

PHASE I INTERLUDE

September 1980 – August 1983

as told by Fred and Nancy Lanphear, 2010

The Student House, 1980 – 1982

for Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

It was August, 1980, when the Assignments Commission (in the person of Priscilla Wilson) came to Nancy and me, asking if we would consider an assignment to Phase I, i.e. the Student House (SH) and coordination of all programs relating to children and youth up to age 18. I was excited but Nancy was petrified! This assignment was known to be very challenging and not one that anyone would request. We slept on the question and the next day wandered up to the third floor of the ICA building in Chicago where the SH was located. My initial impression was that of entering a war zone, with holes in the walls and a coordination room that was a maze of desks and cupboards. It was depressing. Nancy and I talked some more and decided we would take the assignment. Our initial strategy was to recommend to our team that we transform the third floor so that it was welcoming and a bit more home-like.

We had a great team assigned with us. Tim Karpoff and Doris Morris were assigned full-time along with part time folks, Martha Karpoff, Betty Davis and Marie Sharp, who were permeators during the day. Carl Ennis and Margynel Knudsen were full-time staff assigned to coordinate the Emerging Generation programs, from infants through sixth grade. We had about a month to get our act together before the youth would return. We formed ourselves into a team during the month, agreed on a strategy of transforming the space and recruited help from others in the building. After patching holes in the walls, we painted the walls; and lounge furniture was brought in to create home-like lounging areas. Our son Bob painted a beautiful mural on the wall over the welcoming desk in the lobby depicting an aboriginal elder telling stories to the children. When the youth came back from summer vacation, we were ready.

Trying to direct or orchestrate the SH was like riding a roller coaster. There were times of exhilaration as well as times that were scary with a feeling of being in free-fall! The first year there were 35 youth in seventh or eighth grade, including our daughter, Sandra. Most of them went to Joan Arai Middle School where there were over 50 nationalities represented. As the staff of the SH, we were also guardians of these 35 youth – it was an awesome responsibility.

A typical day in the SH began with wakeup at 5:30 a.m. followed by Daily Office at 6:30 a.m. The staff took turns doing wakeup, which was often challenging since many considered the ritual “boring”. Breakfast was held in the SH collegium space with singing and conversations. When the youth left for school after breakfast, the staff let out a sign of relief!

When the youth returned mid-afternoon, they had a snack and jumped into vans that took them to the suburbs where they delivered advertising circulars. They tossed them onto porches as they ran from house to house in all kinds of weather. It was often quite an adventure. Dinner was at 6:00 p.m., followed by homework or recreation time came after dinner, depending on what

homework had been completed earlier in the day. At 8:30 p.m., it was time for bedtime preparations and the nighttime story. Each staff member would go into one of the five dorms and read a section from books like *Ancient of Days* by Robert Greenfield. This book was a great myth about the building of Stonehenge and set the tone for the year. Décor was created that depicted Stonehenge and was displayed in one of the hallway alcoves. A super sketch of Ronstrom the hero in the book, was drawn by Nat Shinn and became the cover of a quarterly newsletter, entitled THE ORBITER. We worked at creating a positive and fun-filled culture to balance the rebellious energy that was always ready to erupt. Sometimes the magic worked and sometimes it didn't.

One of the highlights of the first year included producing and performing the annual SH play. The chosen play for 1980-81 was *Journey to the East* by Herman Hesse. What made this production unique from the previous years was that the script was created from the book. The script and play direction was done by Thelma Neuworth and Kay Nixon. It was a challenging undertaking for all of us. It will not go down in the history of the SH as one of its outstanding performances; but it was one of the most ambitious.

