

Luke Kabat, fourth year medical student at Stanford, has returned to Meridian, Mississippi, for 6 weeks. He spent the summer working for the CORE project in that area. The following is the first portion of the running account he is keeping during his stay.

I am happy to be back in Meridian. I arrived in the night and slept on the floor of the COFO office under the ping-pong table. There were many cockroaches and a good number of them crawled over me. Now I am living with a brave old woman, Mrs. J. Her daughter, Janice, is playing the piano and singing Negro gospel songs in a beautiful voice. She says, "Salvation is so near."

I have been very busy teaching at the Freedom School and testing the Civil Rights Bill. I brought my stethoscope to class and they listened to their heart sounds. Frank, a Freedom School teacher, listens every day and says, "Well, I made it through another day." Some couldn't hear anything and were afraid that they might not have a heart. Gail and I taught a Freedom Class and Gail read them Martin Luther King's speech, "I have a dream." She asked them about their dreams and I am sending their answers. Later we discussed a poem by Langston Hughes,

"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore --
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over --
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load
Or does it explode?"

We felt that our dream of freedom had been deferred and that it was time to act and make it a reality. So we went out for a grand night of testing the Civil Rights Bill. We went to the Burger Chef. Gail and I went first and bought 6 hamburgers and cokes. Then the 5 Negro students asked to be served and were told to go to the back. They joined us at a front table and we all enjoyed the hamburgers. The Burger Chefs looked on with surprised and ugly expressions on their faces. Then we went to the Rexall Drug Store. Gail and I went in and pretended to be shopping for a birthday gift for an imaginary Edith. The kids came in and asked to be served at the lunch counter. They were told that the counter was closed. They sat down and quietly sang Freedom Songs. The pharmacist called the police and they came but didn't arrest us. We went next to a diner. Gail and I went in and ordered coffee. We asked the man how long the diner would be opened and he said all night. Then the kids came in and sat down at a booth. The man turned blue in the face and shrieked that the diner was closed. Bettie asked for coffee to go. The man filled a paper cup with sugar and added a dab of coffee. The man called the police. They came but didn't bother us. Gail and I returned later and found that the diner had been reopened. We all went back to the COFO office and filled out affidavits against the restaurants that refused to serve us.

We have had a difficult time with Mr. Y. He is a self-appointed Negro leader who has been working for the White Citizen's Council. He has actually given them a play by play report of our activities - what goes on at our meetings, what we are planning, and so on. We want to find good leaders for the Freedom Movement and today we had a meeting of the bravest of Meridian's Negroes. We agreed to begin a program of testing the Civil Rights Bill. We talked about holding workshops on nonviolence. At these workshops we will do role playing and try to act out the situations we are likely to encounter. After our meeting we were all filled with the spirit and we went out to the Davis Grill to test the Bill. We picked up Rev. Barber as our spokesman and we walked in an integrated group through the streets of Meridian to the Davis Grill where a mean-looking white southerner was waiting for us. He refused to let us enter and he and I exchanged mean looks.

Today Bettie Manual, age 15, decided to have her head shaved. She explained her reasons for doing this

Why I Decided to Wear My Hair Natural

"The reason for deciding to wear my hair natural was that I feel that straightening of hair is a sign of the Negro being ashamed of being a Negro and wants to be more like the white man. It shows that the Negro think the white man's standard of beauty is the only way to judge beauty. I want to show people that I'm not ashamed of my hair texture."

Sandra, one of the Freedom School girls, didn't like Bettie's haircut and she said, "I wouldn't have my hair cut like Bettie because I for one don't like it. It look too much like a boy and not very becoming for a young lady. After all we are trying to attract young men and most boys like girls with lots of hair. Not that it is not right to have not. But it is nice to have hair."

I wish that you could attend a session at our Freedom School. The nights are cold and we all huddle together near a gas stove. In my class today I did a physical examination of one of the kids and showed them what a doctor looks for when he percusses the chest, listens to the heart, and so on. Gail read the Civil Rights Bill to her Freedom Class and we discussed ways of testing the Bill in Meridian. Kids talked of places they wanted to test. They wanted to test the Bowling Alley. None of the kids has ever bowled and the idea of this "forbidden fruit" has a magical quality, as does the Skating Rink and the White Teen Center with its ping-pong tables and juke boxes. Also the Royal Theater where they play something other than the war, cowboy, and murder movies that you can see at the Negro's Star Theater. Wideman's Restaurant, a swanky place where you have to dress up to go, was another place the kids wanted to test. The manager of Wideman's said, "I won't let Niggers in if they put a bayonet to my throat."

