

register. They couldn't find other jobs so they followed us around everywhere we went, walking with us as if they were bulletproof. They also spread rumors that the Freedom House was protected by armed men. We were all still a little up tight and afraid to sleep at night, but after a while, when the whites didn't come back, we figured the rumors worked. The threats didn't bother me as much now. I began to feel almost safe with those men around all the time. Their interest, courage, and concern gave all of us that extra lift we needed.

Now every Negro church in the county was opened for workshops. The nine of us split into groups of three. Almost every night we had workshops in different churches, sometimes sixteen to thirty miles out of town.

One or two of our protective guys had cars. They were usually sent along with the girls out in the country. It was dark and dangerous driving down those long country rock roads, but now that we always had two or three of the guys riding with us, it wasn't so bad. In fact, once we got to the churches, everything was fine. Listening to those old Negroes sing freedom songs was like listening to music from heaven. They sang them as though they were singing away the chains of slavery. Sometimes I just looked at the expressions on their faces as they sang and cold chills would run down my back. Whenever God was mentioned in a song, I could tell by the way they said the word that most of them had given up here on earth. They seemed to be waiting just for God to call them home and end all the suffering.

The nightly church workshops were beginning to be the big thing going for us at this point in the campaign. However, the white folks found out about this and tried to put a stop to it. One night out in the country three carloads of whites chased George and a group of the guys all the way to Canton. George said they were shooting at them like crazy. Since George thought the whites could have killed them if they had wanted to, we took it as a warning. We were extra careful after that.

The luckiest thing that happened to us was that we had succeeded in getting C. O. Chinn to work with us. He was a powerful man, known as "bad-ass C. O. Chinn" to the Negroes and whites alike. All of the Negroes respected him for standing up and being a man. Most of the whites feared him. He was the type of person that didn't take shit from anyone. If he was with you he was all for you. If he didn't like you that was it—in that case he just didn't have anything to do with you. Because he was respected by most of the local Negroes, he was our most effective speaker in the churches. He was in a position to speak his mind and what he said was taken without offense to anyone in particular.

Just as Mr. Chinn opened up full force, the whites cut in on him. Within a week he was forced to close his place and he began moving out most of his things. This still wasn't enough to satisfy the whites. One evening, when he was taking home the .45 he had kept around for protection, he was stopped and arrested by those damn cops that hung around the office all the time. He was immediately taken to jail and charged with carrying a concealed weapon—actually he had placed the gun on the seat beside him. His bail was set at five hundred dollars. He was in jail for a week before his family could find anyone to post a property bond. Most of the local Negroes had borrowed money on their property, which meant that it couldn't be used for bail purposes.

I think this was the beginning of C. O.'s realization of what had happened to him. Not only had he lost everything he had, he was sitting in jail with no one to go his bail. Instead of this putting the damper on his activities as the whites had expected, it increased them. He began hitting harder than ever. Often when he was speaking, he would say, "Take me, for example, they have completely put me out of business. I have lost practically everything I have. These young workers are here starving to death trying to help you people. And for what? A lot of you ain't worth it!" Not one of us working for CORE could have talked to the local people like that.

It was the middle of August now, and we had been working in the county for two months. Up until this time, not one of the ministers in Canton had committed himself to helping us. When they did give us a chance to speak in their churches, it was only for two or three minutes during the announcements. The biggest Negro church in Canton was pastored by Canton's biggest "Tom." Most of his congregation were middle-class bourgeois Negroes. We all knew that if we could somehow force him to move, every other large church in Canton would open its doors to us.

We set up a meeting and invited all the ministers, but since the number one minister didn't show up, all the others did was mumble to each other and tell us, "We can't do anything until Reverend Tucker says so." After that we decided to forget the ministers and go to work on their congregations. At this point the ministers started coming around. In fact, they called a meeting to talk things over with us. But the talk was fruitless. The ministers tried to play the same game the Southern white people played when things got too hot for them. That is, to find out what you are thinking and try and get you to hold off long enough for them to come up with some new strategy to use on you. Those Toms weren't as dumb as they appeared, I thought. They had learned to play Mr. Charlie's game pretty well.

We had a surprise for them, though. We had made headway with several of their most influential members, and they put us right where we wanted to go—behind the pulpits for more than five minutes. Now we could hit the Canton churches hard.

