



360 Central Park West
 Apt. 11-H
 New York, N.Y. 10025
 Christmas, 1965



My Dear Friends,

You'd never guess where I've settled for awhile--yes, in New York City! Upon arriving in New York, September 23, from Americas, I managed to get through the job hunting phase, and land a job in a city anti-poverty program. It is called JOIN (Job Orientation For Youth In Neighborhood), and finds jobs for school drop-outs between 16 and 21 years. The eight centers provide counseling, remediation, and job placement services, and two other centers are job training headquarters. As a "Neighborhood Developer" I see the youths regularly, at home or in the center, after they are placed on jobs. By the kind of "counseling" we provide, we hope to encourage the youths to keep their jobs, and straighten out job problems. JOIN is a very limited field experience for me, but provides a valuable insight into counseling and psychology. The problems of poverty and minority group youths trying to live in an urban society (many are Southern raised) I can highly sympathize with, because I am having to go through a somewhat similar difficult adjustment--there are many aspects to small town living that I truly miss.

I'm finally beginning to get over the bug-eyed phase of amazement at all the charms and splendors of this great city. I haven't done anything very fancy or ritzy, but I love the fun shops and variety of people. On the other hand, I have been just as struck by the seeming distance between individuals here, as I was by the beautiful closeness of human relationships in the Movement in Americas, Georgia.

The U.S. policy on the war in Vietnam is dominating the liberal-progressive scene here, and I joined the crowds in the march on Washington For Peace In Vietnam, over Thanksgiving weekend. It was very gratifying to see the tremendous nation-wide support (estimates from the inside are 40,000 or so), plus the wide age bracket--even grandmothers in Sunday hats! One really begins to wonder how you can touch the government on the urgency of preventing a World War III; public protests appear to have little affect.

I would so much love to be with all my friends, West and South, but it is not possible this winter. A special note of thanks goes again to all of you in the Seattle area for making my unforgettable 1965 experiences possible, and for standing behind my parents while they endured the trials of this summer in Americas.

The enclosed poem-story, "A Christmas Dream", is taken from entirely true events of the summer that I wish you to know. The truth is very painful, but my story is a heartfelt wish.

Merry Christmas, Lucy,

Affectionately,

Liz

Elizabeth Henry

I have ended up in New York, but before a year is up I'm sure I'll go west, hopefully to work with AFSC. I know I haven't seen the last of the South, however. Liz

A CHRISTMAS DREAM

This Christmas, I am dreaming
About a place I'll never forget--AMERICUS.
I am dreaming that it is Christmas Sunday;
It is the most beautiful Sunday in all the South.
THE WHOLE TOWN IS GATHERED IN FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH!

After the main part of the service is over,
Rev. Thomas leads us in singing,
"Amazing Grace, How Sweet It Sounds".
Because it is our movement church, and we are rejoiced,
Willie Mae leads us in "We Shall Overcome."
There is an electric feeling of ecstatic joy in the air....

Old wealthy Charles Wheatly slowly rises,
"I've come here today, y'all, this Christmas, 1965,
'Cause I just can't go on living the way I have:
I've tried to rule little Americus,
From the mayor to the moonshine maker.
I want to confess that this summer past
I did way too much,
To keep the merchants from hiring y'all
And a Bi-racial Committee from forming at all!
All generations of Wheatlys tried to rule this town,
But justice has been coming, it's nearly '66,
And I've too few years left to hate!"

"Amen, yes brother", responds the congregation.

Before the surprised faces of the town,
Sheriff Fred Chappell rises to respond.
His huge form shakes, his face, as usual, is very red.
"I'll never beat another in yonder courthouse,
The drinking fountains will stay on, the door unlocked,
We'll all meet together in the old courthouse!
I was the one this summer who kept
The Negro women voters under arrest.
I was too damn proud to let white folks think
I'd be the first to give in to VOTING INTEGRATION!"

"Amen, yes brother."

Then, puffing, rises Police Chief Ross Chambliss.
"We on the police force just felt we HAD to win,
I confess we committed a terrible sin.
On August 28, when y'all were marching up Lee Street,
We broke into a rage and arrested y'all
For marching without a permit for parades and ordinances.
We knew, uh, you were on the sidewalk, not the street,
And the constitution supports your right to protest.
But the wicked thing called "hate" broke lose,
And we threw y'all in Lee County prisons."

Then others rise, like the manager of Kresser:
"I knew Gloria Wise was right when she said
'you'll lose all Negro business for not hiring'.

I know we cursed y'all when you picketed for the boycott,
But we were blind to the fact, I guess,
That you're OVER HALF OUR POPULATION!"

Suddenly, a tall blond youth breaks in,
"Let me speak for all us white folks,
I guess I'm the worst of all.
I know that hate killed my brother, Andy Whatley,
Possibly by the Negro youths last August.
It is the same growing hate
That made me try to kill John, the white civil rights worker.
Every night we'd come in my car and wait,
And then chase him and shoot at him on the winding roads.
This same hate made all of us beat and chase you in the last march,
So you'd never march again.
I'm still young, and I want to start a new LIFE.
I've expressed as much hate as I possibly can, and
I have nothing left but to love my black brother,
For we all are in poverty and without decent jobs."

Then Mayor Walker rises:

"I have some news to greet y'all,
For Warren Fortson and Lloyd Moll shall return;
We must prove to them that we can accept them
As the best and most honest folks in town,
And hope they can forgive us
For excluding them from the human race!
We need Fortson for our lawyer;
Dr. Moll can unite us all
To revive the now dormant anti-poverty council.
Most of all, we need the guidance of these humanitarians!"

"Amen, yes brother", responds the congregation.

Minnie Jewel Wise rises, her dark eyes flashing,

"I truly believe now what I hear,
For you are not merely coming to us with promises,
But asking forgiveness for your sins.
I've done hard things:
I've survived the blows, frustrations, and humiliations,
With those that dare to attend white schools.
I speak now for my mother, worn out from scrubbing kitchens,
For teacher and Rev. Freeman, who did not, after all,
Get fired for standing up for his rights;
For Rev. Campbell, who led the past eventful summer,
For Sammy Mahone, of SNCC, who said, "Never Turn Back",
And never did.
If this love will truly exist, as you now say,
Then let American citizens ask forgiveness,
If they EVER think ill of one just 'cause he's black or white.
Most of all we'll show the world what TRUST AND LOVE CAN BRING."

In the congregation, there was a moment of grateful silence.
Then all stood to sing the glorious hymn,
"JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD HAS COME!"