

c/o COFO
1017 Lynch Street
Jackson, Mississippi
Christmas, 1964

Greetings and love to you all!

May the holy season bring you the blessing of knowing the Truth, in order that you may be made free!

My gift to you will be a sharing of some of the ideas and friendships which have enriched me in this past year. These will, necessarily, be subjective views. I will, naturally, reflect my interpretation of ideas. And, as it has been truly said, "Everyone is as many people as he has friends." I can scarcely be objective about the people whom I am about to introduce, because I love them.

So, Here they are.

G L O R I A (and Cambridge)

In July, 1963, in San Francisco, a number of Movement people were privileged to have to themselves a great lady: Gloria Richardson, leader of the Cambridge, Maryland, movement. At the end of the evening Mrs. Richardson extended a homey farewell to each of us - to the effect that, were we ever in her part of the country, we should look her up. A usual enough way for new friends to part. I really didn't think that there was the remotest chance that I would have occasion to accept that invitation. But, less than six months later, I was in Gloria Richardson's home in Cambridge.

Early on a cold Sunday morning in December, several people from Washington, D.C. drove to Cambridge to consult with Gloria on a demonstration that was planned for Washington. I was the only woman in the group of visitors, and quickly found myself in the kitchen, helping Gloria to make breakfast. I was, until then, considerably in awe of her. But her kitchen was a warm and friendly place, and soon we were just two women rustling grub for some hungry men-folk. Yet, for a while after that, I was somewhat amazed when I would think of being on such familiar terms with her. (It was, as I would say then, rather like being a personal friend of Joan of Arc.) But it was impossible to feel so when I was with her. She is earthy, warm and wonderful.

Actually, that was not my first informal visit with Gloria. A couple of months earlier, she had come to Washington for a speaking engagement and had decided at the last minute to stay overnight. She ended up at the house where I was staying, and which was already full of visiting relatives. Gloria, Naomi (you'll hear about her) and I had a "slumber party" in the living room - the two of them on the pull-out couch and me on the couch pillows - and talked most of the night.

In May, I again found myself in Gloria's home in Cambridge. Only, this time, her mother, Mrs. Booth, was my hostess. Gloria was under arrest and locked up in the Armory, along with a dozen of my young brothers in the Movement. All of us were sick from the gas with which we had been attacked by the National Guardsmen. The house was nearly a mile from the place of the attack, but so strong was the gas on the clothing and hair of the people (it had been used in liquid form, as well as in grenades) that Mrs. Booth had been made ill by the odor. About thirty people were in the house when I arrived, a couple of hours later. (I had been manning the phone at the C-NAC (Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee) office. By then, Mrs. Booth was cheerfully preparing a meal for all her guests. At 2:00 a.m. we feasted on fried chicken, potato salad and numerous goodies. Mrs. Booth then told us stories about her family. The gas hung in the air all night; we finally got a little sleep - on couches, chairs, beds and floors. Many people were sick for several days, especially those whose homes were in the attack area. (The soldiers had followed us for several blocks, spraying as they came)

It was a night of horror. The people had wanted to march to the auditorium where George Wallace was speaking. The guardsmen had stopped the march at the edge of the ghetto. We sat down on the street. They tried to scare us by running a truck at us, but we sat still. Gloria persuaded the people to turn back because of the presence of children in the group and the threat of gas.

The people returned to their meeting place and listened to several speakers. A program of very creative direct action was set up to start the next day, and everyone left the hall. I went over to the C-NAC office to get my coat. My brothers, the SNCC kids, began to come into the room where I was. They carried rags, and they silently soaked them in water and left. I had no idea why. I asked Cleve Sellers: "Why the rags?" He answered, "We'll be in front, and there'll be gas." "But you just sent everybody home", I protested. "They're not going", he said as he left. I got a rag and wet it, too.

