

MEMO FROM A MONROE JAIL

MAE MALLORY

GREAT SHEETS OF RAIN were falling that Tuesday, August 22, 1961 when I drove into Monroe. I didn't see the sign on the side of the road that indicates that Monroe is the Revival Center; neither did I see the cross that stands tall over the courthouse. I can't really say that I thought my trip would be uneventful, for it was because of so many events that I can identify with that I thought I'd come to Monroe and see for myself.

Many people remember Monroe from the infamous "Kissing Case"—the case of two little black boys who were kissed by a little white girl around their same age (between seven and nine). This was a crime so serious in the eyes of the whites that these two little kids were jailed and held without benefit of counsel or comfort of their parents. They were convicted of "intended rape on a white female" and sentenced to the reformatory until they should reach the age of twenty-one. Monroe was unknown to me during this particular episode but even then I could certainly identify with the plight of my brothers and sisters down there—having been born in the heart of the black belt of Georgia and bearing the worst damnation as far as American bourgeois mores are concerned, a very black skin.

Sometime later a black woman who worked as a maid was kicked down the stairs of the local hotel in Monroe because a white patron decided that "she was making too much noise." With the help of the local chapter of the NAACP, then led by Robert Williams, this case was brought to court. (I have learned that even to bring a white person to court in this town is no small feat.) The case was kicked out of court with about as much force as the white patron used on the black maid. "There is never a conviction of a white person for a crime against a black person in Monroe," you'll hear many say.

Incidents where white persons take out their frustrations on the

This article was written for FREEDOMWAYS by Mrs. Mallory while in the Union County Jail, Monroe, North Carolina, before bond was raised to free her.

blacks are numerous. There is an instance where a white man raped a black pregnant woman in full view of the victim's child and a white neighbor. When the case was taken to court, the prosecutor (down here they call him Solicitor General) got up and pointed to the attacker's wife and said: "See there sitting next to this man, the beautiful white flower of the South. This is what he has waiting at home for his return. What does he want with that—" pointing an accusing finger at the black woman in the case. "If this man touched that thing in any way he was probably drunk and having some fun," he concluded. Of course the rapist was set free.

Oh yes, this is the attitude of the prosecutor. I know it well for he has given me the same treatment. He pointed his finger accusingly at me—only a few days ago, and with a scowl on his face he inflamed the already prejudiced jury by saying: "Imagine sitting in a dark strange place with a woman like that . . . sitting with a rifle aimed at your head." Yes, I remember the solicitor from the way he was when I had my day in court. It is easy to imagine what we was like that day to a poor woman who had no political training and was terribly embarrassed by the way she had been victimized.

The black women of Monroe, fed up with this type of treatment, vowed that "never again, would a black woman sit and be belittled before a crowd under the pretense of trying the assailant." This was the circumstance which moved Rob Williams to declare that there was no justice in the courts for black people and that there was no other alternative but to "counter mob-violence violently." It was at this point that I heard of Robert Williams. His words made a profound impression on me. I vowed then and there to support this man in his efforts down south.

The national office of the NAACP wanted to suspend Rob for making his pronouncements. How they could even think of such a thing was hard for me to conceive. On the other hand various little groups in New York City did many things trying to focus attention on Rob Williams and his militant group in Monroe. The Klansmen were out to get him. He was blacklisted from jobs and almost daily attacks were made on his life. He needed money to live and to continue his work.

In June of 1961, Robert Williams and some local youths decided that they would try to swim in the city's only public tax supported swimming pool. Even though black citizen's taxes help to maintain the pool, black residents are denied the use of it. After another firm denial of the use of the pool Rob Williams and his group decided to

picket the pool. This provided great sport for the local "yokels" who started to fire above the heads of the pickets. The chief of police and his officers thought this was fun and saw no need to stop the shooting.

Realizing that he and his followers did not enjoy the protection of the law, Rob Williams and his group went back to their community (Newtown), the black section of the city, and armed themselves with their rifles. The mirth disappeared like magic when the police saw Williams and his men marching "heavily armed to swim in a pool." Tension was thick enough to be cut with a knife that day. It was reasonably sure Rob and his men meant business, and if the fireworks were to start it was definitely a fact that all the casualties weren't going to be black. The authorities recognized this fact and it was they who ordered the pool to be closed to all—both black and white.

