniversary celebration. We would love for you all to be involved. Please reach out to the house if you are interested! ☀️

# Our Historical Memory

We continue to prepare for our 50th Anniversary – to be celebrated with a nine-day-long festival from September 28th to October 6th, 2024 – by collecting memories of St. Francis CW. If the community has a special place in your heart and you'd like to share your stories, please email us at [sfh.chicagocw@gmail.com](mailto:sfh.chicagocw@gmail.com).

Thank you to everyone who has shared their memories with us so far, we are honored.

## Denise Plunket's Reflection

Stories from her experience from 1979-1983

### How did you end up living at the Worker?

In 1978, a young woman who went to the Catholic Worker seeking shelter asked "Why don't we start a soup kitchen?" and I volunteered to help start the Soup Kitchen that is now at St. Thomas of Canterbury church. In 1979, I moved into the house when Kris Pierie who started St. Francis House asked if I would want to move in when she went to grad school.

### What was it like being at the House during that time?

The spirit of St. Francis House was always welcoming and people loved to be there. Everybody worked together, no matter what brought them to the Worker. The Jesuit Volunteers lived in several apartments a block away, many others worked at St. Thomas of Canterbury, and all these people were working in jobs to help the poor. We often had concerts at the house. When Jim Holland moved in and lived with us during grad school, he brought his guitar. Chris Inserra would come over with her guitar and join Jim. Both are extraordinary musicians and both have beautiful voices. The best music in Chicago was coming from the Worker! It was the many good times everyone shared that created a sense of community. Those who initially came seeking shelter quickly found purpose and felt a part of something larger. They could welcome people in, fix them a sandwich, or show them a couch to rest on, and enjoy the concerts.

Here's a good example. One winter morning, I found a person sleeping on the front porch. I said "Oh my gosh you're going to freeze. Come inside you could sit down." But they didn't want to come in. The next day it was the very same thing but eventually we got the person to go in the house and they introduced themselves as Mr. Seven. Within a few days Seven offered to cook dinner. Now just the number of people living there took about two table settings, so this was like quantity cookery going on. But for

the next endless number of years, Seven cooked every evening meal. It was a God send. What an important role they played and what respect Seven had all those years.

### What is your favorite memory?

There was a woman named Ms. Minnie, she was a very dear, soft-spoken person, and she was going to be my new roommate. Late that first night, I heard the door squeak open and it was Minnie coming in. She got in bed with her fur coat on and wool hat pulled down over her ears. Then she began praying. She said, "Dear God, Jesus. I'm in my own bed. I feel like a queen. I feel like I'm in my palace. Jesus, how long has it been since I had a bed? I can't remember. I'm so grateful. Thank you God for this bed." Minnie was praying aloud for about ten minutes. I was practically in tears. I was so touched.

### How would you describe the spirit of the house?

Every day was a good day, not that everything was smooth sailing, but if there was a problem, everyone pulled together. The community was diverse in many ways, that made everyone fit in and feel welcome. I will never forget an evening meal when the doorbell rang and the Department of Human Services brought over a young man in his 20s who arrived at Greyhound Bus Depot with no place to go. We made room for him at the table and told him he could stay with us. People continued chatting about their day. All of a sudden this young man raised his voice and said, "This is unbelievable. This is just like one big happy family." He said it from the depths of his heart and that is exactly the feeling you would have.

### Any last thoughts?

I think the most important thing is that it was a really loving community. People truly loved each other. They would do anything for each other and it didn't matter which people you were talking about. Anybody under that roof. That's why I think so many people were glad to go there. ☀️



Jim Holland, Mark Miller, & Denise Plunkett



# New Roof Project Update

Great news: We have raised \$37,405 for our new roof (including \$2,355 through Gofundme), already signed the agreement with the contractor we chose, and made the \$19,297.50 (50%) down-payment,. Work on our new roof will start in a few weeks!

The final and already approved quote is for \$38,595 (taxes included) and it covers the roof itself (main dwelling), two skylights (for the third-floor dorm attic), all the gutters, all the downspouts, and all the fascia, soffits, and frieze-boards.

So, **we still have to raise \$1,190** plus a yet uncertain amount to replace all damaged, rotting, or badly split wood roof decking as needed. But we can only learn about this extra amount when they tear-off the two layers of roofing and underlayment down to the wood deck.

Thank you so much for your continued generosity. We will keep you all updated as we make progress with our new roof.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie, Gordon, Sam, Dan, Dani, & Daniel ☀️



Scan with a  
smartphone  
to donate for  
our new roof

## Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser



Oct. 15, 2023

1-4 PM

\$40 Suggested Donation

*(No one will be turned away  
for lack of funds.)*



Photos from our Labor Day grill out (9/4). We had a full house and wonderful homemade food!

## Friends of St. Francis House Hospitality Network



**"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."**

- St. Paul's Letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 12:13)

Over the last year, we've been forming a network of folks interested in helping us live out our mission. This hospitality network is made up of both new and long-time friends of the House willing to support hospitality here or providing it at their homes. If you are interested in assisting during house open hours, helping pick up food donations, or other forms of volunteering, please email us at [sfh.chicagocw@gmail.com](mailto:sfh.chicagocw@gmail.com).



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# Thank You

Fr. Bob Cook OFMC, the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago, Ronald York, Ron Carrier, Alex, LuAnn Kowar, Garry & Kim Thomas, Jennifer Franco and Saint Thomas of Canterbury Soup Kitchen, St. Harold's Community, Adam Martin, James Murphy & Canterbury House, John & Anita Revord, Jim Revord, Anthony Spalla, Dani Bodette and her mom Barb, Evan Sather, Ellen Butitta, Erica Brock, Claire Sexton, Ben Tompkins, Justin Bartkus, Elizabeth Duff-Russo, Annie McHugh, Maggie Flynn, Tom Geoghegan, Eleanor Dunn, Donna Goering, John Swishik, Sarah Byrne, Alice Victor-McCawley, Charles Russo, Marieluise Kailing, Rachel Shultz, James Sherry, Daniel Weinberg, Ray Graham, New Life Community Church in Roger's Park & Nitin Shelke.

# “Houses Of Hospitality”

By Peter Maurin

1. We need Houses of Hospitality to give to the rich the opportunity to serve the poor.
2. We need Houses of Hospitality to bring the scholars to the workers or the workers to the scholars.
3. We need Houses of Hospitality to bring back to institutions the technique to institutions.
4. We need Houses of Hospitality to show what idealism looks like when it is practiced.

## House Needs

- Prayers
- USPS Stamps
- Coffee
- Toilet Paper
- Laundry Soap
- Dish Soap
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Volunteers
- Uptown History books
- Women/Men's socks & underwear
- Bedding (twin size)
- Pillows
- Extra-virgin Olive Oil
- Vegetable Oil
- House cleaning products



*Want: wheel barrow*

# Give to the House

Support the daily operations of our community by mailing a check payable to "St. Francis House" or donating on our website [francishousechicago.org](http://francishousechicago.org).

Scan this QR code with a smartphone camera to donate online.