The people had marched again. Gloria and the SNCC kids couldn't stop them, so they hurried to try to control the march - to prevent violence. And they would have succeeded, but for the viciousness of the soldiers. The commander of the Guards - the 2nd in command, Col. Tawes, a cousin of the governor (General Galston was by

then escorting Wallace out of town) - told Gloria to send the people home. She said that the people had decided not to go home. He said that anyone who remained would be arrested. Gloria asked those who were willing to be arrested to sit down on the street and all others to leave. Nearly everyone sat down. Some of the SNCC kids were up front and some were scattered throughout the crowd. I sat down near several of the students from Washington - about five rows back and off to one side. Gloria was led to an army truck; a dozen SNCC kids were made to follow. Then, someone spread the word: "Lock arms. Make it hard for them to take us. Go limp if they get you." The arrests came to a halt. We sat quietly and waited, expecting more trucks to come. The soldiers, with gas-masks and fixed bayonets, stood between us and a howling white mob. In our front ranks, one of my brothers said to the guardsmen: "Why don't you tell them to go home?" "Get him!", said an officer. Several guards charged at the sitting student. "Pile on him!" yelled one of his brothers. As the guards struck, the students fell on top of the victim, taking the blows on themselves. Some of the young people of Cambridge began running about excitedly, looking for weapons. We called out to them, snatched at them as they passed us, begged them to be calm. By now the soldiers were holding up one of our brothers, Cliff Vaughn, by his heels. (Later we were to learn that one of those heels had been pierced by a bayonet.) This was too much for the Cambridge kids. They began in blind fury to hurl anything handy - bottles, rocks, hunks of wood. Nothing, by the way, that could have seriously harmed the helmeted, gas-masked, heavily clothed Guardsmen. That was what Tawes wanted. He ordered the gas released. The grenades began to explode in the midst of the crowd. Stokely Carmichael was hit in the face by an exploding grenade. Before he lost consciousness, he helped clam those around him. I clapped the wet cloth over my face and that of Phil Hutchings. There was common determination amongst us to sit it out. But then someone realized that liquid gas was being used, too, (it was sprayed by a converted flame-thrower) and that we couldn't possibly take much of it. The order was given to disperse in an orderly fashion. Phil and I managed to get at least a block away before we had to gasp for breath. One inhalation convinced me that I wanted no more. I could feel the shape of my lungs. And they felt as if they were made of fire. (Oddly, my eyes were not bothered.) I coughed, spit, exhaled, anything but inhale again. (The breathing discipline acquired from singing and ballet served me well.) All along the road, people were dropping like flies. And still the guard advanced. Near me, a woman fell; I stood over her and yelled for two men to carry her. A man was leaning weakly on a car, vomiting; someone helped him to walk on. People were groping blindly, their eyes seared by the gas; others guided them.

Back at the office, Stokely, supported by two of our brothers, stood, half-conscious, on the steps. "Call the hospital", he was murmuring, "Get the people to the hospital. Get ambulances." We tried, but they wouldn't come. Stokely was taken to the hospital in a car and a near-by doctor opened his office to the numerous others. Because I had been protected by the wet cloth from the initial impact, I was in pretty good shape. So I was running a "first-aid station" at the office. Water hurt the skin that the gas had burned, but it seemed to me that we should get it off of us. So I persuaded others to do as I had done and flood any exposed skin with water. I had some salve that contained a local anesthetic, and this was being spread on everybody in sight. Many of us had on heavy clothing, in anticipation of dogs, fire hoses, or dragging; this served as a protection from the gas.

The guards prowled the streets in a disorderly fashion, spraying gas, arresting a few more people, being routed by local people (in one case, several of them by one angry, unarmed man). Stokely was illegally placed under arrest while unconscious, at the hospital. The city was closed off, but haphazardly; some people got out, some didn't. But, at long last everybody was settled somewhere.

The next day, we returned to Washington. Several of us visited our congressmen. I went directly to Congressman Burton's office, still looking a complete mess, and getting strange looks on Capitol Hill. But not from Phil Burton or his staff (I had called them from Cambridge that morning). They took us quite seriously.

Three days later, I awoke in the middle of the night with a scream. There may or may not have been a connection, but I've never had nightmares before.

STOKELY (and others)

You've already met him in the Cambridge account. He is, in order of importance (to me): my best and dearest brother (and frequently hard to get along with, as brothers are), a long-time SNCC worker, and one of the prime movers thereof, a person whom everybody in SNCC knows and whom everybody loves as I do - as his or her best brother. He is also one of the most brilliant minds in the Movement and is possessed of a singleness of purpose which would be difficult to equal anywhere. He has, to my knowledge, never held any office in SNCC or its affiliated student groups, but exercises more influence than many who have held office. Howard Zinn, in his new book: SNCC, The New Abolitionists, says that Stokely gives the impression that he could "stride cool and smiling through Hell, philosophizing all the way". And he has done just that.

