

EXERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM NANCY SCHIEFFELIN IN MISSISSIPPI

1964

July 6 GREENVILLE

It's really interesting to see the kind of person who wanders into the Freedom School. Little kids from the ages of four to ten have been coming in in swarms. The Freedom Schools aren't really here to serve the younger set but we couldn't turn them away. I taught a little boy named Teddy, the most helpful and cutest kid in the whole bunch, how to spell his name. For the little kids there will be reading and writing and arithmetic classes. They will also have a drawing and painting session. The next age group, eleven to fourteen came in smaller numbers. They are a lot more reserved and frightened. They really hate school and therefore have no desire to go in the summer when they don't have to. Most of the kids interested in this age group were girls. Several boys between the ages of fourteen and nineteen came with real purpose and interest in exactly what we want to teach. Others of that same age were really militant and bully-like. They laughed at the whole set up. A well dressed man of about thirty came in this morning wanting to learn how to read and write. He had never been to school. ~~and that~~ He said that the Lord had told him that the SNCC workers were there to help him. He wanted to do right. A lady about forty came in to register: she had had a fourth grade education.....The whole community has come with open arms. Yesterday the whole bunch of us were again served a full fledged meal by a poor family--and today for lunch too.

Last night the NAACP of Greenville met in the Community Center. The leaders of the community are the rich negroes. The leading doctor, the president of the Democratic Club, the leaders of the whole negro community stated that they wanted everyone to cooperate with the SNCC program. The man who rented the building for the ~~meeting~~ Freedom School ran the meeting. Many ministers were there. The ministers and the beauticians are our best communicators and do as much as they can to help. It was a very impressive meeting. At the end the president of the Democratic Club made a motion to raise \$75.00 on the spot. Everyone in the room, people from neighboring towns, farmers, unregistered voters, housewives--all donated a dollar. \$75.00 just formulated out of nowhere.

Sunday was a day of rest. At three in the afternoon the man and his wife (middle aged negro couple with whom ~~we~~ ^{we} boarded) took us for a ride in the country--we wanted to see the Mississippi River. We crossed over into Arkansas for a minute and then back again. We passed through farm and cotton country. The man told us that the workers get out in the field at five in the morning and work until five or six at night. They get \$3.50 a day ~~and that's all they get~~. These people certainly need to be unionized.

July 6 GREENVILLE

We weren't working today. There might be some demonstration today and all SNCC workers have been advised to stay out of the limelight. So I've been home most of the day---home. I say ^{home} because it is really like one. Every day we come home about six o'clock the lady of the house is sitting out on a bench in front of the house. She chats with the passersby and knows all the people on the block, is a sort of a grandmother to all. She has the most magnificent ^{you} could ever imagine. The street outside is constantly full of children kids running around. Many come over to play. The really young ones (two to six or seven years) are very unreserved

and still children; the ten years olds and up are a great deal more reserved. They have learned to shut up. One girl, a ten year old, works in the fields almost every day.

General picture of the street on which I live: the houses, except for a couple, are all old and propped up on cinder blocks. The wood is rotting, some of the roofs leak. This house had many appliances but all of them are extremely outdated. Backyards are for the most part, garbage areas. Old cars, tires and boards are strewn over the place; screens are holey and repatched, the floors are slanty and made of many patches of different linoleum. The naked electric lights are rarely used and we feel guilty if we stay up and read. Trees are large, grass scarce some of the roads are dirt or gravel. The food is very fatty--cornbread and grits are the main diet. Talk is real slow. Movement is slower. The water is very soft.

We have't had any real contact with the whites. We eat in negro restaurants, frequent only negro joints. The negroes are our security. The white man in the car is a threat. It's a peculiar thing not to be able to talk with the white folk.

Written from Oxford, Ohio June 26

All we are trying to do is to develop some real leadership in the negro community so that more and more negroes will see the benefit of their vote in relationship to their conditions, economic and physical (brutality, arrest without reason, bombing). Once they understand what causes their misery and are shown how they can remedy the situation, then they will register. We are by no means dragging them to register--rather the police have dragged them away from the office.

July 12 Greenville

Today in school a thirteen year old girl volunteered to give a report on the difference between the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Bill. In another class of fourteen and fifteen year olds another girl, without using the term "union" suggested that the maids of Greenville who work ten and twelve hours a day cleaning house and tending to the young for \$ 3.00 should get together and organize a boycott so that they could get shorter hours and more pay. The most important thing here is to catch these ideas and then figure out a practical way of using them to really work. If the young are thinking in these terms, all is not in vain.

Received the letter from Senator Williams. He's really great. The Congressional Record is very impressive. (Re: Federal protection for Civil Rights workers) This is a good example to show to my students on what it means to vote and have a say in the government.