

July 10, 1964

Dear Family,

The box arrived the other day. Many thanks.

How time has flown - being busy from dawn till way after dark, the days all seem to melt into each other. I've had a chance to try my hand at registering voters, which was a real experience. What a constant shock it is to ask people to fill in our freedom registration form - working laboriously over it for 10 minutes - having trouble even holding a pen - the whole thing seems so unfamiliar, unnatural to them. Even for those who can do no more than sign their names or make their mark - the hesitation at each stroke, the wobbly illegible signatures. Although I rather expected illiteracy among the older people, many young ones in their 20's can't even begin their names. Mississippi has no compulsory school law (it was dropped in '54 when the Supreme Court decided the Brown case), which permits kids of all ages to spend their lives chopping cotton. How tired I got of hearing people say "Yes, Ma'am. Yes, Ma'am" with the blankest look - a look reserved for conversations with white people - to be treated with the utmost respect but know that not a thing we are saying stays in their mind longer than it takes us to say it. It's a barrier that can only be dissolved with time and use and trust that when a white man speaks he'll keep his word.

Freedom Schools opened yesterday, but I'm no longer in them. After a bit of reorganization I've ended up second in charge of the COFO office (secretarial section). I'm not sure this is why I came to Miss, but 'tis a job which must be done, and since I'm more qualified than some to do the drudgery, here I am. We are pretty well organized here as Pam (Negro girl from NYC) and I have put our collective foot down in an effort toward order. Many of the Negro staff are starting to disperse out into the county now (white staff can't go into the small towns yet as it's too dangerous) to do voter registration. It's like infiltration by foreigners. They find a sharecropper to drive them into a plantation or town, all sort of masquerading as locals. We're also using a lot of Greenville young people to do this with one of the staff as leader of each group. You can't imagine how conspicuous we feel - both in the white and Negro communities. Everybody knows who we are and STARES.

As I said before, the Negro community has been great to us. Lots of free food (thank heavens, as my money is dwindling rapidly) and friendship. People often come up to us in the streets and thank us for coming! Haven't yet gotten a definite place to stay, but hopefully will soon find one on the North Side near the office. The weather has cooled down a bit. Thank god. Am really crazy about Miss.

Hope you are all well. Thanks for so many letters - a reminder that the world is bigger than Greenville. Could you send me a dollar once in a while, please. We eat about 1 ½ meals a day - lack of time, money and too much heat.

Much love,
Pat