Mrs. G. is lonely for her daughter, Edna, who left Mississippi and went North to college. She was looking at her goldfish alone in its bowl and said that the poor goldfish looked lonesome. She got a pink ceramic bird and another ceramic animal and she placed them beside her lonely goldfish. I went out for dinner with some of the kids. We had chitterlings (called chitlins)

- pig's intestines - and they smelled something terrible. If they can eat chitlins, they can overcome almost anything.

Second Letter

Tonight I went to jail. Our entire COFO staff was arrested by Sheriff Davis. Someone named Kaminski, a local sailor, stole a record player and brought it to the COFO office as a gift. We accepted it gladly, not realizing that he had stolen it. So we were arrested as accomplices in his crime. We were frisked and fingerprinted and locked up in the cells for White Men and White Women, and in those jail cells we sang freedom songs and talked about our lives.

Eric told of his experience in a Mississippi jail, and his is a horror story. He was subjected to such tortures as twisting of the fingers and electrocution with a cattle prod, and he was lifted in the air by the groin. He has a scar that runs the length of his body and I marvel that his personality is not more scarred. He believes deeply in the principles of freedom and nonviolence and he went on a hunger strike for 32 days when he was in jail to demonstrate his concern. He said the first day is the hardest; you drink a lot of water and you pee a lot and you dream of food. And he told of how strange it is to be cut off from the world in a room without windows.

Judy told her story of the freedom rides. She said that when she bought a ticket for Jackson she knew that she was buying a ticket for jail. She was locked up in the State Penitentiary for 5 weeks and she dreamed of motion, that she was waltzing about, and she dreamed of cake. She secretly wrote a diary while she was in prison and she smuggled it out in the hem of her dress. When she got home, the first thing her mother did was wash her skirt and the diary was destroyed. She was sick with asthma and they refused to let her have medical care. A pregnant girl who was refused medical care had a miscarriage in prison. Her story reminded me of the German folksong, "Die Gedanken Sind Frie," (Thoughts are Free).

"And if they take me
And put me in prison
My thoughts will burst free
Like flowers in season.
Foundations will crumble
The structure will tumble
And free men will cry
Die Gedanken sind frie."

Judy has a harmonica and she played it tonight. We sang freedom songs to each other. We could hear the girls singing and we sang back and it gave us courage to sing. We sang, "Ain't gonna let no jailhouse turn me round." Eric, Frank, Joe and I were placed in a cell with a bunch of drunken white prisoners: thieves, tough guys, bitter segregationists. There were bars on the windows, a toilet without a seat, and a few beds. Every bed was occupied and I decided that rather than share a bed with a prisoner I would sleep on a hard green bench.

I heard a train come roaring by and it sounded like freedom, roaring away in the night, far away from Mississippi. It was like a scene from Kafka. There we were in jail, charged with a crime we knew nothing about. Frank said that if we were in a Northern town we would holler with indignation. He says he feels guilty in Mississippi, always worried about a bomb or a bullet or a policeman, and he wondered if maybe the guilt had something to do with our acceptance of this situation. Eric feels that this strange, Kafkaesque world where justice doesn't exist is the norm rather than the exception throughout most of the world. I was prepared to spend a month or so in that ugly jail cell, and was thinking about holding my freedom school class by hollering through the bars to Negro children outside the jailhouse. And then the jailor called, "Kabat, Weinberger, Wright," and he released us from jail. We inquired about the girls and learned that when the police agreed to release 3 of the girls they refused to leave without the 4th girl. So Gail, Sandy, Louise, and Judy are in jail at this moment, and they are among the truly free people of this world.

One reason that the police arrested us tonight was that we have started a program of testing the Civil Rights Bill. Today I went with 5 brave young high school girls to Woolworth's, Kress', and Newberry's, and we were served in all of these places. When I went into Woolworth's, I walked over to the lunch counter and was surprised to see only Negroes sitting there. I thought, My God, not only is this place integrated but there are only Negroes at this lunch counter. I sat down and the Negro woman sitting next to me told me that I didn't have to sit with her, that the white counter was over there. I sat and talked with her for awhile and then I went to the white counter and watched the girls sit down and ask to be served. They were told that the Negro counter was over there, and Bettie Manual, spokesman for the group, said, "I don't think it makes any difference. We would like to be served." And they were served. They were sick of drinking coca-cola after integrating the 3 restaurants, but they were mighty happy.