For a little while that good old Movement spirit was on the surge again. Everyone began to feel it. We still were not getting any money, but for the most part we didn't need any. The Canton Negroes began to take good care of us, and we were never hungry. A Negro service station owner let us have gas on credit. What pleased me most was that many of our teen-agers had come back. I had really missed them.

*Chapter*

T W E N T Y - F O U R

Toward the end of August, it suddenly seemed as if everyone in our group was leaving. The Jackson high school students went back to school, one girl left for New York to get married, and one guy went to California. Soon George and I were the only ones left. To make things worse, the high schools in the Canton area were opening in a week. Dave promised to bring in a couple of more people, but meanwhile it seemed as though George and I would have to do all the work ourselves. We also had to find a new place to stay, since Sonny and his wife went back together. This was a problem because people just didn't want to risk letting us live with them. Within a week, however, we found a place which was ideal—a two-apartment house. One apartment for the girls and one for the boys. "Great," I thought, "just when everyone's leaving."

I was so busy moving into the new place, that I completely forgot that the August 28 March on Washington was only a few days off. I had been planning to go ever since it was announced. Suddenly it was August 26 and I didn't even have a ride lined up. There had been no room for me and other staff

people on the bus, since there were so many local Negroes who wanted to make the trip.

Reverend King and his wife were driving up and offered to take me, though they warned me it would be quite risky driving through most of the Southern states in an integrated car. I told them I was willing to take the chance if they were.

On August 27 at 6 A.M., we headed for Washington. There were five of us, three whites (Reverend King, his wife, and Joan Trumpaner), and two Negroes (Bob, a student returning to Harvard, and myself). In the beginning, we were all a little uneasy, but somehow we made it through the Southern states without incident.

After driving all day and night, we arrived at the grounds of the Washington Monument just in time for the march, and joined the section of Southern delegates. Up on a podium near our section, various celebrities—Mahalia Jackson, Odetta, Peter, Paul and Mary—were singing. During a break in the entertainment the Mississippi delegates were asked to come to the podium and sing freedom songs. I got up and followed the others to the platform reluctantly. I think I was the only girl from Mississippi with a dress on. All the others were wearing denim skirts and jeans. We sang a couple of songs and shortly after, it was announced that the march to the Lincoln Memorial was about to start. Thousands of people just took off, leaving most of their leaders on the podium. It was kind of funny to watch the leaders run to overtake the march. The way some of them had been leading the people in the past, perhaps the people were better off leading themselves, I thought.

The march was now in full motion, and there were people everywhere. Some were on crutches, some in wheel chairs, and some were actually being carried down Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues. There were all kinds of signs and placards—one group of men acting as pallbearers carried a casket that said BURY JIM CROW.

By the time we got to Lincoln Memorial, there were

already thousands of people there. I sat on the grass and listened to the speakers, to discover we had "dreamers" instead of leaders leading us. Just about every one of them stood up there dreaming. Martin Luther King went on and on talking about his dream. I sat there thinking that in Canton we never had time to sleep, much less dream.

I left Washington two days later with Joan Trumpaner and the Kings. As we drove out of town, no one had very much to say. I guess they were thinking about the historic event that had just taken place. I was thinking about it too, and I was also thinking that this was the first time in well over a year I had been away from my work with the Movement and away from Mississippi. I had really forgotten what it was like to be out of an atmosphere of fear and threats. I had even gone to a movie. The last movie I had seen had been in New Orleans the previous summer. "It's kind of strange," I thought. "I never really think of going to a movie when I'm in Mississippi." There was always so much work, so many problems, and so many threats that I hardly ever thought of anything except how to best get the job done and survive from day to day.

I noticed that Washington seemed like a deserted town compared to two days ago. How had 250,000 people disappeared so quickly? I seriously began to wonder whether those 250,000 people had made any impact on Congress.

As we began to drive through Virginia, I started to worry about the trip back. I was now the only Negro in the car. The white people of the South must really have some strong feelings about the march by now, I thought. I knew when we returned to Mississippi, we would be faced with twice as many threats and acts of violence. And maybe we'd never even get back to Mississippi. After all, we had to go back through the rest of those backward-assed states. We were going to go through Alabama and I knew damned well how bad that state was.

Reverend King must have thought of the dangers of the