

To Diane Roche: for the JPIC book

My remembrance of RSCJ in JPIC work from 1962 on:

1) Rita Egan: In the 1980s when I met her, she was suffering from arthritis. Her hands looked badly deformed. I heard her reputation as a zealous worker for causes of justice, but I did not know her well.

In 2005, I re-settled in Halifax. One day I answered the door bell. A man in his late 40s or early 50s came in asking for Rita Egan. I told him that Rita had passed away and we talked. He told me that he was illiterate and Rita taught him to read and write. After that, he was able to find a good job and raise a family. He had often thought of Rita, but was unable to come till that day. He really wanted to express his gratitude and I assured him that Rita knew.

2) Helen Ralston: One day, I joined a Kairos group in Halifax for a demonstration for some cause of justice. Another group standing next to ours were singing. Although I didn't know the words, I knew the tune 'Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques, dormez-vous...' so when someone handed me a song sheet, I was able to join in. After that, a woman recruited me to join her group - the Raging Grannies. I did. Little did I know that Helen Ralston was an active member of the same group. They even showed me photos of her dressed in multi-coloured skirt and jacket. She was wearing a hat with a wide brim on which sat a number of flowers. I was then reminded of the zeal with which she spoke of various causes of justice. She seemed to be on fire whenever she spoke of the lack of justice. The Raging grannies keep their rage under control, only expressing it in their grand-motherly way joining persistence without losing any joie de vie.

3) Joan Kirby: I was in the same class with Joan for two years (1950-52) at Kenwood under Mother Elizabeth Cavanagh. In the 1980s, I had frequent opportunities to go to NYC and each time, I asked for hospitality at 49th St. I had heard about the tenement house in which Joan, Judy Garson, Mavie Coakley, Liz Fisher and Chris Weber lived and I wanted to experience living there.

I must say I was quite shocked the first time I went there. They ate in the living room with plates on their laps. Mass was said with the priest using the coffee table as altar. The tiny washroom on the ground floor was padlocked and one had to take the key with her in order to use it. The second floor had

bedrooms. The shower box was in the corner of a bedroom. The owner of the bed might be sleeping when you go in to take your shower.

But the friendliness, cheerfulness and unity among community members were palpable, a fact that makes up for lack of material comfort. One day, I arrived early, the friend who met me at the airport dropped me in front of the house and left. Nobody was home so I sat on the stone steps and waited. I saw vendors of pretzels pushing their carts coming home. They lived in the neighborhood. Then a Philippino lady came; she lived on the second floor and the sisters had introduced me to her. When she saw me there, she invited me to go and wait in her apartment. I gratefully did. She made tea and served me a cup. She told me her son has a job singing in a night club; her gentleness reminded me of my own mother.

Another time Liz Fisher`s mother came to visit. She invited the whole community to dinner in a French restaurant followed by a musical on Broadway. I would never forget the Joseph with Multi-colored Robe that I enjoyed that day.

Once I was walking with Joan in the neighborhood. She saw small lobsters advertised for @\$4. Joan said: "Let's get one for each of the community!" So that was done. That night, we sat around and had our lobster plate on our lap, each had a tiny dish with lemon juice in melted butter. In Halifax, there is no lack of lobsters, but none could compete with the one I had that night.

Another evening, Joan asked me if I wanted to go to a sit-in with her. She was prepared to spend a night sleeping in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in protest of the Pastor's refusal to open the church basement for housing refugees. I said I would go but not to sleep in the streets. So we went. A lady pushing a trolley came towards the church. She wore a fur coat and told me she used to be an actress. She slept in her fur coat and apparently she did that most nights. Other men and women came prepared to sleep in long tube-like card boxes. I went home after a couple of hours feeling cold. The following morning Joan came back. She said her back ached and so did her legs.

Once, I asked Joan whether she had a concrete aim to achieve living at 49th St. She said the city ought to improve the neighborhood conditions. Then I went to China in 1991 and did not visit NYC again until the early 2000s. When I did visit again, Joan had moved to 51st St. One day, I took a walk on 49th St. and

I did find the surroundings much improved. Meanwhile, Joan had moved on to her job at the temple of Understanding.