

Subj:	<b>Aunt Ruth's story by David Jones</b>
Date:	6/24/2004 11:02:35 AM Eastern Standard Time
From:	Eviewhee
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I met Ruth Labor Day weekend in 1947. I had, just before my 23d birthday, been appointed organist and choirmaster of Dewitt Memorial Church, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a nondenominational church of the New York City Mission Society. Ruth had been trained as a Christian worker in the Gramercy School, which had belonged to that organization. A position in one of the City Mission churches had never become available to her, but she was teaching Sunday School at Dewitt. Bea, who lived quite near Ruth, belonged to Dewitt, and when she couldn't attend, Ruth took Marjorie with her. I think Judy was still quite small. The young people of the church were to spend Labor Day weekend at Camp Sharparoon, in upstate New York, and the pastor thought I should go along and meet the young people I would be working with. Ruth and another member of the church had been detailed to keep an eye out for me and introduce me around. "Do you think that's our new organist over there?" Lucille said. "Oh, no, it can't be," said Ruth; "he's just a baby." I suppose I did look younger than my age. During the bus ride, we became acquainted.

I was supposed to play for Sunday School, the 11:00 o'clock service (in English), the Russian service at 5:00, and the Spanish service at 7:00. (Why I ever agreed to all that is still a mystery to me.) Ruth assumed I would be sitting around the church all day, so she asked me to come to her apartment for dinner after the 11:00 service. From then on as long as I was at Dewitt, we cooked Sunday dinner together in her apartment. Since I, a student at Juilliard at the time, lived in a furnished room, we entertained her friends and relatives and my friends and, once, my brother and his wife, who lived in the suburbs, at dinner parties in her apartment. Once Jack, Laura, Laura's friend Agnes, Philip, and Jimmy were there for dinner. Jimmy was, as I said, still an infant and was bedded down in the bathtub while we ate. I told Philip after the service that I knew how old he was because my brother in the suburbs had a son Philip, who was born the same month as he was. Once uncle Reggie came to New York, and Ruth, Lina, and I met him at the station, so I got to know Lina. Once Ruth and I went to Boston to visit Uncle Reggie. I insisted I wanted to go to the Church of the Advent in Boston. "You want to go all the way into Boston to go to church?" Ruth said. When I assured her I did, she said "Well, I guess I'll go too," and Uncle Reggie chimed in, "I've heard about that church all my life, so I guess I'll

go too." This was in the forties, but Ruth was already having trouble with her hearing, and the loud music of the organ turned out to be painful to her. In 1953 I took an apartment on West End Avenue in Manhattan that had been Lina's. She had been subletting it, without the landlord's knowing it, to a friend of hers and had decided to give it up. She, Sylvia, and I went to the landlord's office and I signed a lease for it. I lived there about five years. The last few months I lived in New York I had an apartment on Park Slope, around the block from Ruth. In September 1958 I moved to Austin, Texas, where for one year I was chief editor of the University of Texas Press. This gave me a chance to visit my parents in Houston more frequently. In Nashville Ruth came to see me a couple of years before I met Carolyn. I gave a party so that she and my friends could meet one another. (The invitation said "Come and meet Miss Ruth Irving, of New York." It hadn't occurred to me that my friends would think I was introducing a fiancée.) She was overwhelmed that all these people had come to meet her. She came to Nashville again when Carolyn and I were married, and she came later when my older sister and her daughter were there. After they left, Ruth, Carolyn, and I drove to Kentucky, where we visited Shakertown, then went to Lexington, where we took a tour of the horse farms. Ruth was always game to do anything we suggested.

Ruth visited us many times in Washington and eventually came for Christmas every year until she was no longer able to travel alone. We visited her in Dewitt Nursing Home two or three times but didn't find ourselves able to get to New York as often as we wanted to. Eventually, as I imagine you know, her short-term memory deserted her. She would always say "I feel fine. I just want to go home." She did finally seem to realize that she couldn't live alone any longer. Once we arrived about a half hour before lunch was to be served, and the residents on her floor were all in their wheelchairs sitting around the table. We wheeled Ruth over to a corner where there was a sofa so we could visit with her, which was extremely difficult, since her hearing aid wasn't working. She said "Those two women over there are sitting at a table by themselves because they act strangely" -- and indeed, they seemed to be pretty much out of it. "If I ever get to acting like that," she said, "just hit me over the head." She knew us each time we visited her, but we weren't able to get there during the last couple of years. I am most grateful that Betty was able to be there when Ruth needed her and to look after her affairs. Since she worked near St Margaret's house, she fairly often went and had lunch with Ruth, and once or twice she and her sisters went and cleaned Ruth's apartment, which was a wonderful thing, because Ruth was no longer able to keep it clean herself.

One of the great things about Ruth was her sense of humor. I could always recall some funny event with just a word or two, and she would go into gales of laughter. She loved music, and with me she heard a whole lot of it. She had the idea that she wanted to learn to play the piano, and she assumed that I could teach her. She bought a rather good little spinet, which I helped her select, and I spent many hours playing it, for I had no access to a piano where I lived. Piano lessons were totally unsuccessful, though; she really had no talent for the piano. The last year I was in New York, I was no longer organist of any church, and I became volunteer assistant organist at the Church of the Resurrection, where my good friend David Hewlett was organist-choirmaster. Ruth had become a member of the Church of the Ascension, on lower Fifth Avenue, where my organ teacher was organist-choirmaster. She didn't dare ask him if she could sing in his choir, but finally, after I had left New York, she asked David Hewlett if she could sing in his choir. She didn't really have a singing voice, and when he auditioned her, he kept saying "I can't hear you." He solved the problem by making her choir mother and librarian, and she thus found her niche at Resurrection. She and David's successor hit it off beautifully, and she was very much a part of that church. She had long since become an Episcopalian, for the Gramercy School was on Gramercy Park, where Calvary Church is, and she was confirmed at Calvary while she was a student at the school. Everywhere that Ruth worked or lived, people loved her. She was generous to a fault, and if I had stayed in New York, I think I could have persuaded her to resist a couple of ill-advised generous impulses. Once she decided that Millie, with whom her mother was living, was not treating her mother right, so she asked her mother to come live with her. It was a bad idea. What was her mother supposed to do all by herself in Ruth's apartment while Ruth was at work? When I first knew her, Linus Dudley Irving was in a hospital on Welfare Island. Every Sunday afternoon she would go to see him or Bea or Al would go. In August 1948, when I had been in New York for two years, I went home to Houston for a couple of weeks, and when I came back and called Ruth, she said her father had died. She had been to see him, and as soon as she got home, they called her from the hospital to tell her that her father had died. She felt guilty that he was alone when he died, but I doubt that he realized it.

I didn't mean to run on so. Once I get started, I can't seem to stop. I could still tell you many things about my and our experiences with Ruth. The other thing I should tell you is my name and address:

Thursday, June 24, 2004 America Online: Eviewhee

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