

This could be a difficult read for someone expecting or even wanting to read a hagiographical work. Dorothy Day touched many lives through her hospitality, example, lectures, and writings, and many of us are accustomed to regarding her as a modern saint. Those who contended with her strong personal presence, however, joked about the martyrs who live with the saints. A further difficulty, well worth enduring, is that this is an intimate portrait of the author's larger-than-life grandmother—convert from New York's bohemian scene, columnist, founder, possibly an official saint, and most of all a personage who challenged the only social order we really know.

Dorothy's religion and activism intruded upon the childhood and life of her daughter, Tamar Hennessy, and even the childhood and life of her granddaughter, the author, Kate. Most grandparents that people want to write about are approachable and unassuming; they affect their children's and grandchildren's personalities, but their influence is recondite by the time it comes to be recounted. This is not the case with this account of Grandmother Dorothy.

Kate, who relied on diaries, letters, and interviews, as well as Dorothy's accounts of the family's life as published in the *Catholic Worker*, tells us of Dorothy the young leftist Greenwich Village journalist of the World War I era. Tales of her "wild life" are often exaggerated, but she was the companion and sometimes lover of young literary talents who, desperately poor, lived tragic lives while becoming famous. Dorothy felt for them just as she also felt for street people, whom she would bring into the bohemian hangouts for warm food. She mostly listened to her distressed friends and empathized, but she also went her own way and remained interested in God. In her writings, she refused to exaggerate misery to please a socialist editor, but she also refused to ignore it. A boyfriend, Lionel Moise, proved to be more a wanderer than a mate and left town when she was pregnant. That was the circumstance of her abortion, performed by the "hobo doctor" of Chicago, Ben Reitman. Back in Greenwich Village, despondent, she attempted suicide twice. In 1920 she married the wealthy Boston philanthropist, Berkeley Toby, but dissolved the marriage a year later and relocated to Chicago, which had an emerging radical scene.

Having sold the movie rights to the semi-autobiographical novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*, she bought a cottage on Staten Island in 1924. It was there that she fell in love with a friend of a friend, Forster Batterham. She was reading religious literature even as she gave birth to Tamar Teresa Batterham, whom she had baptized a Catholic. Forster refused to marry and certainly did not want anything to do with religion. He left Staten Island; she stayed and joined the Catholic Church. The conversion was a lonely experience. Faith separating parents who loved each other set in motion a drama that would mark Tamar's life.

In the depression era, Dorothy scraped by with minor writing ventures. When a hunger march was organized in Washington, she covered it as a journalist for *Commonweal* and *America*, and she wondered why the Catholic Church was otherwise absent from the march. The absence of the Church of the downtrodden in the efforts of the downtrodden for betterment was a serious test of her faith. Soon after Dorothy advised Forster that without marriage they could have no relationship, she met Peter Maurin, a Catholic radical who wanted her to listen to his ideas. He was well read in the history of philosophy, the social encyclicals, the history of the Church, and contemporary Catholic thought. He had

ideas for round tables of discussion, houses of hospitality, and agricultural communes. He did not have a newspaper in mind, but Dorothy began the Catholic Worker on the basis of what he was saying. They sold it on the streets of New York for a penny a copy; donations stimulated by the paper covered most of the cost. Despite the crucial role Peter Maurin played in inspiring Dorothy and calling attention to Catholic social teachings that nobody else talked about, his vision and hers were quite different. He wanted a return to organic medieval rural communities, she a Catholic movement of unionists. As the subscription list exploded, the paper's office became a hospitality house for the homeless and the volunteers, simply because Dorothy could not close the door on anyone. A breadline developed spontaneously. Tamar was to grow up among the various characters of the hospitality house, often with her mother Dorothy away on a lecture tour to raise money.

Other hospitality houses opened elsewhere, and visitors showed up at the one in New York. Sometimes Dorothy was there, sometimes she was on tour. Peter would maintain a continuous philosophical chatter, with or without her. An older couple—Steve and Mary Johnson—took charge of Tamar when Dorothy was away. When home, Dorothy would take Tamar to movies, the beach, or on visits to Forster. Tamar and her father had a mutual interest in biology and gardening. The Worker hospitality house affected her life: her toys would be stolen, and people would expect the shy girl to be like her mother. Sometimes Dorothy and Tamar would find respite at a Worker farm near Easton, Pennsylvania. Tamar preferred Peter Maurin's idea of a Catholic farm commune to Dorothy's house of hospitality. Some of the most difficult Worker people lived at the farm, but little Tamar befriended them all.

Life was hard at both places. Both were crowded and dirty. Dorothy's accounts in her column were often upbeat, but her diary records difficulties, as well as her own migraine headaches and bouts of depression. The worker family was little help; some complained Dorothy was away too much and tried to wrest the paper from her; some wanted resources to go into the paper and not the breadline, some into the farm and not the paper. Criticism from outside led to cancellations of subscriptions when the Catholic Worker refused to side with the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War and when the paper criticized Hitler and his forcing Jews into concentration camps. City inspectors forced expensive renovations on the hospitality house while anti-Semites shouted Workers down at meetings in parish halls. George Shuster, managing editor of *Commonweal*, often loaned money. During all this Dorothy felt she had failed. Within one year, 1939, Peter left for a year, Dorothy's father died, and war erupted in Europe.

