

15-03

ANDREW GOODMAN 1943-1964

The story of Andrew Goodman is the story of youth activism. In critical times, when justice and inequality become intolerable, it is the young people who are prepared to face the consequences of challenging the status quo. In the last half century young men and women, often in nonviolent protests against injustice, have been gunned down in South Africa, the United States, China, France and elsewhere. Their efforts led to revolutionary changes. Today in South Africa the system of apartheid is crumbling, and in our country, the superstructure of segregation and white supremacy if not dead, is in a state of decay.

Andy Goodman was born in 1943 on the cusp of a student movement. At the time of his birth our country was waging a war against fascism in Europe. In the 1940s, millions of Jews, labor leaders and cultural minorities in Western Europe were slaughtered by a self-styled "master-race." They were exterminated in gas chambers and tortured in concentration camps because of their religion, political activity and race. In our own country congressional committees censored, investigated and jailed political and social dissidents who stood on their constitutional rights and refused to testify. It was a dark period for freedom when our constitutional guarantees were threatened by the very men who were charged with upholding them.

In contrast to a national atmosphere of mistrust and divisiveness, where people informed on former colleagues and segregation prevailed throughout the nation, Andy was raised in a racially mixed community of White, Black and Hispanic families. He played on the streets and in the playgrounds with children who came from different cultures and races.

He became aware at an early age of the differences in lifestyle and comfort between himself and his neighborhood friends. Even as a young boy, Andy had questions about these disparities. He saw the hopelessness and frustration of the "newly arrived" immigrants from Puerto Rico who had emigrated to the mainland to seek employment and a better life for their children. In discussions at home and in school he learned that language, color and religion close/doors of opportunity to people already burdened by second-class education and poverty.

As he grew into adolescence, Andy tried to understand the political and social forces that governed life in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The questions he raised grew out of the values and experiences within his family, in a school where teachers welcomed diversity and from his own observations in a multicultural community. He wondered why people were afraid to express opinions if they represented minority viewpoints. He asked why people were put in prison for refusing to inform on friends. He questioned how workers such as coal miners could organize themselves for better living conditions when they were dependent on their bosses for jobs, and he asked why citizens were denied the rights and protections granted them under our constitution.

Andy was not satisfied to read or hear about the world he was growing into. He was a born activist and wanted to learn by direct encounter and personal experience. At fifteen, he and a friend went to West Virginia to live in a coal mining town. They were disturbed by the working conditions and decided to call the Governor but were not able to find a phone booth! At seventeen Andy travelled to farming communities of Western Europe where he saw how large scale agribusiness was displacing small farmers, and at nineteen he spent the summer as a dramatics counselor at a camp for inner city children. That summer he was attacked by a gang of men who opposed the presence of interracial children in their

community. In his college years Andy worked on a construction crew and as a helper to a truck driver. His knowledge deepened in a school without walls.

But for Andy life was not all work and study. He played with the same zest and intensity that he devoted to his work. As an ardent Brooklyn Dodger fan, he arranged for a neighbor and Dodger star, Jackie Robinson, to speak at his school. Jackie, the first Black man to play in the major leagues was a hero to the students. As a clarinetist, Andy's interest in music ranged from jazz to classical, but practicing the clarinet did not always mean concentration on the music. One day, lost in fantasy, his clarinet became a baseball bat, he the great Duke Snyder, playing in Ebbets Field. He swung for the ball, hit a door knob and his "guaranteed unbreakable" instrument lay in pieces at his feet!

The theater was Andy's passion and a means through which he expressed his creative gifts. He participated in every school play beginning at an early age and continuing through high school. He wrote plays and stories one of which was performed by his classmates at graduation. His English and Dramatic Arts teacher, Richard Crosscup who fostered Andy's love for the theater wrote these words in a book on drama and self discovery in children:

. . . . It was Andy we were talking about when we described the sensitive human insights by which a twelve year old was able to get below the surface of a harsh and superficially rude person and make him as tenderly funny and as loved and—in a deep, essential way—as loving as everyone else. In his sophomore year, Andy was Marc Antony in an informal dramatization of *Julius Caesar*. His gifts were subtle and his Antony was not the flamboyant man who hardly knows where real emotion leaves off and histrionic emotion begins. He was an Antony whose quiet delivery and cunning emphases were as much

an incitation to riot as though he had blown up a storm. In junior year, Andy was the Covey in *The Plow and the Stars*. It was his marvelous face which, in the tragic moment, expressed a more disquieting self-revelation than what O'Casey had written seemed to demand. In his senior year he was the author of the stream-of-consciousness story some of his classmates dramatized with readers and a pantomimist. His own role in the senior dramatics program was strangely prophetic. It is best described by one of his classmates in the words she spoke at the dedication of his tombstone:

"Four years ago I wrote a play in which Andy had the role of a prince who lived life and died to preserve his integrity. Andy gave the part a vitality and impact which my self-conscious attempts at poetic drama did not deserve, and I knew then that this work was one of the most beautiful gifts I would ever receive."