The weather was hot during that summer of '61 and so were the tempers of the citizens of Monroe—black and white. The white power structure of Monroe decided that without a doubt Rob Williams had to go. First they tried arson . . . many fires were started around the town and Robert Williams was named as the culprit. The authorities could not make any of the arson charges stick so they were forced to think of new ways and means.

They started a war of nerves. Rob's telephone would ring all night and all day. Most of the calls were crank calls. One woman later admitted that she was paid three dollars a week to call and harass Rob. Williams applied to every law enforcement agency in the country for aid and protection. Even the newspapers refused to print the story of the besieged black community of Monroe, N. C.

In desperation, Rob called his friends and supporters in New York (and elsewhere) and asked us to do what we could to help him get aid and protection for the black citizens of his community.

The weekend of August 19-20, 1961, Rob Williams called us in New York and expressed doubts he could hold out for another week. He informed us that the Freedom Riders—fresh out of Parchman's Penitentiary in Mississippi were now in Monroe; that they had formed, with the local black youth, the Monroe Nonviolent Action Committee. He told us that the racists had become emboldened by the local youth's failure to fight back since they had adopted temporarily the philosophy of passive resistance. Rob explained that things were in an explosive state and someone from the North should come and see so that they could record the events.

Naturally, we thought of Julian Mayfield because of his extensive knowledge of the situation. Julian had written an article for *Commentary* magazine and had submitted an article to the *New York Post*. Unfortunately, the *Post* refused to print the story. They thought it was too explosive. Perhaps if they had told the story of Monroe, the situation would have been saved.

Julian Mayfield convinced me that I should go to Monroe with him. At first I didn't see any practical purpose for my visit but I finally consented when he explained that Mabel (Mrs. Robert Williams) could use my moral support. We traveled to North Carolina by car. Julian was driving and I sat chatting about what I expected to find in Monroe.

The rain storm which came up just as we entered Union County, we both agreed, was a blessing in disguise because just a few weeks before another black visitor's car had been forced off the road into a ditch. Yes, luckily for us, we thought, it was raining so hard that it was impossible to tell the color of the occupants of the car even if one could recognize the license plates as out of state.

Interestingly enough, as we drove up to Rob's house, the sun burst out bright and shiny. A crowd of people were standing on the porch to greet us, to welcome us to Monroe, North Carolina, "Terror City, U.S.A." they called it.

The population of Monroe is about eleven thousand; one third of it being black. The town is in the Piedmont area, in the south central part of the state. The largest industrial plant in the area is located just outside the city limits, the Yale and Towne Lock Manufacturing Company. Most of the employees are white. Then there is the Carolina Textile Mills, reportedly the oldest in the city. The rest of industry is small—so small that it is said that the owner and his family run them with as little outside help as possible. Where there are workers, I am told, the working conditions are terrible because *there are no unions in Union County*.

While on the subject, it is brought to mind, a recent full-page ad which appeared in the local papers. In large bold type the caption read: STRANGERS IN OUR COUNTY. The contents of the article stated that employee-employer relationships were good until "the strangers came." It further stated that there was "friendly understanding" until this talk about unions. Actually it is the old story that is retold time and time again to the black people about our relationship with the whites. This time it is told to the white worker about unions.

The housing conditions in Monroe are deplorable. The poor whites

live in the same type hovels as the blacks. Their children are just as ragged and hungry. By the power structure's own admission, Union County is the poorest county of the whole poverty-plagued state of North Carolina. The only advantage a white worker has over a black person is the right to take out his frustration by committing acts of cruelty on the black community. In other words as one of the cars that boasted a sign in the Klan parade (August of 1961) brazenly put it, OPEN SEASON ON COONS—NO LICENSE NEEDED. What a pity these poor whites can't recognize their real enemy as did the poor whites in Harlan County, Kentucky. There is not even a government surplus food program in Union County; neither is there a free school lunch program. The whites are brainwashed into believing that they don't need surplus food or free school lunches. They are sent to fill their empty bellies by committing mayhem on those in the black community.

We realize the enemy isn't really the poor, illiterate and naked "red-neck." The sad part is that this poor, white wretch still does not know that we are not his enemy. So the poor whites made a nuisance of themselves by attacking the pickets who were demonstrating for better conditions for the blacks, that were bound to bring about better conditions for the whites too.

