THE NASHVILLE SIT-IN STORY

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FH 5590

Conceived, Coordinated and Directed
GUY CARAWAN

Creatively Edited
MEL KAISER
Cue Recording Studio, N. Y.

Narration Written (and partly ad lib)
REV. C. TINDELL VIVIEN
Vice-President, NCLC

Recorded on Location by
WILLARD ELECTRONICS
Nashville, Tenn.

Singing and Spoken Parts
Rev. C. Tindell Vivien
James Bevel
Diane Nash
Marion Berry
John Lewis
Candy Anderson
Peggi Alexander
Paul La Prad
John Nye
Lesley Green
Rodney Powell
Bernard Lafayette
Samuel Collier
Guy Carawan
King Holland
And other students from
Fisk University
Meharry Medical College
Tenn. A&I
"We Shall Overcome"
Old Spiritual with new words
Theme Song of the Sit-Ins
Introduction

The Lunch Counter Incident

"I'm Going to Sit at the Welcome Table"
The Story of the Sit-In Movement
"We Shall Not be Moved"

Jail Sequence
"You Better Leave Segregation Alone"
"Your Dog Loves My Dog"
"They Go Wild Over Me"

Court Room Scene
"I Hope We'll Meet Again"
"Moving On"
The Trial

Reason for the Sit-In Movement
Interviews

Remarks by Reverend C. Tindell Vivien

Scene on Mayor's Steps
Victory Meeting
How This Record Came About - by Guy Carawan

After spending two months in Nashville going through some of the history making events and being in daily contact with the students I decided to try and record some of the spirited singing and new songs that had grown up around the movement. Then the idea hit me that the songs would mean more to people if they were put in the contexts from which they came. Slowly a skeleton outline formed in my mind which wove together the songs, narration and scenes to be recreated. I then parcelled out different sections to different people to rough out. The scenes that were reenacted were done so semi-spontaneously by the students - with the following people taking the responsibility for giving the scenes some minimal organization:

Lunch Counter Scene - Paul La Prad
Jail Scene - Candy Anderson
Court Room Scene - Bernard Lafayette

Other sections were handled by the following people:
(and again with much spontaneity)

Introductory statement - James Bevel
Narration - Rev. C. Tindell Vivian
Interviews - John Lewis, Marion Berry & Diane Nash
Scene on Mayor's Steps - Rev. Vivian, Diane Nash, Rodney Powell
Victory Meeting - Diane Nash, Marion Berry, Rev. C. Tindell Vivian

When I got the students and Rev. Vivian together for the recording sessions they were so alive with the events and subject matter that they poured them out in spontaneous fashion very easily.

With the magic of tape editing the recordings were tightened up - the rougher spots and the superfluous removed, music and narration mixed in with the scenes ---- lo and behold, out came this L.P. None of us had ever tried anything like this before. Except for Mel Kaiser, the sound man at Cue Studio in N.Y. Without his "experienced ear" and creative suggestions to help me edit and put the pieces together this record would have never seen the light of day.

Songs

They Go Wild Over Me (parody of the old pop song & wobblly song) -
Candy Anderson - Fisk University
(exchange student from Pomona)

You Better Leave Segregation Alone (parody on a Rock'n Roll song)
Moving On (parody on Hank Snow's Hill Billy favorite)
Your Dog Loves My Dog (original)
I Hope We'll Meet Again (original)
--- all four: James Bevel & Bernard Lafayette

We Shall Overcome - an old Spiritual with new words.
It is the theme song of the Nashville Sit-Ins

I'm Gonna Sit At the Welcome Table
Keep Your Eyes On the Prize, Hold On
We Shall Not Be Moved
--- all three are old spirituals but are used as theme songs in Nashville
by Rev. Kelly Miller Smith

