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KOINONIA NEWSLETTER #29

AMERICUS, GA.

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On the day before school was to open four years ago, three white young people from Koinonia, Lora Browne, Jan Jordan and Bill Wittkamper, were notified that they would not be admitted to the white Americus High School. The School Board gave no explanation as to why these three were the only students from the county to be turned away. All efforts to get the Board to change its action failed. Finally, with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, Koinonia won a Federal suit against the Board restraining it from barring these students because of the "religious and social beliefs" of their parents. They were ordered admitted, but no court has the power to change the climate of hostility with which they were surrounded.

This June all three graduated from high schools in different parts of the country. Bill Wittkamper, who transferred after one year in Americus, graduated from Evanston, Ill. Lora Browne, whose family (Con & Ora Browne) moved to Knoxville, Tenn., just before her senior year, was graduated from a high school there. Jan Jordan put in all four years at Americus High and intended to graduate very quietly. It didn't happen that way.

Like other seniors, she invited her friends to the graduation. Unlike other seniors, some of her friends were Negroes. When they arrived at the gate of the stadium, where the exercises were to be held, they were turned away by police and school authorities. Once again all negotiations failed, and Jan, who was then in her cap and gown waiting for the procession to begin, was informed that her friends were not being admitted. She then stepped out of line, walked to the head of it and said to the faculty member in charge: "I think my friends have as much right to come to my graduation as anyone else's friends do." With this, she started walking toward the stands, where several thousand people were expectantly waiting for the procession to begin. They watched in amazement as this lone senior, followed by her father and kid brother (her mother stayed at the gate with those who had been barred), walked steadily toward them, slowly climbed to the top of the stands and sat down. Then the other seniors marched out on the field and seated themselves on the platform facing the stands--and Jan. After speeches by honor students on "Moral Responsibility" and "Reverence", each graduate was called to the rostrum and given a diploma. Jan's name was not called.

Next day, because she felt that some might not have understood her strange action the night before, Jan placed an ad in the Americus paper. It was headed: "WHY I DID NOT GRADUATE WITH MY CLASS AT AMERICUS HIGH", and stated simply that because her friends were not admitted on the same basis as other's, she felt unable to participate.

Following this, Koinonia challenged the right of the School Board to choose the friends of graduating seniors, and at the same time began pressing for immediate integration of the schools. Without going into all of the details, we might say simply that when the schools opened this fall, the Board had agreed to accept any Negro who applied, with no restrictions. There are now four Negroes enrolled in the Americus High School.

After winning a \$500 scholarship for her part in the civil rights struggle, Jan has now entered Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. Lora Browne, because of her exceptional abilities, has a full four-year scholarship at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. And Bill Wittkamper will be lending his much-needed energies to the work here at Koinonia.

Jim Jordan was another Koinonia graduate. He received his A.B. degree from Mercer University in Macon, Ga., with a double major in English and History. Since Jim grew up on the farm, he is familiar with every aspect of it, and we have come to rely heavily on his mechanical and electronic abilities to keep our wide array of machines moving. All summer he has been overhauling our office procedures, installing equipment where necessary, and bringing the mailing list up to date. Jim will be on hand this fall to see

that your orders are handled promptly and efficiently, and that we stay in closer touch with you than we have in the past.

You will find enclosed with this letter a brochure about our friend of many years, Ashton Jones. We know of no man in America who has fought longer, more devotedly and courageously and with more self-abandon than Ashton. His treatment at the hands of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta is a cruel injustice and is a disgrace to America and Christendom. At a time when the civil rights bill makes it a crime to turn citizens away, because of their color, from restaurants, hotels, schools and other public places, it would be unpardonable depravity to send this saintly man to the penitentiary for insisting that all men be admitted to churches as well. We commend Ashton Jones to you, and urge that you lend him all possible assistance.

The boycott which was imposed in 1956 and came very near to wrecking us financially has been gradually eroded away over the past few years, and the last remnant of it fell a few weeks ago when some trucks spread some agricultural lime on our land. It was the culmination of long efforts on the part of many people. Just before her death, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt laid our plight before the Secretary of Agriculture, who issued directives which, if obeyed, would have brought delivery of the lime two years ago. This was not done, and when all other efforts failed, we turned once more to our faithful ally, the American Civil Liberties Union. They took the matter up again with the Secretary of Agriculture. This time an agent from the Inspector General's department was immediately dispatched to the scene here. When he had completed his investigation, the local lime dealers had agreed to honor any government purchase order issued to Koinonia Farm. Shortly thereafter we got delivery from the first dealer we approached. While we are happy to get the lime, we are ashamed that it had to come from the promptings of government instead of God. Sadly we confess that at present the laws of men are more potent than the grace of God in the ordering of human affairs. May it cease to be so.

With the lifting of the boycott, we have been increasingly able to stand on our own feet again. Each year since 1956 we have been showing a loss, until our debt stood at about \$60,000. The past year, however, we not only stayed out of the red, but came out ahead about \$5,000, which was applied to the debt. We feel that we can carry our own weight now, without further financial help. But we do want you and your friends to buy our pecans, fruit-cakes and pecandy, for this is almost our only source of income. Please buy them, however, not out of charity but only if you feel you get your money's worth. To all of you who through the years have borne us on your love, prayers and good will, we send our heart-felt thanks and warm greetings.

## KOINONIA COMMUNITY

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