

# David K. Morath Papers

## INTRODUCTION

I served as a staff member at Emmaus House from September, 1970 until August, 1972.

During this period I wrote a number of letters to my parents, Kenneth and Willa Morath, who lived in Westminster, Maryland. When my mother died in 2002, I discovered that, unbeknownst to me, she had saved our correspondence. The files contained over 20 hand written letters, many of which are undated, along with a few clippings. This material provides a snapshot of life at Emmaus House as seen through the eyes of a recent white male college graduate in his 20s from the Baltimore area.

My parents and extended family in the Midwest were extremely supportive of my decision to claim conscientious objector status. My parents were understandably nervous about my leaving home and heading into an unfamiliar environment. After their first visit to Atlanta, I had their unwavering support. They were charmed by the staff, volunteers, and adults and children in the neighborhood.

I have eliminated references to family matters that were unrelated to Emmaus House. I eliminated a section of a letter involving an internal staff issue that was quickly resolved. Where I was able, I've tagged documents with an estimate of when the letter was written. In some cases I have chosen to substitute initials for names of clients/neighbors to protect their privacy. When writing the letters I specifically did not name individuals who were not known to my parent.

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## A NOTE ON STAFFING AT EMMAUS HOUSE - 1970-1972

The Rev. Austin Ford was the founder and director of Emmaus House.

Sister Marie (Mimi) Bodell of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur directed children's programs. She lived at the convent of St. Thomas More School in Decatur, GA. As her order returned to their original mission, many of the sister were leaving parochial education. The Catholic bishop permitted this as long as half of the sisters living at the convent were staffing the school.

Full-time, year round staff members lived on the premises and received room, board, and a small stipend funded by private donations. Many of us were serving two years of alternative service to the draft as conscientious objectors. Gene Ferguson was the only year round staff member to stay longer than two years. While we had our own unique interests we all worked with children and youth; assisted the Welfare Rights group; provided transportation; did political organizing around a variety of issues; assisted with surplus food delivery; worked with clients on a variety of issues; and staffed the front desk from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. The job was pretty much 24/7. During my second year, there was an attempt to provide one day off a week, but this was not always successful because we often had our own clients who had unscheduled needs. Volunteers occasionally had us to their homes for meals or overnight visits. We were able to take time to visit our families when there was sufficient staff to cover the work.

Volunteer staff members lived off-site. Many were married and were self-funded or funded by outside organizations, like the Mennonite Service Committee. Their roles were more specific, often involving the Poverty Rights Office. Some were conscientious objectors, as well.

During the summer we had many college students who stayed at Emmaus House and worked primarily with children and youth. They also had the opportunity to do neighborhood work. Some stayed only one summer while others worked several.

## Emmaus House Staff and Key Volunteers 1970-1972

<b>Name</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Status</b>
Ford, Austin	Decatur, GA	Director
Bodell, Marie (SND)	St. Davids, PA	Director, Children's Programs
Magby, Annie Ruth	Atlanta, GA	Housekeeper/Cook for Austin Ford
Smith, Joseph	Atlanta, GA	Driver / Grounds
Erdmanczyk, Thomas	Winona, MN	FT Staff / CO
Ferguson, Gene	Atlanta, GA	FT Staff
Goldstein, Dennis	San Mateo, CA	FT Staff / CO
Morath, David	Westminster, MD	FT Staff / CO
Newton, Peter	Point Reyes Station, CA	FT Staff / CO
Organ, Fred	Napa, CA	Summer→FT Staff
Settlage, Mabeth (Mabie)	Napa, CA	FT Staff
Jacobs, Buzz	?	Volunteer Staff /PRO
Maynard, Ray	Elgin, IL	Volunteer Staff / CO/Mennonite/PRO
Sargent, John	New Haven, CT	Volunteer Staff / CO/PRO
Coolidge, Fran	Chicago, IL	Summer Staff - Union College
Coven, Mark	Boston, MA	Summer Staff - Union College
Fishman, Rita	Great Neck, NY	Summer Staff - Union College
Harris, Barbara	Atlanta, GA	Summer Staff
LeSage, Patty	Panama City, FL	Summer Staff
Lyle, Virginia	New York, NY	Summer Staff - Union College
Rembetski, Thomas	?	Summer Staff - Union College
Shields, Debbie	Decatur, GA	Summer Volunteer
Smith, Greg	Atlanta, GA	Summer Volunteer
Spellman, Steven	Westerly, RI	Summer Staff - Union College
Taylor, Susan	Dalton, GA	Summer Staff
Zugnoni, John	Albany, CA	Summer Staff
Abernathy, Juanita	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer/PRO
Beischline, Nancy	Chamblee, GA	Volunteer / Parishioner
Brown, Johnnie	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Cason, Rachel (Petie)	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Coe, John	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer- Front Desk
Dewar, Catherine	Decatur, GA	Volunteer / Parishioner
Killingsworth, Alex	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer- Front Desk
Knox, LuEstá	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer- Front Desk
Lokey, Muriel	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Pauley, Frances	Decatur, GA	Volunteer - PRO
Sapp, Anne	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Stone, Grace	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Tuttle, Ginny	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Catering
Weems, Dee	Atlanta, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Wiley, Mary Frances	Decatur, GA	Volunteer - Surplus Food / PRO
Barden, Terry	Atlanta, GA	Neighborhood Volunteer
Griggs, Margaret	Atlanta, GA	Neighborhood Volunteer
Johnson, Ralph	Atlanta, GA	Neighborhood Volunteer/Driver
Matthews, Ethel Mae	Atlanta, GA	Neighborhood Volunteer/President WRO
Welch, Margaret	Atlanta, GA	Neighborhood Volunteer