He's more than ten years younger than I, but he is my elder brother. He's had responsibilities that would crush a much older person. Much too much has been expected of him. I, for one, asked too much of him on a personal level. I was in a difficult transition period, confused, upset. Old friends were far away. Long hours in the SNCC office made it difficult to find new ones - or to find them awake when I had time to see them. Stokely gave of his time and strength. He didn't really know what to do about me. I was an embarrassment to him. He usually just sat and looked uncomfortable (or sounded it, on the phone). But he listened. He let me talk - or cry. Or just sit and read - and fall asleep amid all the coming and going of "the gang". His apartment in Washington always had more people than furniture in it. All the Movement kids hung out there all the time. Everybody draws strength from him. Even after he had graduated and left for Mississippi, and Eric had acquired a few room-mates, everyone still called the apartment "Stokely's place" and we always met there. It was as if he had left something of himself there, something around which we could gather.

Perhaps I could have said all this more briefly. I could simply have said that he loves people. He really loves each individual person with whom he deals. He will deny that. But everyone else knows that it is true. (Everyone except the new girls on the WATS line or in the office. He delights in terrorizing them. But they soon catch on.) Everyone who speaks to him, even a total stranger coming up to him in a public place, gets his undivided attention. He really listens, and he responds. The only thing that is likely to catch him off guard is an expression of affection. I recently told him, during a break in a meeting, that he could be really exasperating at times, but that I didn't think that I could find a better brother, even custom-made. He replied, "That's 'cause I'm West Indian", and turned quickly away.

Among his conquests are a group of Carmelite seminarians in Washington. They were already involved in the Movement before they met him, but since they have known him, there is no retreat for them. (They were with us in Cambridge.) Their friendship is something very beautiful, stretching across seemingly impossible extremes of religious belief and non-belief, to meet in a common love for truth, a common reverence for Man. It is a delight to all who know them, and a surprise to those who only think they do. Stokely, has, of course, shared his friends, and the other SNCC kids have enjoyed knowing the Carmelites, too. They managed to get away for picnics together on a couple of occasions. The last of these, in June at a camp on Chesapeake Bay, I shared, and I will long remember it. "The Carms" wanted to come to Mississippi for the Summer Project, and three of them made all the preparations and were ready to leave for Oxford (Ohio) when they learned that the bishop of Natchez-Jackson would not allow them to come into his diocese in that way.

Yes, Stokely is special, but not unique. There are many beautiful people in the Movement. It just happens that I know him better than I know most of the others. I have other special brothers - and sisters. There is Courtland Cox - the quiet man. "He thinks much, and is a great reader of books." He's moody - sometimes a big tease and sometimes seemingly full of sorrows. But always concerned that we know what we are about, that we are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people. Appropriately, he is SNCC's Program Director. Then there is Ed Brown. Who defies description. But for the Movement he would probably have been either a famous preacher, a prominent gangster, or a very great dancer. When he gets excited he talks "all over". He loves order and organization and is, consequently, a "devil's advocate" in many a discussion. He "dances" his arguments in meetings. I once persuaded him to attend the ballet; his intuitive insight into the dance was a revelation to me. I had only technical knowledge; he has talent.

Since coming to Mississippi I have met others. MacArthur Cotton, who conducted some of the sessions of my orientation has since become a good buddy. He's a native Mississippian and one of SNCC's "old timers". He has some great ideas about non-violence and about the spirit of the Movement. I hope to share them with you sometime.

And there are others whom I don't know so well personally. But they are great people. Frank Smith, who says, "I'm not sure I have a right to own anything. If someone 'steals' something from me, perhaps it is my fault for not having made clear to him that he was welcome to it." And who defines SNCC by saying: "SNCC at this moment is Willie Shaw in jail in Belzoni". Or Charlie Cobb and Ivanhoe Donaldson, who recently went into action to calm an angry, confused, almost hysterical young man at a meeting. With the skill of a psychiatrist and the gentleness of a mother, they asked just enough of just the right questions to sooth their troubled brother. They didn't humor him. They didn't compromise the truth as they saw it. But neither did they destroy all his argument and leave him with nothing at all. But they asked him questions that he would have to answer sometime, for himself. And, all the while, they seemed oblivious to everyone except the person who needed them then. They looked at the same time like the personification of gentleness and as if no power on earth could have moved them from where they stood.