THE MOVEMENT IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE that is commonly called the "Student Sit-in Movement" is considerably more than that appellation would seem to suggest. While the chief courageous and dramatic thrust was made by students in the form of "sit-ins," it should be made clear that this was a unified community movement backed by a community organization known as the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. Students from the various Nashville schools and colleges worked unitedly with older residents of the community in the effort to attain an objective about which they were all concerned. The Leadership Council followed a meeting of the Regular churches of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council held in Nashville, Tennessee when a Nashville representative was in attendance. On the inspiration of the N.C.L.C. and its concern for Christian social action, letters were sent to all Negro ministers of the city urging them to attend the meeting to be held January 15, 1958. At this time plans were to be made for a mass meeting which was to feature Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., on the following February 12th - Lincoln's birthday. Plans for Christian social action in general were also to be considered. Regular times of meeting were agreed upon and, armed with a staff of officers representing several of the many religious denominations of the city, the group went forward with plans for attacking the various social problems while always operating within the context of the Christian faith. It was soon recognized that the group could do its most effective work by including laymen among its members. Emphasis was always placed upon the fact that it was a Christian organization and that those who would be members should be strongly committed to the purposes of that faith. The immediate objective of the organization was to increase the number of Negro registered voters. Yet, because it was clear from the outset that the group would go well beyond this emphasis, plans were begun for other action. Two representatives of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Glenn Smiley and James M. Lawson, Jr., were in town on other business and were impressed with the N.C.L.C. and its plans. They offered their services to assist in setting up a workshop on nonviolence as Christian social action would necessarily have to take this discipline into account. The proposal was accepted, and the first workshop on nonviolence was held March 26-28, 1958, two months after NCLC was organized.

While the nonviolence workshop was still in the planning stage the committee on plans decided that the workshop would seek "to establish a concept of Christian nonviolence." The workshop was planned to lay a foundation for the practical application of the technique of Christian nonviolence in situations where racial discrimination or injustice prevailed. Leaders in the first workshop were the Reverend Glenn Smiley, the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr., and Miss Anna Holden. Guest speaker was the Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy who had been a leader in the nonviolent bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama. The workshop was attended by a number of persons who held significant positions in the community, many of whom were destined to play important roles in the "sit-in" movement. Incidentally, it was during this time that it was learned that James Lawson planned to become a resident of Nashville and complete his work on the bachelor of divinity degree at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

A period of several months elapsed before the workshops were begun on a continuing basis. This was not embarked upon until Lawson returned to the city. In the meantime, the NCLC fostered a voter-registration campaign for which it maintained an office in a local church.

It was early in 1959 when the NCLC adopted the project of desegregating the downtown eating facilities. In connection with this project the attempt was made to negotiate with representatives of the two leading department stores. In these conferences the store managers expressed an intention to attempt to desegregate their eating facilities on the ground that they would lose more business than they would gain. At this time it was emphasized that no publicity had been given to the project which would mean that the changeover could be done in an atmosphere of relative calm. The store managers were unimpressed. The risk would be too great, they contended. Both stores expressed the willingness to desegregate after the rest of the city had changed, in this direction. The committee members were unimpressed. The most that was accomplished at this time was the laying of the foundation for further conversations on the matter. This proved to be a great value, however, for it meant that when the negotiations were to be resumed on a continuing basis all the persons representing the Negro community and those representing the merchants would not be strangers. This helped greatly in the tedious process of establishing rapport between the groups.

Although representatives had verbal confirmation of the fact that the stores were adhering to a policy of segregation, it was felt that the policy of the stores should be further determined in an "action" situation. To do this, a group of NCLC members, students and international visitors went down to these stores and attempted to be served. They were refused service and the course of action that must be followed became clear.

The statement of purposes and principles of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council which had been adopted some time before, included the following statement: "If we are to see the real downfall of segregation and discrimination it will be because of a disciplined Negro Christian movement which breaks with the antiquated methods of resolving our fears and tensions and dramatically applies the gospel we profess." In this statement the suggestion of the next move which would have to be made.

By now it was the fall of 1959 and the workshops had been resumed in earnest. Interestingly enough, students from the schools and colleges of Nashville became interested both in the projects which had been adopted and the workshops which were providing discipline in the methods of nonviolence.

In the meantime, the NCLC was gradually becoming known in the community as an organization that was concerned about the many instances of discrimination and injustice prevailing in Nashville. It was during this time that someone called the president of the NCLC informing him that a nationally known evangelist and faith healer was conducting a meeting in the city and that they were requiring Negroes to go to the balcony. Certain leaders of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council decided to visit the meeting and attempt to be seated on the main floor. The members of the group all found seats on the main floor, although they were not seated together. They were each approached by an usher who attempted to make them move to the balcony. The group insisted upon remaining in the seats which they had found in spite of threats of arrest or of physical harm. An attempt to follow this up with discussions with the persons responsible, policy proved virtually fruitless, for no one would admit that they had made the decision. The local sponsoring group said that it was the policy of the visiting evangelist to have segregated congregations. On the other hand, a representative of the evangelist said that the decision was made by the local sponsoring group.
On February 27th had no fear oppressors, would fill 27, 1960 Report I

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sit-ins began again. At that time Meharry Medical
College, Fisk University, and Vanderbilt University
students (the latter two schools are predominately
white) and the community participated to publicly
show that the movement had become changed to a united
one.