## SCHOOL DESEGREGATION WORK - Emmaus House - 1971-72

My first experience with M&M transfers - a court provided option enabling students in a racial majority in their assigned school to transfer to a school where they would be in a racial minority - was with two neighborhood kids who were not attending school regularly. I took them to Spring St. School and was met with serious resistance from the principal. She refused to take them and the social worker for the Atlanta Schools on the Northside urged me to consider another building with a more cooperative principal. I took them to Sara Smith, which had a very supportive principal and E. Rivers whose principal was more neutral.

In the fall of 1971, several of the people from the neighborhood, suburban folks, and Austin Ford decided that we would organize busloads of kids from South Atlanta - Peoplestown, Thomasville Heights, and Leila Valley. We initially placed about 30-40 kids in Morris Brandon and E. Rivers. Later we had a busloads going to Birney and Sara Smith.

Concurrently, Austin Ford and I had conversation with Attorney Peter Rindskopf about re-opening the Atlanta school desegregation case and petitioning the court for a metropolitan school district much like the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Co. district. Rindskopf represented the NAACP. Peter Rindskopf was killed on Oct 9, 1971 in a freak car accident at age 29.

His widow, Elizabeth, took over his cases and Austin Ford had further conversation with her. The City of Atlanta was now clearly a majority black district with the possibility of Black control of the school board and administration. The NAACP withdrew from the school desegregation case and shortly thereafter Margie Pitts Hames representing the ACLU, took the case.

I initially did some legwork, visiting the suburban districts and looking through old Board minutes, trying to find instances of students crossing district lines to maintain segregated schools in the '40s and '50s. I recall that Cobb did not provide high school for black students, and paid to send them to Atlanta.

Initially, several attorneys had their fingers in the pie, making conflicting requests on us, but Margie let me know that she would be calling the shots. A lot of very slanted stuff was written about Margie Hames after her work on Roe v. Wade. I can tell you that she was extremely professional and quite meticulous about how she wanted plaintiffs signed up. It's sad that all of the stuff about how she coerced the Roe plaintiff came up after she was dead. I do not believe any of it. She was a fine attorney.

As I explained in the phone interview, we spent much time mapping all of the schools in Metro Atlanta. Schools with 80% or more black students got a green dot. Schools with 80% or more white students got a red dot. Schools in the middle got a yellow dot. There were very few of them in 1972. While there have been enormous demographic changes, I suspect there would be very few yellow dots today. This work was done on Frances Pauley's kitchen table out in Druid Hills.

The first day we sent kids to Morris Brandon, the staff were all wearing smiley face buttons (à la Wal-Mart). Their demeanor did not match. The school secretary at Brandon was a former parishioner of Fr. Ford's and she was my ace in the hole if I needed inside information. It was several weeks before I needed her assistance, and when I called her at home, she said, "I'd thought you'd never call". I later had a meeting with the principal where I told her, "This is what I know for a fact is happening..." She was using some of her ESAP money - for desegregating schools - to hire a black male disciplinarian to paddle black kids. She denied it all in front of the parents and later admitted to it all privately. She retired at the end of the year. The principals at Smith and Birney were much better.

David Morath

## WELFARE ISSUES - Emmaus House - 1970-1972

When Emmaus House opened its doors in 1968, the staff quickly learned about the reality of living on welfare in Georgia. There were no Food Stamps. Surplus commodities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture were available, however there was only one distribution center for the entire city of Atlanta. It was not easily accessible to people without automobiles. Muriel Lokey started an organization of volunteers who would pick up surplus food for clients once a month. As they became acquainted with their clients, they reported on other needs - typically involving housing, employment; health care; utilities; and legal issues.

At this time the maximum allowed for rent for a family of 5 or more was \$40 per month. Very little private housing was available at that price. There was no SSI. Welfare provided Aid for the Aged, Blind, and Permanently and Totally Disabled. Welfare also provided Aid for Families with Dependent Children - provided that there was not an able bodied man in the household. Caseworkers used to make night time raids to see if a man was in the house. Television was not permitted. There was an inordinate amount of money spent on policing the client rather than helping them. The rules were applied capriciously and were not available to anyone other than the caseworker. Due process and right to appeal were newly instituted in 1970. The Welfare Rights Organization led by Mrs. Ethel Mathews and supported by Emmaus House educated and organized welfare recipients. The Poverty Rights Office, which had its beginnings in 1970, collected information; learned the regulations; and advocated for change.

