

Mississippi Letters -- Epilogue

24 June 2013, updated 15 July

After I left Columbia and headed home, hoping to work out a way to return for the fall and winter, I was faced with an ultimatum from the University of Chicago that I would lose my essential scholarship if I disenrolled for a term. I knuckled under and returned to the University, and except for a few mail exchanges with community friends early on, I lost touch with Columbia and put it behind me.

In October of 2012 I was corresponding about my Mississippi experiences with a woman who was writing a children's book about the Freedom Summer when I got the urge to find out what happened to Curt Styles. I didn't find much on the Internet, but what was there seemed to have been provided by someone named Ira Grupper. One of these sources provided an email address, and we exchanged email. We were on the verge of telephoning, when I suddenly had to attend to family matters, and then somehow lost touch with him, and lost track of the piece on Curt that he sent.

When my 1965 letters surfaced this year, I renewed the search for Curt, and came upon the references to a book I hadn't heard of, *Transformed: A White Mississippi Pastor's Journey Into Civil Rights and Beyond*, by a Rev. William G. McAtee, from which I learned that Ira was a white northern volunteer who had been working in Georgia and had come to a conference in Hattiesburg, where he was recruited by Curt to work in Columbia, probably shortly after Sam and Ann and Sara and I left.

Rev. McAtee's bio for his book brought back to me Mayor McLean's attempts at moderation, and made me wonder if Rev. McAtee was the white minister who approached us there. I was excited by the potential of the book to show me how things looked from the "other side," and ordered a copy.

Update: July 2, 2013

Bill McAtee's book arrived, and I glanced through it to pick up some of how he was seeing what I only knew through my own eyes. It was fascinating. I found he has been living in Lexington, KY, found him online, and called him up. We had a wonderful talk for almost an hour. He told me about working with Chris Watts, director of the Marion County Historical Society in developing the book, and they apparently had been trying to locate me due to references to me in Mayor McLean's papers (apparently it didn't occur to them to try "Dick" instead of "Richard"). Ira Grupper turned out to have been another *major* source of information for the book. Bill sent me scans of a forgotten Christmas card I'd sent to the mayor that year, and a copy of Ira's lost piece on Curt Styles.

When I had emailed the Marion County Historical Society in mid-June to try to ascertain exactly where in Columbia the Courthouse was, I had several exchanges with someone named Chris Watt, who was very helpful. Not knowing him, I did not want to reveal who I was or why I wanted the information. Bill McAtee's reference to Chris removed that barrier and I wrote to

Chris. It turned out he had been the one searching for me, and when I contacted him recently, the name rang a bell, but he couldn't place it. It was wonderful to connect with him. I gave him the link to the draft of the site. He was gratifyingly excited to have come upon photographs of the picketing. He'd heard of it, but as far as he knew there was no extant photographic record of it.

Update: July 5, 2013

In further correspondence, Chris and I were acknowledging frustration at having been unable to locate the others who worked on the project. I decided to try one more time. Sam Gross's name was impossibly common. Ann Marsh turned up a lot of people whose name was "Something Ann Marsh." But I actually found Sara Shumer! I called her and talked briefly, and sent her a link to this site.

Update: July 11, 2013

It's interesting how this brings all kinds of things out of the woodwork. I sent a link to the site to some of my activist friends. One of them, Naomi Stauber, wrote back to say she was looking through the Mississippi materials and it brought back all kinds of memories. She said:

My family moved in August, 1955, from Long Island, New York, to Spartanburg, South Carolina. Culture Shock does not begin to describe. My Father was the only Rabbi in 70 miles to the West, 30 miles to SW, 60 miles to the North, you get the picture. He was invited to join the Spartanburg County Ministerial Assn., as the previous Rabbi had developed a good relationship with the group. It took five years of my Father asking at appropriate times, "If Jesus came to Earth today, which Church would he attend, a white Church or a black Church?" and asking the question to please invite Black Ministers to join the Ministerial Assn.

Five years, 1960, and they did invite Black Ministers to the organization. Five more years, 1965, and a Black Minister became the first Black President of the Sptg County Ministerial Assn. "The Uptown Nine" (the nine largest and most powerful Churches in the County, most located on Main Street in Sptg.) had moved to a point of Divine Intervention, I imagine. 1980, the Uptown Nine walked down the center aisle of my Father's Synagogue for Friday Night Services and to help him celebrate his 25th anniversary with his Congregation. Daddy was always part of the Uptown Nine.

A long time resident of Sptg is very involved in the Community and works closely with childrens' groups and anything that has to do with Peace. A dear friend of mine, I helped her host a luncheon in her home 20 years ago. Civic, religious and community leaders came to talk and coordinate. Several elderly Black Ministers were introduced to me as they entered. Tears came easily to their eyes as they recognized my last name and war stories ensued. I knew a lot, but they knew so much more. The genuine love they held for Daddy was full of lifetimes of respect.

My Mother was very protective of my Father and did not allow any Congregants to visit him in the hospital when he had his stroke. She did allow all the Uptown Nine Ministers who came and cried knowing Daddy would be leaving soon. She knew they were his best friends. I guess someone should write a book.

Update: July 14, 2013

Further correspondence with Sara Shumer provided enough information to include her on the "people" page.

[For the complete set of my Mississippi 1964-65 letters,
see <http://dickatlee.com/issues/mississippi>]