The Freedom Riders had been in Monroe a full week before I arrived. They picketed the Court House to end segregation and to grant welfare to the starving people, black and white. Their aim and purpose were misunderstood by the townspeople. The local "yokels" were blind to anything but what they saw as integration and miscegenation. The local whites spat on the picketers, kicked, hit and called them all kinds of vile names. Richard Griswold, standing on the sidelines, was beaten and had his camera taken away from him by the police. Ed Bromberg, another Freedom Rider, was shot in the stomach by an air rifle. No arrests were made . . . "after all, the damage was only done to niggers and white niggers." The term "white nigger" is a product of police chief A. A. Mauney's mind.

Instances of cruelty on our people in Monroe are known far and wide. Constance Lever, a white woman, came all the way from England to see for herself if the stories about Monroe were true. Miss Lever joined the kids on the picket line and tried to integrate a few lunch counters. One drugstore (Secrest) finally relented and invited them all in to have cokes. The group came back elated. They thought that they were making progress. The very next day as our Crusaders came marching home singing, an elderly white woman ran out of her

shack and chased them with a butcher's knife. Her preacher husband hurled bottles at them and called them by most unholy and ungodly epithets.

All this time I stayed at the house and helped Mabel Williams with her household chores. We cooked, shopped, washed, ironed, answered the phone, wrote letters, and did all the little things around the house that everyone must do. Never on any occasion did I join the picket line. Not that I am against picketing; my trade union background will bear that out. But I cannot let someone hit me or kick me and remain passive. It was agreed by all that I should stay at home.

Sunday morning August 27 the sun rose bright and shiny. Both Julian and I were somewhat disappointed that we hadn't left for home already. We decided the klan had bluffed and was afraid to attack. We thought Rob was relatively safe in Newtown and we were free to leave. I packed my bags and waited for Julian who was staying nearby at a neighbor's house. Robert Williams asked us not to leave yet. He said the Klan was most vicious on Sunday, and that all the worst incidents happened on Sunday, the bus-burning in Anniston, the swimming pool incident in Monroe. We agreed to wait. Besides the women in Newtown had promised to bring many good things so we could all have dinner together.

In the meantime the Freedom Riders and the local black youth decided they would picket some more. Surely on Sunday they thought they could warm the hearts of these white Christians in the Revival Center. The Monroe Nonviolent Action Committee decided to picket the mayor's house. Robert Williams gave them a stern warning against this and told them they could only picket public property. With that they set out for town and city hall.

At about four o'clock we heard gunfire that seemed to be coming from the direction of the court house. A few minutes later a car drove up in front of Rob Williams' house and told us that the pickets were being beaten and shot and that a racist had burst open James Foreman's head. People jumped into every available vehicle and started towards the courthouse. Most of them came back and said cops had the area completely blocked off and no one could get in or out of Newtown. Tempers were at boiling point and everyone seemed to be talking at once. At this time a police officer drove into Boyte Street and stopped in front of Rob Williams' house. "OK.," he said, "all you niggers are under arrest. Throw your guns out here in the street." This dialogue enraged the crowd. Rob stepped out and

quieted the people. He then explained to the policeman that no one had violated any law. He asked information about the kids that were mobbed downtown. The police officer claimed he had no knowledge of anything that had happened around the courthouse. The excited people yelled for the cop's life—"Kill him!" "Let me at him!" was all I could hear. Some one suggested taking the cop's clothes off and sending him back to town nude. This idea I thought awfully funny and I joined in the laughter. Rob rushed the cop out of the area and returned to admonish me for losing my "decorum." I still thought it an excellent idea as I went back into the house to help Mabel with the food. As soon as we got to the kitchen that is in the back of the house we heard another uproar. I ran at Rob's heels to the front of the house. There in the midst of the crowd stood a scared white couple. The people of Newtown were yelling that they weren't going to let them get away. Everyone sort of gravitated towards Rob Williams' house. He walked down his front steps to a tree that stands in his yard. The elderly white couple begged and pleaded for Rob to save them. At this point a small private plane flew low over the gathered crowd. Rob ran into the house and the white couple followed close behind. They even got between Rob and me and I was standing on the porch.

Robert Williams warned the people that they weren't to come into his house. He commanded me to stay by the door to keep everyone out that didn't belong in the house. Robert Williams talked with the chief of police. I don't know who called whom because I was caught up in all the excitement. I do know that Rob told me we had to leave because the police chief said he'd have us all hanging by our heels and that they were coming through and "wipe out that nest of niggers."

