

Hunter
Toms

(1)

Dear Steve

I'm on a bus leaving Mississippi now feeling quite uneasy being among white after so long; leaving friends, a culture, a movement that has become a part of me; facing a future after the changes in and outside of me this summer.

Perhaps you'll find it strange for me to be writing to you when I don't know your address-- but I do want to talk to you, with you and this is the second best way. Also writing now gives me a chance to review this summer in part.

And my mind is a patchwork of memories, emotions and ideas now. It forms a rather rough pattern-multicolored rainbow design outlined in black and white

(Oh had I a golden thread and a needle so fine
I'd weave a magic strand of rainbow design-
of rainbow design.

In it I'd weave the beauty of women giving birth
In it I'd weave the innocence of children over all the earth
over all the earth

Far over the waters, I'd weave my magic hand
To every human being, so they would understand-)

As you know I was supposed to work as a teacher in the Delta in Miss. In part this was what the plan was. First I went to Ruleville to help establish a community center- from scratch. Shelving, roofing, plumbing, fixing up a Library (the 1st one open to Negroes in the area,) cleaning a field for a recreation area, establishing a curriculum for the freedom school. It was also learning how to be accepted into the Negro Community. This town was already active in the movement. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer- who ran against Eastland on an independent party - is in the town and had organized a rocking movement. The week before the church had been burned- but still this didn't slow down the pace. The mass meetings jumped in song and spirit.

And the police cars the dogs parading up and down the street- the phone calls, the jeers were also part of this picture.

Here I lived with a widow. She is a midwife (had several calls while we were there) and a member of Church of God in Christ (which would not let us attend a meeting) and her silent bravery is part of the patchwork design.

So is the memory of that first night in Miss. at the end of the city of Ruleville by the cotton fields (by poor communications I was removed from the other workers that 1st night)- and remembered bearing that unmarked cars were ~~xxxx~~ seen near us in the city dump; and when the lights were turned off and the widow was asleep... fear slowly came on me. Every shadow seemed to be of a foe, every noise either a car driving up to the isolated house or a shot on the dogs- and rustling in the fields quickened the fear and so tense that the door seemed to have opened and distinctly yes- two klansmen were there on the right of the bed.

And the fear ~~xxx~~ terrible beating heart.

And I reached for the flashlight to have those Klansmen disappear into the curtain and the mirror. Still almost paralysed by fear for several minutes

Until the realization that I was in Miss really hit me and the definite reaffirmation of why.

And the why--knowing Negroes-hundreds- have died- and no one cared.

abundant night
in
dark

II

add to FS
or II -
nothing
negative

(2)

knowing people have worked 10 hours a day for \$2.50
knowing the daily indignities so powerful a people have been forced to endure

knowing that a vicious system had been engrained in this soil and had to be destroyed if man is to be free--

yet knowing that no

from the white northern monied sections cared
except perhaps some crazy idealist, some "second generation radicals"
~~some~~ "communists & beatniks," "white niggers," "sex starved girls,"
"whores," "psychotics"...

Except perhaps some of the finest men I've ever heard- Like Bob Moses, Vincent Harding, like Staughton Sind.

And remembering Bob Moses' last speech at the Oxford orientation--

Saying, yes he thought the three boys murdered and in such soft words...

He has been called murderer but felt justified in that he did not ask anyone to do anything he himself wasn't doing. and that is (sic) was necessary to do- right to do.

And the fear- though it never left me- became not so important, not so paralyzing- and the fear-now overshadowed by the need to act- was no so personal, but more for others in the project, for the Negroes who must live in Miss. once we left, for the project itself.

~~was~~ A beginning.

Soon housing was found in Shaw and 20 kids left. I was the youngest, the oldest was no more than 26 - no one knew the problems there, few had heard of the town before, no one was southern- and we did not know what was there.

Shaw is a very small town, sharply divided into Negro & white sections (as are all towns in the delta, but here no one crossed over) The youth had began to organize- a Mississippi Student Union- but were not sure what to do other than talk with beautiful spirit.

I stayed with 5 other girls in a house of 10 people two dogs, a cat and an assortment of several thousand bugs. Cockroaches climbed over the walls till they seemed to be alive with a crisscross pattern. Roach eggs were strained from our cereal before we ate and we fried in the meat used for cooking. An ants' nest was in my bed the 1st night, a bees nest in the kitchen a wasps nest in the bedroom.

~~The boy often came into the house.~~ The outhouse was rather imprudent, the water rather scummy. Two of the girls left within the week.

And we had quite a cultural exchange ahead.

And there were had feelings on both sides.

Why should we want to bath every day? Or have such clothes? or not pay for the food of the whole family? so this family must have felt.

~~And the too resented being used as aids, living in unhealthy and uncomfortable conditions.~~ And at first there were clashes-- we tried to fumigate the kitchen or joke about the bugs. They felt free to use our commodities or clothing or even money.

There was a lot to learn, to accept, to understand on both our parts until it was no longer

we and they, but us.

and a movement was building.

SHAW