More sit-ins were staged and more arrests were made.
In April a new pattern was formed. Approximately two-
thirds of the seats were filled while the others were
left vacant so those of the white race who wished to
sit down to request service. Though the request for
service by some whites was heartening, the counters
were still closed to all whenever students sat-in.

On April 9, 1960 during a sit-in a high school Negro
student spectator was beaten by approximately 30
white youths. The Negro youth, just as the college
students who sat-in, was arrested wherein the police
offered the explanation that the white youths who
also fought were not found, when questioned as to why
only the Negro was arrested.

After Easter negotiations began with the managers
and an economic withdrawal was put into action. Ne-
gotiations lasted until the counters opened. During
the weeks of negotiations sit-ins were not staged and the
down town area was only reminded of the Negro's
refusal to accept segregation by the absence of Negroes.
Finally the students with the community con-
bined and managers reached an agreement. On May 10,
1960 there was an agreement to open six lunch counters
on an unbiased basis.

Throughout the movement the process of learning took
place. Students learned of the method of using non-
reporting...
violence as a means for social change under the direction of the Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. and Rev. Cordell T. Vivian. As the ministers underlined the message from the laws as seen by the philosophy of non-violence the students saw, through practice, the truth and beauty of the profound words "Love thy neighbor as thyself". Students learned to unite faults, schools, races, etc. to become one in motive de-segregate so as to integrate and ultimately bring about brotherhood.

Peggi Alexander
(A student member Student Advisory Council)

Report II

There we all locked up in jail for what we believed was the most valuable aspect of life, human dignity. After one hour in jail there appeared on the scene 4 lawyers to go our bail, but we refused. Accepting bail would have been supporting the immoral practice of segregation. Our consciences would never have been free had we come out on bond. Because of the schools' responsibilities to our parents we were released, after 6 hours in jail, into the custody of our deans.

We thought at first that the lawyers had volunteered their services but later we found that they had received a phone call asking them to go down to the jail and see about getting us out. All the Negro lawyers of Nashville later came to our rescue and without fees. And even up until today they have not charged us one cent.

We received cooperation from the N.A.A.C.P. when they gave us their lawyers to take our cases to court. Many other organizations as the Nashville Council on Human Relations, our sponsor the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, the United Church Women and C.O.R.B. They all released statements to the press in favor of the courageous stand that we had taken.

Social clubs contributed funds. Sororities and fraternities decided to forego some of their annual functions to contribute to our cause.

The interest of "outsiders" was marvelous. We, the students, received telegrams from every section of the country expressing their support and sympathy because of the injustice done us by the Nashville police, the judge, and because they believed in what we were doing and because they believed in equal rights.

Student organizations as S.A.A. and N.S.C.C. and students from other schools held sympathy demonstrations which included picketing, prayer vigils, sit-ins, mass meetings on their state house steps, at the stores which had done the great injustice of not serving us at their lunch counters.

Some students conducted civil rights rallies, others just donated on their own. I remember one young man who organized S.C.R.A.W. at Lehigh University saying "Every normal human being, we believe wants to walk the earth with dignity and abhors any proscriptions placed upon him because of race or color. In essence than this is the meaning of the sit-down protests that are sweeping this nation today".

In March a young 31 year old student was expelled because of his participation in the student sit-in movement. By expelling the Rev. James M. Lawson, Vanderbilt violated the principle of academic freedom. From Lawson the students were orientated in the whole philosophy of the movement, non-violence. On Good Friday, Lawson was arrested at First Baptist Church on charges of "conspiracy to obstruct trade and commerce". This was not a valid charge since he had done nothing but preach the word of God and conduct non-violence workshops, which enabled students to study its philosophy and techniques.

Members of Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty and Lawson's classmates raised $500.00 to pay Lawson's bond, he refused but came out only when student leaders in the sit-ins though that he should.

Ever since that time Vanderbilt students from the Divinity School have actively participated in the sit-in protests. Two of their students are members of the student advisory council to the sit-in protest.

E. Angelina Butler
(A student)