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COFO Community Center
Box 547,
Shaw, Mississippi
July 8, 1964

Hi!

I will try to keep this to a reasonable length. Not much tangible has happened since you last heard from me. We have been working on setting up the community Center- building tables, bookshelves and such and typing everything imaginable. We are running off copies of all our news releases so I will try to enclose copies instead of trying to write about them. I sent a relatively long letter to the church and a long one to Paul this week; one a night appears to be all that I can handle. I have so much to tell everyone that it seems a real crime to stop writing, no matter how many other people are waiting to hear from me. I plan to try to get a letter written to Jackie about a little Negro girl here who is just about his age, telling him about her life and the situation which she can expect to face when she grows up. This particular girl appears to be very intelligent -- she is learning to type and she likes to write stories. I think that she may have a chance where most of the kids around here won't.

I am now living in the home of a widow. Her husband apparently left her fairly well off, because she has a large four room house with inside plumbing and a nice kitchen. She doesn't have anything like ~~washing machine~~ washing machine, but her situation is far better than the one I faced when I came into Shaw. The family I was living with was seven strong; they lived in a five room house with no running water but plenty of roaches. They were driving me out of my mind because I couldn't get away from them. Here the worst beasts are tiny brown ants who like the plastic dish scourer. It is a very welcome change.

In a way though, I feel guilty, because I feel that I am not seeing the real Negro South. Most of the people down here seem to have more than I expected to find and the reception has been better than any of the things I had heard had led me to expect. In a way, I almost feel cheated, but I know that a lot of what I expected would be intolerable to me now.

The tension is something else again, however. There seems to be no limit as to how much tension can be contained in a situation when nothing is happening. The only manifestation of any kind of hard feeling that I have experienced has been the fact that the phone company has been stalling for several days about installing a phone at the local center here, despite the fact that it will be a pay phone and that the deposit has already been paid. There has been one other small thing; some of the local merchants have started to refuse to cash Travelers' Checks where we had no trouble before.

As far as I have been able to determine, there has been absolutely no trouble with the mail. Nothing has failed to arrive except the stuff that was sent to Jackson, and I think that a

lot of that can be attributed to the fact that the Jackson office is abnormally busy right now and forwarding mail takes time. I don't imagine that this can be blamed on the Post Office at all.

However, just to make sure, I am going to write to Jackson tonight and ask them to forward the stuff, that I will pay any charges and that if it isn't there that I wish that they would start tracers on it. Ok?

I called Paul tonight for a few minutes. It really felt good to talk to him. He is feeling very good about the return of Fred's bike and he feels that he isn't doing too badly in school. I sure hope that he can pull B's in his courses because I would hate to have him have to drop out of school for such a petty thing as grades, and in his case, they are petty.

There is one apparent development that really bothers me. I heard indirectly that the Community Center might be transferred to Cleveland yet, and the idea of setting up a Center in Mound Bayou has been discussed. If I get transferred again, it is really going to get me down. I have started to feel that I have found a place where I belong and that I have a real contribution to make. Transferring would make me lose those tentative roots that I have put down and make me lose a lot of the security that has been created here. I really feel that my moving would be a mistake and that if it appears that I am not going to be able to count on ~~being~~^{being} permanently in one place, that I should think seriously about leaving the project. I don't know if this will happen, but it does bother me. What do you think? Is this a selfish attitude of mine or am I just being realistic about my position and possible contribution? I'm not really sure and I would like to know your ideas on the subject.

The food here is good, far too good. I think that my expectation of losing ~~this~~ weight this summer was unrealistic. I am going to have to be really careful not to gain about twenty pounds! And it isn't my fault; these women cook huge meals and are insulted if you don't eat more than your fair share. I have to take the smallest piece of everything if I am not to be unable to arise from the table. The food is not always what I have ~~x~~ been used to, but it isn't far different. ~~The~~ The major problem seems to be the amount of starch, but they don't seem to believe in lean meat either. The woman with whom we are staying is supposed to be on a low cholesterol and low salt diet but she eats fat pork chops, fried chicken, potato chips, and everything else that she wants. Her only concession seems to be skim milk and ice milk in place of their richer counterparts. I asked her about it, but she didn't really answer me.

The county sheriff sent word that he wanted to talk to the volunteers, so most of us have gone up. He will protect us because he doesn't want his county to have the kind of publicity that Philadelphia has had to face. If we step out of line or even seem to, I'm sure that he would have no qualms about arresting us on the spot and prosecuting us to the hilt.

Could you send me some cheap stationery from the grocery store? I am bound to run out of typing paper before too many days pass, and I don't want to have to borrow it.

The project here is in a strange situation now; no one is really sure just what his job is now, except maybe me. As a result there are a lot of people who are really discouraged about their presence here and feel that their time could be much better spent than it is now. I won't argue with them, I sometimes feel the same because the local reaction here has not been the kind that I would really like; to have the kids ~~xx~~ want to have their own library and want to learn how to use it. Those people who have shown an interest have come in and settled in a inconvenient corner and looked at picture books. I know that they cannot read anything much more difficult than this and that any desire to read is a good sign. However, they haven't discovered the magic of books yet and can't seem to feel at all at ease in the library.

I have checked out two books so far, On the Beach and one of the Cub Scout Handbooks. Maybe I'm just being picky because I'm tired, I don't know.

I really like my roommate. Her name is Judy Michalowski, and she is a senior at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin. Her home is in New Britain, Connecticut. Her folks have been active in "underdog" movements for as long as she can remember and they are supporting her presence here to the hilt. Her boyfriend applied and was accepted for the Project, but his mother was really bothered about his coming, so he dropped out at the last minute.. She (Judy) is a person with remarkably the same kind of personality as I hope that mine is. She is open yet quiet, frank yet tactful, and much fun without sacrificing real dedication to her purpose in being here. She is one of the Freedom School teachers here in Shaw and she seems to have about the same problems and attitudes as I do. The project is breaking up early enough for a lot of the kids to go to Atlantic City to picket the convention and try to get the Freedom delegation accepted as the legitimate Miss. group. Her folks have made plans to meet her there and join in the picket line, making a real vacation out of it. I hope that it works out.

There is supposed to be a week's break sometime during the summer, at least for the Freedom School personnel. If I also get a break, I am supposed to leave the Project area. Do you have any suggestions as to what I might do? I don't have any ideas as to where I should go. It would seem wisest to leave the state, but there isn't anywhere nearby that I have friends, is there? And I surely cannot afford to travel for the whole week, regardless of what I am supposed to do.

I guess that I had better go and write to Jackson.

Love

Judy