

The New Barbarians

"Now boy, you go to writing and write me up a new day".

Mamma Dollie was speaking to me as I sat close to the heater in a little old house way back in the woods of Lee County, only eight country miles away from Shady Grove Baptist Church, burned down during the summer.

This was "Mama". Standing fike-fike, strong, resembling a proud Indian woman worn with the years but unbowed. She goes swiftly about the house spreading light in all the dark places, challenging us all to be honest to the best in us. Kathleen Conwell of Skidmore had worked in Lee County on voter-registration along with Peggie Dammond of Boston University and Penny Patch of Swarthmore. In spite of bomb scares, shootings, threats -- face to face -- of death, and the scarcity even of the bare necessities of life, we walked along lonely roads, flirting with death but loving life enough to desire it for others. "Mama" was always there, a symbol of hope in an ~~x~~ area where it seems that everyone is too afraid to weep where the world can hear. Here, we worked and thought together, always searching for the best way.

Sometimes I wonder if the country knows that deep in the heart of Dixie, in the land of ~~the~~ Eastland and Thurmond and Ellender and ~~Russell~~ ^{SPARKMAN} and Russell ^{of WALLACE}, there is a young band of "new barbarians" living in the backwoods with the gentle people of oppression. I am afraid that few know of our sufferings in the Deep South. One hears that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee is waging war, non-violent war against the political structure of the South by getting people to register and vote. One hears that on such a date one, two, three, four churches have been burned and six houses have been shot into by night-riders, that three persons have been shot one man killed, but that they have not stopped in attempts to register more people in spite of overwhelming odds.

Only a few know Larry Rubin of Antioch and John O'Neal or Chico Neblett of Southern Illinois University. A handful of people in the Jack country know ~~John~~ Chatfield of Trinity College and Faith Holsaert of Barnard College. ^{Hardly anyone knows Peter W. Coffey or John Cherville of New York, and Arthur Hall of Temple or Ralph Allen of Trinity College.} But nobody really knows the "new barbarians". Our country's people have not seen the thinking man who would accept dusty roads in place of the four-lane "super dupers" of today. It is hard for a man ^{of these times} to understand another who is willing to trade right now a '63 Cadillac for an opportunity to suffer. It is even harder for others to identify with those of us who refuse to be successful, to be the best no matter what, to climb the highest mountain no matter how, to eat ~~of~~ ^{the} eaten, to kill before you are killed. The "new barbarians" refuse to eat in Rome or Greece at the best tables but prefer to share the hog ~~head~~ ^{head} of the oppressed. This is strong talk. But there are those who live it.

A new day must arise but it will never come without the conscious effort of earnest people working with all that they are worth. When we ~~came~~ ^{came} to ~~Albany~~ ^{Albany} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ southwest Georgia in October 1961, we offered before the people our minds and bodies. That was all we had. Three months later, nearly a thousand bodies and minds were being offered before us. In Lee, Terrell and Sumter counties we are receiving comparable response from the people.

In Sumter County there is one recent example. On Thursday, December 6, the home of ^{Deacon} Trim Porter was burned to the ground. He had left two small children at his home to go to a store a couple of miles away. He returned to find his children frozen with fear, lying in a ditch. When they revived they reported that a white man came in a blue car and told them to ~~it~~ go down the road.

This man, the eldest deacon of the only church in Sumter County which permits us to have voter-registration meetings, has been shot at, intimidated, and now has been asked to leave Sumter County. This man is an elderly person. He has lived in this area all his life. He is tired and

~~he~~ wants ~~a~~ to rest from the world, but he must find new roots in old age.

This is typical of this area. All that poor men have is the mind and the body. All that any men need is the body smoothly working and the disciplined mind. These are our tools in the Deep South -- the mind and body. These are our armaments for non-violent war.

We had small scale sessions in non-violence with those who would listen. For even in Albany, where over a thousand times steel doors were slammed shut in the faces of honest men, people were afraid. They were afraid of the past. They have lived with dark memories of lynchings, burnings, shootings, and sordid tales of brutality. They are afraid of the present. They have lived ten in a family on fifteen dollars a week. They have had only dreams of better times where baby will get enough to eat or there will ~~be~~ for once in a life be some money, one dollar in a bank~~s~~ somewhere. To have enough is an eternal effort; not a ~~comfortable~~ ^{comfortable} portion, just enough.

We spoke to the fears of the past, offered to share and shared the fears of the present and projected hope through Faith in God and the strength of fellowship. This has practical value to us. Fellowship is another form of unity. There is an indoctrination caught in one negative maxim: "Negrees don't stick together". The other is, "White is right." Black bodies isolated under the sun have been subjugated for years on these two and one other -- "Jail," a hammer consistently and successfully used by puppets of segregation. But we broke the hammer of "jail" with another maxim: "A jail is just another house," and with this lever we broke the other two. Blacks stood together and respected with a sense of personal responsibility the judgement of black leadership. It was at this point that ~~we~~ we began to educate the people in the responsibilities of citizenship.

Larger numbers became involved ~~it~~ on the grass ~~rank~~ ~~x~~ roots level. In the center of two congressional districts where one group of men believes another has no rights he is bound to respect, eyes have been opened, men once dead to hope and aspiration toward progress have become alive to the joys and challenges of a living constitution. Albany is the center; watch it!

In six years, there will be a black man sitting in congress from southwest Georgia. Between now and then a great many will run. Thousands of Georgians will interpret this as an attempt to gain control of government everywhere from ~~a~~ federal to city level. We will only smile. For memories will flash back across our conscious thoughts. The days in December when we met in an old tent in Sasser where two churches burned, where we met in the rain, where we huddled together to keep warm and listened to reports of ~~xxxx~~ harrassment, intimidation and progress in the counties where we work. We will remember ~~our~~ headquarters in Albany, three a ~~xxxx~~ room house where thirteen of us gather for staff meetings and strategy sessions. We will never forget the all-night skull sessions, the soul-searching sessions in which we make bare our ~~xx~~ artificial defenses and share our fears and joys and hopes and suffocations. We will remember the attempts at educating the young and not-so-young in city and state government, the responsibility of citizenship, the place of the church, the meaning of sacrifice and the role of the federal government. A black man in congress from southwest Georgia will be no surprise to us. *for all will know that he represents the new body politic in an county*

But this is not the most important thing to ~~xx~~ ~~xx~~ watch for in southwest Georgia. For many months now we have been cutting hard at the roots of prejudice in the South. As we search for voters we are also searching for open hearts. In the backyard of a brutal monster we make the search, two victims, one black, one white. We stand before this monstrous system of segregation and with a united cry from the depths of our frustrated

souls, ^{and} ~~we~~ damn its untruth and vicious deception. While walking streets where once blood ran from black folk and lynch mobs shouted in distorted ecstacy we daily, black and white together, signal the death of this infamous monster. Young and filled with the joy of living we perceive the irony of the double standard. We stand together, black and white, face to face with the political henchmen of the South who have wrested power from justice, and ^{have stated} ~~state~~ claims on truth and love and liberty and human dignity and freedom. Southwest Georgia is unknown now, but one day somebody will do as Mama Dollie said one day in Lee County: "Now boy, you go to writing and write up a new day."