We are working on a campaign to get the Negroes to take advantage of their right to ride at the front of the bus. The buses have been "integrated" for 2 years, but most Negroes still go to the back. So we made up little cards with statements like, "If you want to be free, ride in the front of the bus. We've been sitting in the back too long, ride in the front of the bus. Be a freedom fighter, ride in the front of the bus. The stairway to heaven starts at the front of the bus. Take a step toward freedom, ride in the front of the bus." These cards may be successful. Andressa Thompson tells me that one woman received a card and said, "I don't want to be a Tom," and she stood up and walked to the front of the bus.

We had intended to go to a Synagogue tonight. We hope to find friends of civil rights among the Jews of Meridian. There are many Jews in the civil rights movement and Jews should understand better than most the horrors of prejudice. But the rabbi here said, "We have suffered for 2,000 years. Let them suffer."

I had a good long talk last night with Rev. P., a powerful leader in the Negro community. He told me about his boyhood in Amite County, Miss. Years ago, when he was refused his poll tax receipts, he conducted a "stand in" for 10 hours until the white men gave in. And he told about a day back in 1942 when he and his father walked 5 miles through the snow and he entered the Army. He told of how he fought in Europe and returned to America to face the humiliation of being a second-class citizen. He swore he would never fight in another war.

I had good long talk with Mrs. J. She told me the story of her daughter, Doody, who married a local boy named Sam. Sam joined the Army and became an alcoholic and he treated Doody badly. She wanted to leave him but he would plead with her and swear he'd never drink again and she always forgave him. One day he got drunk and threw hot sauce in her eye. It almost blinded her and then when he tried to beat her, she stuck a butcher knife in his heart. He said, "Doody, I'm hurt." She wiped away the blood on his chest and called a doctor, but Sam died. Doody lives down the street. The law forgave her because they knew that Sam mistreated her and was a drunk. Doody loved Sam in spite of his drunkenness and I believe she really misses him.

Tomorrow, Free and I are going to take Rev. and Mrs. G. and Mrs. J. out to dinner at Wideman's, a fancy place that refuses to serve Negroes. We expect to be turned away but it is terribly important to try. And perhaps our affidavits will help to open it up someday.

Third Letter

(Part of the contents of this letter relating to Luke's experiences in jail have been combined with the second letter.)

Gail is in jail. She took 5 Negro children to Tudor and Simm's Drug Store to test the Civil Rights Bill by requesting service at the lunch counter. Mr. Tudor called the police and they followed Gail for miles as she drove through town. They finally stopped her for making a "bad left turn." In court Gail pleaded not guilty. She put the policeman on the witness stand and demonstrated wonderfully well that this was a civil rights case and not just a traffic violation. The prosecuting attorney smoked a big cigar and made wisecracks while a chorus of policemen behind him cackled. The judge tried to be lenient and fined Gail \$12.00. He felt that she would be pleased to "get off easy." Everyone in the courtroom was shocked when she said, "Thank you, judge, for your leniency, but I will not pay money because I did not commit a crime. I do not want to enrich the city of Meridian by \$12.00. I do not owe you anything for requesting service guaranteed by United States law. I would rather save that \$12.00 for testing. And so I will go to jail." I was very proud of Gail. She is in jail now and she is one of the world's freest persons. She looks so sweet and pretty that she has even won the hearts of the policemen. They buy her cokes and they speak of her as "our model prisoner." She writes to the outside world and signs her letters

I took the freedom school kids to jail to see Gail and she conducted freedom class from a jail cell.

Joe Morse and Sandy Watts, 2 of our COFO workers, are still in jail as "accomplices in the crime" of accepting the stolen record player. The Meridian Star has gleefully announced the news. Joe is a red-haired 21-year-old from Minnesota. He wants to become a priest someday. Joe is in jail with a bunch of tough, white, segregationist criminals and I am afraid for him. Sandy is a freckle-faced girl from Oregon. She has been charged with burglary because she gave Kaminski a ride one day. She is in the White Women's cell and has been on a hunger strike for 5 days now. What a terrible and criminal system of law enforcement.

Freeman heard a Negro man praying. He said, "Lord, I been down so long it's a part of me. It's a part of me."

I received a phone call late one night. Linda, a COFO worker in Clarke County, was sick and needed to see a doctor. I was driven to Clarke County and when I examined Linda I found that she had lymphangitis. There was a sore on her leg and red streaks were advancing up her leg. She had a large, tender inguinal node and a fever. She needed a penicillin shot and we drove her to Saint Joseph's Hospital where she received a shot.

