

LETTER FROM AN AMERICUS JAIL, ABOUT ORGANIZING: by Randy Battle

I have found that it's better to go into a community if you are planning on staying for a while, and first getting to know people and letting people get to know you. Now you can become known and get to know people in many ways. You can first start by going to the churches, cafes, school dances, community club meetins, if there are such. And at all of these, whatever you go to, you should talk to people, and try to get them to either let you come around to their homes or you ask them to yours.

If you are young, like most of us are,, then you must be careful about how you go about talking to older people. The best way to get to the older people is to have something to offer. If you have ever been in the field, often it is found that older people like to talk about jobs, bad streets, no street lights, bad housing, and how the white school is so much better than their own. People talk about these because most of the time they don't know enough about any of the other things that affect them to talk about them. So the thing for you to do is to kind of ask questions and answer them at the same time. To do this will, or would, give people other things to think about.

After you have made yourself know you are then able to ask things of the people. You can ask them why they are living in such a bad house and get an answer without offending the person whom you are talking to. But without being known you just can't talk truthfully with a man or woman who only makes \$10 a week in Miss Ann's kitchen, or who come for Mr. Charles for \$25 or \$30 a week, and look for an answer. I have found that now they will tell why they don't do anything or go along with the things the Movement does. I find mostly people will say that M.L. King won't give me a job when I lose the one I have, nor will he give me any food for my hungry children. So I am going to keep away from them Movement people like my boss told me, because she is the one who is going to help me.

What I will say is that the first thing you do when you go into a community is to get to know as many people as you can, not as a leader or anything of that kind, but as a person tired of living in bad houses on bad streets without lights, no place for your child to go after school, and not a very good school.

I don't think you should worry about making contact when you go into a community, because if you do the things I have stated heretofore then you have made your contacts. Also, by this time you should know who the key people are, whatever that means. Maybe I should ask what kind of people are considered as key people. Then maybe I could speak to that. I don't know how to get people into a leadership position. But there are ways, I know. Sometimes you just kind of force them one way or another by asking them to do little things, whatever may be the situation where you are or maybe where he's working. All people are not the same; it takes more to get some people going than others.

But to me there is something in your letter of which I have read, that has some real meaning to me. And that is how do you overcome fear, apathy, and suspicion -- not only in the hard-core areas, but everywhere there is a movement underway. I don't believe anyone knows how to overcome these. One can only say what he or she feels is the best way to overcome fear, apathy, suspicion.

Before I say what I feel, I would like to go back to what Sherrod would say when he asked people to go down in a march or sit-in. He would look at you a while, then slowly he would say, "If you can free a person's mind, then he or she is able to think." In so many words he would say if you can give a blind man 20-20 vision, then he will be able to see when he comes to a corner. How do you free one mind? In my own mind I would say somewhat in the same way you overcome apathy, fear, and suspicion.

But there is just one thing that I worry about most; and that is fear; for I believe if you can overcome fear then all of the others you can easily overcome. There are many ways to overcome fear, and for some people a few or one of the ways will help them to overcome fear. And for others it may take all of them. The way to overcome fear could be for some people registering to vote, or going downtown in a march or sit-in, or going to the police station to go someone's bond.

...

Randy Battle