In the second year, the SH play was the musical *Oliver*. This turned out to be a fantastic production. We created a stage with raised platforms and heavy olive-green fabric hung as a backdrop, as sidewalls, and to frame the stage from the front. Fred Karpoff was our pianist, except for one night when Nancy filled in, surprising herself that her fingers had maintained a keyboard memory after many years of not playing. Thelma, who had a background in theater, was again available to help direct the play. Some of the key roles were Oliver, Robert Caulfield; Fagan, Abednego Barnes; and Artful Dodger, Colin Murphy. In addition to be entertaining, these productions were transforming. They released the creativity and often overcame real or imagined human limits! The production of *Oliver* was ready to take on the road. Joan Arai Middle School invited us to do a performance at the school. It was a wonderful opportunity for the youth to be proud of themselves, in the midst of being "scared to death" of performing in front of their friends. Their usual mode was to conceal their SH identity from these same friends.

Over the course of our two years in the SH, there were many other events and activities that were memorable. Going to the farm in Watervliet, Michigan for a weekend each fall was a great event. We would harvest bushels of apples, take them to a cider processor, and come back to Chicago with gallons of cider interspersed in the large van with the students themselves. Once back home in Chicago, we would sell the cider to colleagues or parents of the students.

But the SH was more than grand productions and fun-filled events. It was also about each youth realizing their potentials as students. To encourage this, we set up a way of tracking each student's progress. It was designed to reward individual progress rather than being competitive with each other. A youth with an average or below average grade point could show the greatest progress and be honored.

The SH was a daily challenge to create an open environment with structural limits. We did not want to stifle the creative energy of the youth, but also realized there were adolescent energies that required channeling. It was a continual juggling act, sometimes with surprising outcomes. I

once physically constrained one of the boys who was roughhousing by holding him under my arm. He later called the police to accuse me of physical abuse. A policeman came to investigate and upon learning that I was the boys guardian and that he had not been physically hurt, admonished him for calling the police. These encounters were seldom that dramatic although at the time each were experienced as a drama.

Mobilizing the youth after school to go out and distribute the advertising circulars was often a challenge. This was not an activity they looked forward to, particularly on rainy or snowy days, The most helpful incentive was pressure from their peers who wanted to get back as quickly as possible. Mark Rebstock, who was allergic to peanuts, would jokingly say he was going to eat some peanut butter so he wouldn't have to run. Mark was always in the van when it was time to go. It was quite impressive to let two youth out of the vans at the beginning of a block, give each a bundle of circulars, watch them take off like lightning, and come back later and pick them up at the end of the block. Driving a van full of teens to the suburbs, with the radio blaring, was an experience I will never forget!

Three additional comments from Nancy:

- Sherry and Sarah's dental braces most always broke while running metro. Fred finally bought a pair of cut pliers so that he could attend to the broken wires immediately.
- Driving the van on a Sunday morning included not only listening to the TOP 40, but the driver had to promise to listen and remember the top numbers played when the kids returned to the van
- Driving in the suburbs on a snowy, cold winter, Sunday morning with cars still lining the streets on both side – just picture that!

You would expect after two hours of running the youth would be tired and ready for bed ... WRONG! ... they were energized! Even after they had gone to bed I would wander the halls to intercept any who might have night-time play plans. I gained the reputation of never sleeping. I was up when the youth retired in the evening and often walking to the bathroom during the night if one of them peered out into the hall. And, of course, I was up before any of them emerged from sleep in the morning. The bedtime routine was often a drama in itself. A delightful ritual each night was to watch the twins, Elena and Stuart Harper, go back and forth between the boys and girls dorms to say good night to each other.

Nancy: Most of you know or remember, there were sad and difficult times during our years in the SH. There were injuries, some much more serious than the others. There were sobering times when families separated or divorced. There were emotional upheavals and broken hearts Life within the walls of our experience were not unlike the walls that held youth across the country. As a team, we were able, for the most part, to take on the cares and concerns of our students supporting them as they traveled through them.

Ninth Grade Year Overseas

The SH enterprise of distributing advertising circulars in the suburbs, called “running metro”, was an income generating activity that funded the cost for the ninth grade youth to have an overseas immersion experience while doing correspondence school. Students were assigned to our Human Development Projects around the world. They would usually go in pairs or occasionally as triads. In addition to the cultural immersion, the year was an opportunity for each youth to realize their personal identity in an environment free from intense peer pressure back home.