Today I went to Clarke County for the first test of the Civil Rights Bill in this county. Eric and I were witnesses. We went to the Greyhound Bus Station and sat down at the counter. Then 5 Negroes entered and sat down. The man tried to make them go to the Negro section but Rev. W., 6 foot 6 and menacing-looking, reminded him that the Civil Rights Bill has passed. He trembled with fear and said, "I know about the law. What do you want?" Rev. W. ordered a ham sandwich and the others had cokes. They were proud as could be and we all felt very happy about it. Clarke County is one of the worst counties in Miss. and this was something of a triumph.

I took the Negro kids to Chick n Treat tonight and they gave us hamburgers with hot pepper sprinkled liberally on top. I howled and my mouth is still burning. The Bastards. Sometimes it's hard to be nonviolent.

I am writing this letter from the Meridian jail. Last night Freeman and I drove a carload of 9 Negro high school students to the A & W Rootbeer Stand and the Toddle House Diner to test the public accommodations section of the Civil Rights Bill. At the A & W Rootbeer Stand two homely pimply-faced teenage girls saw the Negro children approach. They screamed, "The niggahs is integratin - The niggahs is integratin" and they locked the door and called the police. The children returned quickly to the car and we drove off to a side street as 4 police cars passed by. We then drove to the Toddle House Diner, and we parked on a side street nearby. The children went in and ordered 9 Cokes. The woman brought the Cokes and told the kids that the price was a dollar a Coke. They asked her if this was the price for everyone, and after some discussion, she lowered the price to 25¢.

Meanwhile, carloads of local toughs began to arrive at the diner and a crowd began to gather in the parking lot. Four or five police cars drove up and the policemen talked with the crowd. Freeman and I and one Negro girl were sitting in the car, and we didn't hear what they said. Freeman got out of the car and went to look for a phone to report our situation to the COFO office. I remained in the car with the girl. The door of the diner opened and the children came out. They walked bravely through the crowd, and a police car followed slowly behind them. A girl in the crowd - I think she was a waitress - pointed to our car and the crowd moved toward us. One car pulled in front of us - one on the side - and one behind and we were boxed in. I rolled up the windows and locked the doors. An ugly crowd gathered around the car and cruel sneering faces leered at us through the window. There were old men in business suits and young men with a motorcycle look about them, and there was even a girl in the crowd. They were hollering for our blood. "Niggah lover - You're going to get what Schwerner got - You son of a bitch" - and they shined bright flashlights in my face.

I was terrified. I have never seen human faces with such an animal look and I will never forget them. I looked at the Negro girl and said, "We shall overcome." She answered, "We shall overcome." I kept wondering, "Where are those four carloads of policemen?". Someone shined a flashlight on the Negro girl and screamed, "Look at the niggah - Look at the niggah!" They shouted cruel and obscene things at her. I was looking at the faces in the crowd when suddenly I saw Freeman. He walked behind the crowd and straight up to the door of the car. I opened the door and Freeman got in. I think the crowd was stupefied by the courage and daring of his act, and no one made a move to restrain him. He locked the door, we shook hands, and there were three of us to face the mob. I said, "Have courage Free." He said, "We will, Luke; we will." Then a man in a brown suit began to knock on the window. He hollered, "Open up that window." I refused and started up the engine of the car. He said, "If you try to get away, I'll have to shoot you." Then he showed me a badge and I read the words "Juvenile Officer" on it. He told the crowd, "I don't like it anymore than you do, but if you bother them, I'll have to arrest you." He told me to get going. My legs were shaking, but I managed to drive through the crowd and back to the COFO office. I was followed by carloads of toughs.

At the COFO office I learned that the kids had called from the Trailways Bus Station. We were on our way to pick them up when the police drove by us and we saw the kids piled in the back seat. We followed them to the police station where the kids were booked on a charge of disorderly conduct. In Mississippi, testing the Civil

Rights Bill is considered to be disorderly conduct. Free and I walked into the police station, and we asked to be arrested with the kids. We told the policemen that we drove the kids and that if they were arrested, we wanted to be arrested too. We were charged with contributing to the delinquency of minors. This means we helped Negro children to test the law of the land. The kids saw us as we were being led off to jail and we winked at each other.

It may surprise you that we volunteered to go off to jail. We wanted the kids to know that we were with them and we were outraged by the events of the evening: by the ugly girls at the A & W who screamed, "The niggahs is integratin!", by the waitress who charged children \$1.00 for a Coca Cola because they were Negroes, by the police who not only failed to enforce the law of the land, but opposed its enforcement. I asked Free why he volunteered to go to jail, and he said, "It was the only thing I could honorably do," and this is the way that I feel.