It would be a great over-simplification to claim that Andy's participation in creative dramatics shaped the humanity which dictated his decision to go South. But it would be to mistake him altogether not to know that this decision was the direct result of the sensitivities, insights and integrity which characterized both his personal relationships and his creative work.

One time when Andy was in sixth grade a lonely boy got himself involved in a wrangle with the other boys and found himself so overwhelmed he ran home and said he would never come to school again. The boys discussed the problem very earnestly, and it was Andy whom they dispatched

to the boy's house, feeling that he alone among them could reassure the boy and bring him back—and Andy did. . . . It can be said that what Andy Goodman took to Mississippi when he was twenty was the perceptiveness, the integrity and the humanity which his boyhood had shaped.

Richard Crosscup, *Children and Dramatics*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1966

Andy entered college with a major in dramatic arts which he later changed to sociology yet he always maintained his love for the theater, and throughout his college days he acted with an Off-Broadway repertory company. Real life issues and the creative arts were joined in the short span of Andy's life and allowed him to drink deeply from his political, social and cultural heritage. He knew the pain of those less fortunate than he and gave much tenderness and love to his family and friends.

Andy's father, a poet, humanist and engineer, wrote a poem to his three sons when Andy was only five and a half years old. It expressed, with unusual sensitivity, the depth of his understanding toward his children.

And Andy—as the strength of my own excursions
 Into the realm of jubilee and laughter
 Into the peace of love and beloved
 Into the frost of bruise and hurt
 Into the fantasy of idols above him
 Into the knowledge that good is for him
 And from him flows a tide of belonging
 That gives to the giver his own desirings.

These lines written by Robert Goodman caught the essence of Andy, and like his father, he too expressed insight and feelings in poetry. The year before the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project, Andy wrote this poem in an English class at Queens College. It was based on A.E. Housman's *To an Athlete Dying Young*:

How dismally the day
Screams out and blasts the night.
What disaster you will say,
To start another fight.

See how heaven shows dismay
As her stars are scared away;
As the sun ascends with might
With his hot and awful light.

He shows us babies crying
We see the black boy dying
We close our eyes and choke our sighs
And look into the dreadful skies.

Then peacefully the night
Puts out the reddened day
And the jaws that used to bite
Are sterile where we lay.

In the Spring of his Junior year at college, Aaron Henry and Fannie Lou Hammer, two veteran Black Mississippi activists spoke to the students about the oppressive conditions in their state. They presented plans for a summer project and were recruiting students who, if they were under twenty-^{ONE}~~five~~ years of age, required their parents' permission to sign up for the project. Andy saw the Freedom Summer 1964 Project as an opportunity to participate in a movement that could have positive ramifications on race relations and the rights of Black people. It was inevitable that he would decide to join with others to register voters, teach in freedom schools and work in community centers. Andy's friend, Ralph Engleman, who spoke at his memorial service said, "Andy's decision to go to Mississippi was the result of a simple

ability to perceive and feel the reality of the social evil which pervades our society. And for Andy the step from conviction to action made quietly but firmly came naturally."

The young activists who took part in the 1964 project and the three who lost their lives, Andy Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner were brave men and women. They are part of a long tradition of youth committed to justice and equality. The poet Stephen Spender memorialized and paid tribute to young men and women who were committed to the cause of justice and democracy. In 1938 young people came from all over the world. They formed an International Brigade to join with the Spanish people in a fierce struggle to preserve their democratic society and defeat an infamous dictator. They were drawn to Spain just as young activists thirty years later answered a call to go South because they believed, as Abraham Lincoln did, in a government "of the people, by the people and for the people." The last verse of Spender's poem, *I Think Continually of Those Who Were Truly Great*, although written for the Freedom Fighters in Spain, is a tribute to committed youth at any time in history.

Near the sun, near the snow, in the highest fields
See how these names are feted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.
The names of those who in their lives fought for life
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun they travelled a short while toward the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

Youth activism has been, is now, and will continue to be a flexible but unbreakable fiber in the fabric of today's society. We who are part of the tradition of activism can continue to play a role in perpetuating youth participation in social change. At this writing, the Andrew Goodman Foundation will make that effort by working with young people to develop Freedom Summer '94. The legacy of Andy Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner can be an inspiration to the youth of the late 20th century. They can stand on the shoulders of their predecessors and continue to struggle for a just society.