High School House Experiment in Kansas City, 1982-1983

We felt good about the two years we were in the student house but were dismayed with the struggles the high school youth were experiencing in the religious houses. We learned about these struggles from parents, students or directly from house priors. Our Emerging Generation and SH staff visited each of the houses with high school youth. It became clear to us that there was a problem and something different was needed. In 1982, Nancy and I proposed and were assigned to establish an experimental High School House. It was to be located in the Kansas City house as it had already established itself as being youth-friendly.

The concept of our proposal was built around the notion that the youth would be engaged in responsibility for finances and operation of the House along with their high school education. We had eight high school youth and our son Bruce who was in medical school. The youth shared the responsibility with Nancy and I in earning money for self-support and in all the other activities of our lives together. We were quite successful in achieving our financial objectives in that first year.

The youth were responsible for generating sufficient revenue to cover 50% of the operating costs that included food, utilities, and travel as well as their stipends. Nancy and I covered the other 50%. Those over 16 years had no trouble finding jobs at McDonald’s and Annie’s Mexican restaurant to cover their proportion of the expenses. Most earned more money than required so the balance went into their own personal savings. The others earned money doing odd jobs like yard-work and painting for households in the area, most often for and/or with elders. Much of my time was involved in securing these jobs and transporting the youth to their worksite. Nancy had a part time job coordinating the assistants in a dental office.

The youth were also successful in achieving their educational objectives, although sometimes it was a struggle to maintain their motivation. Peer support was important along with Nancy’s mothering behavior when needed. When we discovered that Reinard Knutsen had not completed his high school correspondence course tests, from four years prior, and needed the transcripts/grades to graduate, all the youth joined in to help him complete the tests!

Nancy: Another part of this story was that a woman from the correspondence school called and offered a challenge to me. Reinard’s grade was one point below passing. Should she pass him or not? You know what I said and she agreed – he graduated from high school that spring!

Reflection

Fred:

The two years with the SH and the one year experimenting with the high school house in Kansas City were intense and meaningful. The memories and relationships of that time are some of the most vivid in our lives. My life was enriched time and again by engaging with the youth during formative parts of their lives.

Over the years, the Phase I Programs have been the focus of considerable criticism. The structure called the Student House began in the 70's when life was full of chaos and rebellion. Along with being teenagers, this surrounding sense of what meaning is there in my life, these children were apart from their families and pulled together in one place. The original intent in opening the student house was:

- 1) to create an intentional structure for our children,
- 2) to allow parents to participate in the larger mission and assign a few adults full time with the youth.

There have been considerable in-depth studies in the developmental needs of children that recognize each part of their journey. The various programs were created to meet those needs. One of the early programs was the Fifth City Preschool from which came many of our learnings that were incorporated in later designs.

I am proud and pleased to have been part of this experiment.

Fred

Nancy:

Fred completed the writing of this paper as he was nearing his death in 2010. He could type early on but later depended upon me or some of the neighbor children or his own children to complete the writing.

Did we as an Order succeed in our vision and intentions for the care of our youth and children? My response and accountability after 50 years of reflection is: No and Yes. As an Order, there were those of us who took our assignments for children and youth very seriously, yet there were times that we allowed ourselves to be distracted by other priorities. Some of us found the opportunity to ask forgiveness of our children and have been blessed with love and good relationships. Others have found that the pain and loss of those family relationships with our children to be overwhelming. May each one of us find a pathway to resolution or an opening of forgiveness.

Fred was correct in saying that I was petrified with Priscilla's suggestion that we take the assignment to Phase One. Our plans were to return to Kenya I did not deal with change

quickly. And, the memories now over 30 years old, are precious. The relationships we have experienced over the years are beyond wonder-filled. Many tears were shed with these youth in the midst of chaos and pain, and now tears come when I think about the closeness and care that we shared with each other. SUCH A GIFT!

One place of sadness is that we first generation Order members are not invited to the reunions of the second generation Order. Of course, that seems trite these days when communication can take place at so many levels and I can email or talk with any of the students-now adults on a personal basis. I am grateful for the time spent with our Order youth., as challenging as it was – it was good!

With love and appreciation, Nancy