We were placed in a tiny jail cell - a square room with black walls, bars on the window and door, and cockroaches on the floor. The walls were lined by trails of spit, and there were messages from former prisoners - Mary is a good fuck, Billy Weathers 1963, and the usual bathroom wall philosophies. Free and I sang Freedom Songs.

At 5AM we were taken in a police car to the city jail. We were placed in the white men's jail cell with a group of tough looking characters. There was an Indian they called Chief, and Free and I thought it strange that a man with the pigmentation of a Negro was accepted so readily into this white community of prisoners. If it's not skin color then what do they hate in a Negro? One man told about his sexual relations with mules. He said (with reference to a mule), "Her mother wasn't too upset - she was eatin' grass." And he laughed. It's men like this who holler nigger, who make up lynch mobs, who would keep our Negro children from having a Coke at Toddle House. Free and I didn't say a word to the prisoners. Had they known that we were civil rights workers or even Northerners they might have tried to hurt us. I fell asleep on a filthy sheet that was spotted with blood from a former prisoner and wondered whether it was TB or whether he was beaten.

Later Free and I were transferred to the county jail. As we walked up the steps to our cell we heard the Negro children singing Oh Freedom. Their voices came from a far away jail cell, and I have rarely heard a more beautiful sound. Free and I were taken to the court room and we were led before the judge. We pleaded Not Guilty to a charge of contributing to the delinquency of minors, and we asked for and were granted a continuance. Then we were taken to a cell in the county jail. That is where I am now. We met and talked with some of the other prisoners. We told them we were COFO workers and we discussed our differences of opinion about Negroes. They said, "Niggers stink," "We treat our niggers good", "Would you want one to marry your sister" and the usual empty talk.

An old man told us that he was a professional thief. He was proud of his talent and boasted that he never worked a day in his life. He made \$50 a day and supported two dope addicts on his earnings. He is addicted to Demerol and is now going through painful withdrawal symptoms. I told him about Synanon, a community of dope addicts who help each other to get better. He was interested. One prisoner learned that I was studying medicine and he told me about his heart condition. He has

had two heart attacks, he has shortness of breath, hemoptysis, swelling of the ankles, and other symptoms of heart failure. The jailer has not allowed him to take his blood pressure pills (which relieve the strain on his heart) and his symptoms have become worse. I told him to insist on his rights, and he promised to speak with the jailer.

Under my mattress I found a letter to a former prisoner - a love letter from Fay Ann Taylor to a Mr. Junior Couch -- She writes

Saying goodbye will be very hard to do
There will be very few words
Only tears
The only thing said will be, "I love you."
And it will be me saying it.

I wonder what Junior was here for and if someday he will return to Fay. The whole thing seems terribly schmaltzy but terribly real. This is such an odd place to find a love letter.

Luke

MORE NOTES FROM THE COUNTY JAIL

Pat McCarthy, the old thief, told us frightening stories about the county farm - stories of chain gangs and whippings and dreary days of labor on the roads of Mississippi. The lawyer is trying to swing a deal - a \$100 fine in return for a plea of guilty. A plea of guilty offends my sense of justice, and working on a chain gang offends my sense of self-preservation. This is a very difficult situation. Someone in jail has a radio and I just heard that 20 men have been arrested for the murder of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman. The radio said these men are in the Meridian jail. When Free and I heard that these men were to be in jail with us we looked at each other and laughed very nervously.

I met 3 men and was told that they were among the murderers. They were pink faced businessmen-types in suits. They looked like civic leaders and they probably were. They joked with the jailer and inquired about the food. They acted cocky and confident. They were probably thinking about De La Beckwith, the manure salesman who killed Medger Evers. They had a parade for De La Beckwith recently in Greenwood, and I could see them dreaming of a parade in Philadelphia, Mississippi on their behalf. Signs saying Welcome Home Murders - with popcorn and candy.

Freeman was just handed a warrant charging him with Grand Larceny. It was so absurd that I laughed when I saw it, and so did Freeman, but we both realize that this is a serious matter. They have made a mockery of justice and used it as a weapon of intimidation. They obstructed testing of the Civil Rights Bill and stood by why a mob threatened our lives. And then when we asked to go to jail as a demonstration of our indignation they trumped up charges of loitering, disturbing the peace, contributing to the delinquency of minors, and now Grand Larceny. If the Justice Department fails to step in, if justice is permitted to be so abused, if Freeman and I are convicted of these trumped up charges, then I will laugh or maybe I will cry when I hear the word Justice associated with the name America.