I finally made my way back to New York City. There on the front page of most of the New York papers was a story claiming that Robert F. Williams was wanted in Monroe, N. C. for kidnapping a Mr. and Mrs. G. Bruce Stegall of Marshville, N. C. The papers claimed that Rob was armed and dangerous and should be approached with caution. Every thinking black person knows this really means shoot first and ask questions later. I did not know where Rob was at that time, but instinct told me to lie low and that's just what I did. Thursday I read that I too, along with Harold Reape, Richard Crowder and John Lowry had been indicted for kidnapping this same old white couple. Richard Crowder and Harold Reape, I wouldn't have known again if my life depended on it. I remember John Lowry only be-

cause he looks so much like the movie actor Anthony Perkins and I had just seen Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" shortly before I left New York for Monroe.

After learning of my indictment I thought it would be best if I left New York and went to a strange town with a black population. Cleveland, Ohio came to my mind. That Friday before Labor Day I caught a bus for Cleveland. The bus station was so crowded that the authorities couldn't tell me from any other black workingclass woman. I arrived in Cleveland that Saturday morning and tried to stay incommunicado and incognito as well. This worked for about six weeks, or at least until Rob and his family were safe in Cuba. But on Thursday night, October 11, 1961, twenty-five members of the FBI swooped down on my landlord's house to arrest me. It literally rained cops. They grabbed me up so fast that they nearly ran off and left a few of their men stranded without rides back to their headquarters.

We set up the Cleveland office of the Monroe Defense in a five-room apartment at 1289 East 115 Street. The rent was steep, \$30 per week but we had to get established and time was against us. Bernard Berkman was retained as my attorney to handle the legal aspects of the case while the Monroe Defense Committee and I assumed the responsibility of the public relations.

At first Cleveland was extremely cold to me, an unknown, and the Monroe Defense Committee—a group with a way out philosophy of self-defense against mobsters. All the so-called respectable organizations slammed their doors in our faces. The city councilmen whose ward I lived in claimed I should be sent back. Things were really rough.

March 1, 1962 I was put in jail without bail after I had been free to walk the streets of Cleveland for 5½ months. *I remained in jail for one whole year.* I had committed no crime in Cleveland, nor had I violated any stipulation of bail. Arbitrarily the authorities of Cleveland, Ohio, threw me in jail hoping to destroy me and my fighting little committee. We were not destroyed, our bonds grew tighter. We were forced to give up the five-room place and move into three unheated back rooms. Nevertheless the Monroe Defense Committee fought on.

Election time rolled around and every candidate that had publicly denounced us lost except one. Every candidate that had publicly supported us won except one. The black communities and some of the whites too had let it be known that they were solidly behind that

determined little group called the Monroe Defense Committee with a dynamic young fellow named Clarence Seniors at its head.

After an unprecedented fight for bail was won I walked out of Cuyahoga County jail again. This time under \$15,000 bond. We carried the fight against extradition to every court in the land. Each time we were turned down. In spite of our numerous demonstrations, picket lines and rallies, the courts would not hear the case, nor would the governor intercede on my behalf. All efforts failed against extradition but the case was made widely known, and we found many true friends in Cleveland. Friday night, January 10, 1964 I was extradited from Cleveland back to Monroe, North Carolina, the Angola of the U.S.A. The trip down was uneventful thanks to the groundwork laid by the Monroe Defense Committee. Clarence Seniors was already here when they brought me in—they meaning the sheriff, D. S. Griffin, his wife, Mrs. Griffin and a deputy named Kenneth Helms. The black community had been so intimidated it was hard to find a house suitable for a headquarters.

On our arrival in Monroe the two local Afro-American codefendants said they wanted to disassociate themselves with the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants and identify themselves with the Monroe Defense Committee. This we realized would be an additional financial burden, but it should at least help to clarify some of the issues around the two committees. This also created somewhat of a problem as to the defense. Not that we expected any justice in the courts, but we at least wanted to put up the best legal fight we possibly could.

The Trial

It would be senseless to go into all of the details about the selection of the jury. The jury was selected. The solicitor general made sure that it was lily white. A black person didn't stand a chance in the jury box, the same as a black person didn't stand a chance in the courtroom.