Dorothy came to favor silent, ascetic retreats conducted by Fathers John Hugo and Onesimus Lacouture at the farm. The two priests' spirituality was ascetic, anti-worldly; Tamar and most of the Workers detested it. The retreats were so extreme that church authorities forbade the two priests from preaching or teaching. As Dorothy needed the retreats ever more as an anchor for her unpopular pacifism during World War II, Tamar hated them all the more.

Dorothy sent Tamar to a French-speaking school in Montreal after a teenage boy proposed marriage to her. This amounted to an exile from all that Tamar had come to love about life in the Worker farm. The school emphasized domestic crafts rather than academics, which reinforced Tamar's

feeling of not living up to her mother's example. Eventually Tamar wanted to marry David Hennessey, a lad who idealized agrarianism but was on the verge of leaving the farm because he did not see himself as a radical. Dorothy sent Tamar to a Worker arts and crafts program, and after a lengthy and disputatious correspondence let Tamar study at an agricultural institute. Before the year was out, Tamar had proven she could succeed at college-level work, turned eighteen, and returned to the farm to marry David. Dorothy alternately resisted and allowed Tamar to make up her own mind. David, it seems, was becoming an alcoholic.

After World War II, Dorothy faced opposition from within the Worker movement. She wanted to turn part of the farm into a retreat center, but the residents, including Tamar and David, hated the retreats and did not want anything to do with such a center. Men who returned from the military or from conscientious objector assignments, as well as people with mental problems were populating the farm. A priest named Guy Tobler moved into the farm and took control of it, turning it into a cult of his own personality; he regularly demonized Dorothy. She severed ties with the farm and sold the part that was to be the retreat center.

Meanwhile Tamar began to realize her marriage was a mistake, as David turned into a control freak. They moved to an isolated farm in West Virginia, hoping to establish an independent commune; it never worked out. Dorothy visited and wrote glowingly in her column about life close to the land while Tamar experienced grinding poverty, loneliness, and depression. In 1950 David sold the farm and took a short-lived job in Baltimore. Reports of Worker farms failing elsewhere came in, as Peter Maurin died. Moreover, the house of hospitality in New York had to relocate when its rented quarters were sold. To make matters worse, an anti-Communist scare was raging in the country. Dorothy began to see the houses of hospitality as respites for the desperate rather than opportunities to force retreats on people. The mission of the farms also shifted; they began to accommodate alcoholic and troubled priests. A Staten Island farm became a refuge for David and Tamar, among others; David had taken a mail-room job with Sheed & Ward, which lasted two years.

Dorothy began to protest militarism by refusing to cooperate with bomb raid drills—cities were still conducting them in the 1950s—and was arrested many times. From then on local government proceeded to harass the Worker about its building, the sheltering of unrelated people, Dorothy assisting in a childbirth without a midwife license, etc. The reaction to the harassment was renewed sympathy and support. While support from outside, despite harassment, developed, hostility within the family grew. David Hennessey descended into drunkenness, violence, and hostility toward Dorothy and the Worker. By this time he and Tamar had a number of children; they moved to a farm again, this time in Vermont. By 1961, David had to be hospitalized in a psychiatric ward; Tamar legally separated from him.

Kate Hennessey read her father's diaries after he died. As a young man he had a relationship with another young man; the latter eventually married a woman, which caused a crisis. Very Catholic as he was, David was unable to cope with homosexuality, except in liquor. After David and Tamar separated, Tamar raised the children at a new Vermont farm; Dorothy would not let her rejoin the Worker life. Despite her poverty, Tamar studied nursing, and two of the older children entered college. Over the years, she had left the church, taking the children with her. The only time she gave Kate a reason, she referred to

teachings on birth control and sex. Interestingly, Dorothy never asked her about their leaving the Church. One daughter would eventually rejoin, without opposition from Tamar, and Tamar herself displayed the Prayer of St. Francis, the Beatitudes, and a collection of Russian icons in her home.

Dorothy maintained her own prayer life and attendance at mass, but she was not uncritical. She was "...bored by theology, disheartened by anti-Semitism in the old writings, driven to distraction by indifferent mumblings of priests during Mass, and suffering over the wealth of bishops and their refusal to condemn nuclear weapons." Many priests and religious were leaving their stations in life, but at the same time there was a deepening understanding of the sacraments among many Catholics and renewed social activism, this time including Catholics, during the era of the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war era.

Dorothy's opposition to segregation and to the Vietnam War drew hostility. She cautioned against bitterness in the anti-war movement in particular. And Tamar's living off the land in Vermont was idealized by numerous young people. Neighbors criticized her, however, for living off of welfare as well.

Dorothy's final years centered on new hospitality house locations in New York City and the financial problems of a large farm on the Hudson. She began to experience heart problems and slow down. In her old age, she, Forster, and Tamar would visit together, overcoming but not addressing their old divisions over religion.

After Dorothy died, Kate lived near the Worker house of hospitality in New York but could not live in it; she was unable to face the infinite needs of the residents and visitors. Finally, she turned away from it altogether: "I turned away from the Worker, and I turned away from the Church, for without the Catholic Worker, the Catholic Church made no sense to me."

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