## HOUSING ISSUES - Emmaus House - 1970-1972

Atlanta was something of a boom town and the recent construction of I-75; I-85; and I-20 and the construction of a new stadium had results in the loss of public and private housing for poor people in the downtown area. The Atlanta Housing Authority slowly built new housing projects in isolated areas on the edge of the city. Typically these were located in poor areas lacking in shopping, transportation, schools; health care; and employment. Private housing was scarce.

In Peoplestown, the cheapest housing was available in Primrose Circle located about 5 blocks east of Emmaus House, off Haygood Street, and at Sugar Hill, located about 1½ south of Emmaus House on the opposite side of the street.

Both had about 30 apartments constructed out of concrete block with concrete floors. These apartments were uninsulated and expensive to heat affectively. Both were owned by private individuals and managed by dummy corporations. Maintenance needs were unmet and it was difficult to get a handle on who was responsible. While we wanted absentee landlords to be held responsible for maintaining their properties, we did not want the property condemned or closed and poor people displaced

REFLECTIONS ON EMMAUS HOUSE  
40th Anniversary of Emmaus House Celebration

David K. Morath  
July 2007

As a young, somewhat naive conscientious objector from Baltimore, I had much to learn when I arrived in Atlanta.

Seeing the difficulties of people with limited literacy skills shifted the focus of my teaching career. I wound up working as a literacy specialist and working in federal programs for the disadvantaged.

The concept of a “playmama” was one that I didn’t know before my arrival in Peoplestown. Women like Annie Ruth Magby, Nancy Beishline, Margaret Griggs, Frances Pauley, Ethel Mathews, Muriel Lokey, and Margaret Welsh all taught me that it takes a village to raise even a grown child. Thank God for playmamas. We all need several.

When the Emmaus House summer program took an academic turn, Peter Bryg taught us all that poetry can come from very unexpected places and that everyone has a story to tell. This lesson served me well through 32 years in the classroom and 20 years of working with prospective teachers.

A long conversation with Terry Curry, as he tried to teach me chess, brought me to an understanding of “rather facts” versus “matter of facts”. Truth for an individual is often shaded by their experience.

The children of Peoplestown taught me much about family and love- whether it was Herman Shackelford riding on my back as I walked up Capitol Avenue up to visit on Pete Mann in Sugar Hill or Silva Griggs telling me she didn’t have to listen to no white man telling her to end the fight and get in the van. (Ultimately she did).

Something as simple as Muriel Lokey’s file cards for tracking surplus food recipients in the Atlanta of 1970 was resurrected for tracking Food Bank clients in Columbia, PA in 2006.

My stay in Georgia taught me that assistance can come from some very unlikely quarters. Calvin Craig, the former Grand Dragon of the Klan and Chief Voter Registrar of Fulton County, once vouched for my good character so I could become a Notary Public and sign up plaintiffs for the ACLU school desegregation case. Zerah Baggett, principal of Morris Brandon School in Buckhead, had many issues with us, but she did marshal many resources to the benefit of our children- albeit for the wrong reasons- before her very timely retirement.

Frances Pauley taught me to be a bit wary of planning – a lesson which actually came pretty easily to me. I can still hear Frances exhorting people to “put your foot in the road, and plan later”. A few of my principals and I locked horns over this one, but taking action and being open to possibilities is important. I am really grateful that I was able to spend time with this dear friend when she moved north at the end of her remarkable life.

The lesson from Sister Mimi Bodell was about faith. She has gone through life setting goals and waiting for God to provide the means for reaching them. Only God could have selected Ralph Johnson as our bus driver.

Austin Ford was probably the toughest boss I ever had. For a while I thought it was me until Dennis Goldstein and I compared notes on how many times we were fired. I learned to step up to high expectations. Fr. Ford, along with Mrs. Mathews and Joe Boone, taught me to stand up for my rights without fear.

The roller coaster ride of highs and lows was made easier by my very lively co-workers. Whether it was taking the Pig Ear Challenge at the Blue Eagle; sampling a home-brew called Wagon Wheels over on Vanira Street without

going blind; or venturing forth on a 2:00 a.m. road trip to Alabama- boredom was never an issue when one lived with Gene, Dennis, Mabie, Tom, Fred, Susan, Pete, and other staff.

I was recently watching of video of Pat Conroy's *The Water is Wide*. He taught on Daufuskie Island at roughly the same time I was working at Emmaus House. He raises the question of who did the learning and who did the teaching during his stay on Daufuskie. It's a question, I, too, have asked.

A few years ago I was in a men's group dealing with issues of spirituality and I was asked what informed my spiritual practices. I must go back to Luke's story of travelers on a dusty road at an upsetting time. As one looks into the face of a stranger, gets acquainted, and breaks bread, Christ is revealed! We are all pilgrims on that road.