

June 30

Dear Dr. and Mrs. Ellin,

It was nice to get your letter today; we hope you will write often. I'm sure Joe will write to you any minute now, but I thought I might as well, too.

We got here OK, though we were frightened most of the way, quite unnecessarily. It was the people who came down in integrated cars who had the unpleasant time - refused service, cars following them, etc. We came down with a very nice girl who just graduated from Smith and who did quite a bit of driving.

We are currently hard at work getting the Freedom Schools organized. Joe and another boy have everyone typing up stencils of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, etc. The school enrollment is over 150; we are having official registration Thursday. The philosophy is to take everyone who comes; we will be teaching adults in the evening. There are 10 teachers, 8 more expected from New York City on Thursday. We also intend to recruit a few local people.

I, too, am sorry things came to such a pass. We felt terrible about causing you all such anguish, but we felt the decision was ours to make, and though we were very afraid and doubtful at Oxford, we made the decision to come. You must know that you were not the only parents who were worried, and some kids did drop out, one from our group, in fact, who was underage and couldn't get his parents' consent. Now that we are here we feel more than ever that coming here was the right thing to do. Even if we don't teach a single child (and I think the odds are heavily against that) we still will have accomplished something in showing the people of Hattiesburg that they should not hate whites. Even our own group leaders, Carolyn and Arthur Reese, who are Detroit Negroes (schoolteachers), were very anti-white until Oxford, Ohio. (Carolyn has been extremely frightened much of the time we have been here.) The people of Hattiesburg are militant and eager; our landlady told us last night about a woman who had attempted to register to vote 17 times before she made it.

Things here are pretty horrible. The Negro section, where we are, smells and looks more than a little like India. The house we are staying in (free) is pretty good-sized but very dilapidated - creaky floors, etc. It has a bathroom - some don't. Our landlady is registered; her husband has tried but hasn't made it yet. Everyone agrees that things here would be much worse right this minute if it weren't for our presence and the pressure exerted on the Govt. on our behalf by our rich Northern parents. Negroes in the movement tend to lose their jobs. We feel @ rightly or wrongly - that our place is here, in the heart of the struggle. No man is an island ...

Otherwise, there isn't much news. We have been to one mass meeting and are cutting another one tonight to make stencils. Another job we have before us is organizing the library - there are tremendous quantities of books. We haven't had much contact yet, aside from smiles and handshakes, with the regular Negro community, so I haven't much else to report. The leaders we have met are terrific.

Thank Mary and everyone for praying for us.

Love,
Nancy

Thank you very much for your letter. What you say makes me feel much better. I hope we can make you feel more at ease too.

(Nancy Ellin, June 20, p. 2)

We've been very busy getting things going - the response of the community has really gotten out of hand, from the teaching point of view; this is a very spirited lunch here.

The city fathers are relatively unbelligerent; someone talked with the Chamber of Commerce yesterday and they said that if we don't make trouble (picketing) it's OK - the mayor has already said the same.

Back to work,
Joe

Letter from Nancy Ellin with a postscript by Joseph Ellin, Hattiesburg, Miss.