

R. R. 3, Box 83  
Carthage, Mississippi  
July 16, 1964

Dear Peg and Dick,

We're beginning to see our way through some of the frustration surrounding this project. Maybe we'll have the whole program in high gear about the time we have to go home. For one thing, the rain has let up a bit. It rained the first day we got here, the first time in over a month the local people said. It has continued to rain almost daily for two weeks. This meant that the Freedom School classes had to move indoors in the little church—and virtually eliminated the possibility of having class. It would be too much like a "blab school," which we used to read about when we studied the Pilgrims...or somebody like that.

In case this is your first letter from me, at least for a while, let me fill you in. Our Freedom School in the Harmony Community was to have met in some old unused school buildings that were abandoned when the schools were consolidated in 1961. The Leake County school officials intervened, however, and said we could not use the buildings. Their decision was legal and within their jurisdiction; it was nonetheless spiteful. The buildings are still empty and unused.

This apparent setback has brought out the resilience and independent spirit that is part of this community. The local people are going to build their own Freedom School and community center, and it's going to be better than any old buildings that nobody wants. Mr. Dotson, the brother of my hostess, has donated a piece of land and some of the men have arranged for delivery of the lumber. Several of the volunteers in the project have pledged sums of money—some from their home Civil Rights groups, others from their sponsoring organizations—to help pay for the cost of erecting a building which may be added to or partitioned later. The cost is estimated at somewhere around \$2,000. It'll be pretty modest to begin with, but it will be theirs. Work is scheduled to start Tuesday. I have visions of an old-fashioned house-raising, with the women providing the dinner and the men doing the work. Of course, our project will take longer than a day. Anyway, we're quite excited about the possibilities and looking forward to showing the kids what you do when you run into a stone wall. (Actually, we were the ones who were shown.)

I'm living with a widow who owns about 180 acres and makes a pretty good living off her beef cattle. She has no cotton, I discovered, but keeps her table, as well as the tables of ~~most~~ her two daughters and her son, well supplied from her vegetable garden. She also has a well stocked freezer. I might also add that my hostess is the only one in our community who has indoor plumbing. She has the other things a farm should have—chickens, hogs, cats, dogs, and mules. One morning last week she butchered a calf, with the aid of her brother and son-in-law. They had the calf slaughtered, dressed, and quartered before 8 a.m. When I started this paragraph I was going to mention the young couple who share my home with me. Judy and Hank Werner were married one week before embarking on their orientation and summer's work in Mississippi. Their assignment is in the federal programs, helping the farmers get help from various government aids and co-ops. They have discovered that the local FSA representative is a real stinker who has given the Negro farmers a bad time. They hope to apply some pressure on him, either from the top or the bottom.

As the summer wears on I'm getting more and more convinced that the least heralded part of the program will be the one that will make the most difference. The Freedom Schools, largely ignored by the local police and would-be harassers, are going to tell the tale. But let me drop the riddles. It was (and is) voter registration that has the Mississippi white power structure worried. In counties where the Negro population is large, they had effectively kept the Negro away from the ballot box and they weren't about ~~them~~ to let anybody change that. Therefore, the arrests, the bombings, the harassments, and, yes, the murders, have come where the emphasis ~~as~~ heavy on voter registrations drives. Negroes have been intimidated even more than they were before, and the V-R drives are bogging down in some areas. Freedom Schools, however, have been relatively free from trouble. The teachers have met their pupils in fairly small groups—that keep growing—and the kids keep coming. And it's surprising that the Mississippi whites don't realize that here is the greatest potential danger to their society, a school where Negro kids talk with white teachers about equality, opportunity, integration, and freedom. In Freedom School they explode the myths about the Negro—and the kids learn that it isn't true that they can't learn as well as white kids and that they can be anything they want to be instead of being limited to the stereotyped vocations. These are the people who will shake the walls in a few years, and it will be because of a seemingly innocuous part of an otherwise trouble-making "invasion." These kids are going to remember what they learned about equality long after they've forgotten what agrees with ~~was~~. And they're going to be a lot harder to scare than their parents are, nor so easily turned away from the poll book. Don't anybody tell white Mississippi, but somebody is pounding on the door.

Oh, yes, it finally stopped raining. I washed some of the mud off my car, and I can recognize it again. My old white tennis shoes, however, will never be the same again.

Please excuse the carbon. I hope you can follow the ~~logic~~ sequence of what happened to me. After my orientation conference in Oxford we drove to Mississippi to Canton. I was there when the three guys disappeared. I had met all three of them the previous week. If you saw the national TV reports on the case you may have seen my car. It carried James Farmer around the area where the men disappeared.

I moved here to Harmony June 30 - to a rural settlement outside a little county-seat town. The life is pretty easy. I'm eating too many home-made biscuits and not doing enough work. Perhaps our project will really get going soon, so all that will change. I'm really having some experiences - if I can remember all of them & tell you when I get back in August -

Love,  
Dottie