AN APOLOGY: I'm sorry. I got carried away. But there's not a word I want to cut. But there are other people I wanted you to meet. Perhaps later. Maybe an Easter letter. Then I can tell you about the great gang I lived with in Washington, at Sts. Paul and Augustine. And about Naomi and John and Victoria. About Paul. About

the other NAG (Nonviolent Action Group) kids in Washington and some of the things we did together. And, most of all, about the beautiful people in Mississippi - especially all my "kin-folk" in Tougaloo. And Mrs. Baldwin in Jackson, who has taken me into her home and into her heart.

But if I got started on any of these I would go on and on. And then I couldn't answer some of the questions that come to me over and over from many of you. Questions and statements, both of which need to be answered. What they all boil down to is why I'm here. Here in Mississippi. Here in the Movement. And here I'm going to take a break and sleep on that one, and hope I don't lose heart for the task. Because I nearly always do.

A N A T T E M P T

Three days later and this must be done now. I'm co-ordinating a third congressional district workshop on the Congressional Challenge, and it keeps me running night and day. So I'm going to be very blunt and brief and polish off this anyway disagreeable task as quickly as possible.

I'm here because I belong here. This is my home. I have come home at last. In the Movement I have found the reason for everything else in my life. Perhaps, as time goes on, I shall be able better to answer these questions. Right now I am better able to do so than I was two weeks ago, and far better able than two months ago. The main reason for this is that recently we have met together and talked together and found that we think together. And what we have found is something so wonderful that I, for one, do not as yet know how to share it with anyone who did not participate in our experience. Yet this above all is my desire. We have our community; if we can share it, we shall have given the only gift that matters. So, let me try.

"All we have is each other. All we have is our relationship to each other. We have come this far with this alone. Without it we could not have begun. Without it we can go no further." This is a paraphrase from a statement at the last COFO staff meeting. Stokely said it. He pleaded with us not to fall into the trap from which we had, we hoped, escaped. The efficient, mechanical, bureaucratic world in which most of us grew up, and which certainly controlled all of our lives in some way or another before we came into the Movement. We had escaped a world where people no longer matter. We had come into the Movement, where people alone matter. And here we were, trying to make the Movement into a miniature of the world against which we were rebelling. We were, some of us, pleading for meetings conducted according to "parliamentary procedure". Why? Because some of us knew how to use that way to make a meeting run our way. Because that is a nice, efficient way to "limit discussion", rule "irrelevencies" out of order, pass "motions" and take votes and close matters. All very neat. But it steps on people. Lots of people. Everybody who has not the skill and experience to use that procedure as a tool. Or a weapon. Everybody whose ideas on a subject are not yet jelled when the "discussion limit" is reached. The alternative? Talk things out, in an atmosphere of concern and love. Then reach a consensus. Listen. Really listen. And, above all, "translate". Translate the words into the idea and the idea into your own frame of reference. (The "translation" idea was my contribution to that particular discussion.) What I have discovered is that if you learn to translate, you find that "men of good will" everywhere really agree on most things. On all important things. Only most of them don't know it. They think that words mean the same thing to everyone that they mean to themselves. And it just isn't so. Humpty Dumpty knew that, and he tried to explain it to Alice. But Alice was too practical and she couldn't accept such nonsense and she went back "Through the Looking Glass" to her tidy Victorian life.

If you become skilled at this kind of translating, you will discover that there is but one great truth and but one hideous heresy. The truth is the unity of man. And the heresy is the denial of that. And the proof of this is that this alone distorts and disfigures a man and destroys his spirit. And this is true whatever form that denial may take. Now, it is the same whether I say: "There is but one man; there is no 'you' and 'me' and 'he' and 'she' and 'we' and 'they'". Each man is all men; all men are but one person." Or if Stokely says: "I don't give a damn about 'the people'. I'm in this for myself, because of the pressures I feel in this society, and because I know that the only way to relieve them for myself is to relieve them for everyone". Or if someone else says: "I'm not free until all men are free." We all say the same thing. Yet, I would disagree slightly with the last mentioned. We are free, because we are working for freedom. The moment any one of us stops, and decides to live for himself alone, he loses his freedom. Because he no longer lives in harmony with the truth. And that, if you want to know, is my definition of freedom. And not mine alone, it just occurs to me. Remember? "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This love of truth, this seeking after truth, this refusal to compromise the truth, this is the mark of the Movement. Please don't think that we are merely a "civil rights organization". The denial of human rights on a racial basis is only the most glaringly obvious symptom of society's sickness. And the one for which remedies can most readily be found. It is a rallying point around which men of good