

[Typed version of handwritten letter]

[Page 1]

Sept. 16th [1964]

Dear Mom, Dad, Sal & John, & everyone:

I guess I have started a dozen letters in the past week that haven't gotten finished. Often there is the problem of simply not getting use of a typewriter long enough to complete a letter so you will have to bear with my handwriting. I am making this letter in triplicate for obvious reasons.

I'm beginning to feel some hope for this project which is a damn good thing because Mississippi is bad enough and Gulfport is worse and a bad project was beginning to get to us. There are still a hundred and one things that are still unsatisfactory (at best) with this Project itself but we have made a good breakthrough this week with the youth of the community and doors are now open for rapid and effective action.

The kids here are terrific. I'm speaking of the teenagers— junior high and high school— and our work at home has prepared us

[Page 2]

well for working with them. The kids are with the movement deeply and completely and the simple recognition of their capabilities and potential brings forth a flood of response. It is difficult to imagine, until you see it face to face, what this oppression has done to and meant, in a specific way, with each and every individual. These people have been taught to believe and are treated as though they have absolutely nothing to contribute, might just as well not exist, and are indeed less than human. And this governs their behavior— they believe this is true about themselves because up until this movement began there was never any hint that it might not be true— no glimpse of any different concept of themselves.

And this truly is a most vital goal of this movement. This concept of each person of themselves must be changed for progress to be made— and where this has happened, there has been progress.

[Page 3]

Unquestionably, the two go hand in hand. Each step and each new victory goes a long way toward stripping away the old image of a Negro as a worthless animal, allowed to survive only for the purpose of serving and bowing to Mr. Charlie, the white master— “boss man.”

The young people still have the determination that they have some worth; they have not lived for many, many years being whipped and beaten with experience after experience, day after day, year after year finally driving the determination out of them. This is the case with many adults: it is understandable in a way but it is frustrating and infuriating too. With the kids, however, they do still believe in themselves and the look on their faces and the shine in their deeply expressive eyes when one reaches out to their strengths is truly worth a lifetime to see.

The work that I am settling down to is in 3 areas. First, with the students— both Freedom Classes and direct action (which believe me they want.)

[Page 4]

Secondly– with Community adults in a rather general health program beginning with securing specific things that the people need, now, and carrying that then into a more advanced program of teaching.

Actually the two will develop somewhat simultaneously; we plan to have the community “run” the securing and distribution of supplies, with CoFO helping mainly in an advisory way and using CoFO resources to ~~gather~~ get needed materials.

Thirdly– voter registration and freedom registration (Freedom Democratic Party). This is one of the hardest tasks of the movement; it is also most necessary. It involves plain, hard, tedious, tiresome, exasperating, patience-trying, infuriating, hellish work. It is also most satisfying. Here you find all the forms of adjustment that a Negro has made– and all the justifications he has manufactured for himself for having made the adjustments. Here you find all the fear– sometimes admitted– other

[Page 5]

times obvious but denied– that these people have lived with all their lives. And here you find the reasons for the adjustments, the justifications, the fear– Here you see all the ways that oppression is maintained, practical ways; bread and butter ways, life and death ways. And so when you win with even one person it is deeply satisfying. And we do win and are winning, step by step, one man at a time– but winning.

There is so much to say about this movement that it’s hard to get started and hard to get stopped. The time element is frustrating beyond description. There is so much that can be done– the potential is virtually inexhaustible– and there are so many things “doing” right now. Frankly, I would like to stay here at least 6 months to a year. This is impossible but this is how you can’t help but feel once you’re here. And the knowledge of having to organize your contribution within the framework of a 1-month period is certainly a challenge.

[Page 6]

Mississippi still needs help, critically, from the rest of the country. Each project needs help. Most of all we need people. We need teachers, nurses, students– anybody– because there is work enough for everyone.

Second of all is money– to support workers, to furnish cars, to pay for buildings, equipment, food, you name it, it’s needed.

Gulfport needs a building for a Community Center and this means money for Rent or lease. We are working on one place to be donated but it’s a big “IF”. We need food badly. Fruits and vegetables are almost absent from the diet here. Beef is non-existent, chicken and pork being the meat when there is some. Vitamins with iron could be eaten like candy here and never noticed. Iron-deficiency-anemia is as common as a “common cold” here– commoner in fact.

[Page 7] Saturday

As you may have guessed by the three shades of ink I have stopped and re-started twice.

When I left off before we had just received a stack of petitions to be completely filled by this week end. They are nominating petitions to get Mrs. Victoria Gray and Mr. Aaron Henry on the ballot as Congresswoman and Senator from the 5th District. As could be guessed this is when we find out that many of the people who have said they were registered are not. Honestly I wonder whether to scream or have a good cry. Perhaps I'll do both. One of our project workers said yesterday, after talking to some people who wouldn't sign the petition, "These are the most scared colored people I've ever seen in all the damn days of my life!" He was mad and we all get that way when you hear some of the excuses. This particular project worker is a wonderful person.

[Page 8]

He is a 20 yr. old Negro from Michigan who spent his senior year in School in a town a few miles from here and has worked here all summer. He is a joy to work with— and a dear friend already.

Someone told us a while back that just our presence here— as "white people coming to help" — was a contribution, and that our work here just added to that. I know what they mean now. And I know also that our work here teaches us many valuable things which we need to know. But believe me, just living here teaches us many things too. We feel only a small part of the problems of life in Negro Mississippi— but at least we do feel part of them. And I am forever conscious of the fact that we can get out of this any time— so it makes it easier to take. The people we live with and among cannot, and I am conscious of that too.

Now I must end this so I'll say for all of us—

Yours for Freedom,
Marj,

[Page 9] Sept 20th

Today I will mail these letters— come Hell or High water. As you can see it's well battered— as am I at this point. I seem to be suffering from some malady— I believe to be a general urinary infection and heat sickness. I spent all day yesterday in bed— but have been up and out working again today. I'm taking salt pills and trying to keep track of my intake and output. We've done well on this emergency petition and are leading the county in signatures— but it has taken its toll on us workers. Hattiesburg, which is the largest and best organized project in the State— and is also in our County— hasn't gotten as many as we have. We're very proud of us.

I got your latest letter today. No, we are not generally in the office in the evening. They told me here that person-to-person costs \$3⁰⁰ after 9:00— therefore I have limited my calls.

I have received \$20⁰⁰ of your personal money (I guess it was your own.)

[Page 10]

I also received the things from Laurie. We sure did enjoy them and I passed her pictures around for the others on the staff to see. They were pleased with them, too. Tell Laurie I miss her and I love her. Mike and Mary (Punkin') send their love.

The weather is HELL. The food is tasty but all the kinds I have trouble with– Example– one supper– Pork chops & gravy, rice, biscuits, french fried potatoes, and cooked okra. The first & the last would have been sufficient.

Have to quit to prepare a freedom school class– Negro History.

Say hi to all the kids– ask them to please write. I'll try to write oftener.

Beverly mis-understood. I will most definitely be back to take State Boards. I wouldn't think of missing that. Please send them the money so I don't miss out for that reason.

Call person to person if you call– it's the only safe way. Please write again soon– letters are so welcome–

Love you all,
Marj,

[Written in margin] Mailing address same until Oct. 1st