First of all my attorney, Walter S. Haffner, was dragged into the case at zero hour. He didn't even know that he was to defend the other two Afro-American defendants. Haffner was summoned after a misunderstanding with attorney Len Holt who was to represent me. Mr. Holt wanted a change of venue and I disagreed with the idea because Union County brought the charges against us and I thought it only fair that the Union County authorities be exposed in their own native surroundings for the bigots they are. I think it was a proper decision and I still stick by it. To this moment the local papers

and a few Charlotte papers too are trying to prove that goodwill existed in Monroe during the trial. The final outcome proves to anyone with any grain of intelligence that the whole courtroom affair was a farce. After two days a lily white jury of six men and six women was selected. I can't say that I was satisfied with the jury. I can say it was the kind of jury that I expected. Monday started a new week and Mrs. Mabel Stegall was the state's first witness. She came to court well dressed, looking afraid. Her face was a ghostly white. Apparently she painted it with rice powder, the kind the Kabuki actors use to get that dead pale effect.

Mrs. Stegall told how their car was stopped on Winchester Avenue and Boyte Street, the very heart of Newtown, the black community. She claimed hundreds of angry armed black people were vying for opportunity to kill them. According to her testimony some colored women came up to her side of the car and took her out. She further lied that I held a rifle on her and marched her into Robert Williams' house and tied her and her husband up and marched them two doors down to an empty house called Freedom House. There, she says I sat with a rifle on them for 3½ hours and flashing a light on them once in a while. Mrs. Mabel Stegall contradicted herself several times during cross examination, but all it did was make the judge angry at my Northern Jewish lawyer embarrassing a Southern white "lady." Mr. G. Bruce Stegall was the state's next witness. Even a blind man could see that Mr. Stegall had a serious drinking problem.

On the witness stand he tried his level best to be a true blue patriotic southern white man that has been done wrong by mean Negroes. This was a hard role for Mr. G. Bruce Stegall to play even in his own theatre. He slumped down in his chair. His big eyes rolled more than any stereotype of a scared Negro. Mr. Stegall had so much trouble with his hands that even the judge had to tell him to grab the arms of the chair and hang on.

Mr. Stegall tried to back up his wife's lies to the best of his ability. He bungled the job so badly that I, one of the persons that he was trying to send to the penitentiary, felt pity for him.

Next came a pudgy little southern bigot named Jessup. The state throws away taxpayers' money by paying him as a State Bureau of Investigation agent. He rolled and twisted in the witness stand and tried to testify from some notes that he had borrowed from another agent. In any reputable courtroom, the SBI agent would have been chased from the court and fired for embarrassing the state. But we must remember this is Union County, N.C. However, the state re-

claimed part of its image in the next witness for the prosecution. This witness was SBI agent Vanderford. It is said that he was formerly with the FBI. He read from his notes statements (unsigned of course), that were supposed to have been made by my co-defendants. First he read what was supposed to have been John Lowry's statement. According to agent Vanderford, John Lowry identified me as a "loud mouthed bossy Negro woman" who dragged Mrs. Stegall out of the car just as he got in to drive the car out of the street to the curb. I seriously doubt if John Lowry is as big a fool as all that. No one who claims to be intelligent would give such an asinine and self-incriminating statement even if he wanted to smash someone he disagreed with politically.

Next, agent Vanderford read an unsigned statement that was supposed to have been Richard Crowder's. Richard Crowder said that he, Harold Reape and several hundred armed Negroes stopped a car with some white people in it and brought the people to Robert Williams' house. Then he ran home and tore up some strips of a mattress and brought them back so I could tie up the Stegalls. After realizing that he was wrong for capturing white people he and Harold Reape left until the next morning. Early the next morning they went to Robert Williams' house and got the guns. When they were arrested Richard Crowder wrote a note to his grandmother and told her it was all right to give the officers the guns—this is according to agent Vanderford's notes.

Next came big bad police chief A. A. Mauney. The guy that's going to "hang us from the court house square." Chief Mauney ordered a lot of guns to be brought in and threw them in front of the jury. He couldn't identify a single rifle as part of the weapons used in the so-called kidnap. He couldn't even identify a single gun as having come from Robert Williams' house via Richard Crowder's. Chief Mauney is a classic example of the poor and backward condition of the Union County law enforcement. After Chief Mauney's fumble the state rested its case. Actually the case should have been thrown out at that point, but remember this is Monroe, North Carolina, the Angola of the U.S.A.

For the defense of Richard Crowder, Harold Reape and myself, our attorney Walter S. Haffner read Robert and Mabel Williams deposition taken in Cuba a year earlier by attorney Conrad Lynn. John Lowry disassociated himself from the deposition. Rob and Mabel's deposition is the same as my previous statement, a simple testimony telling the truth. Next James Foreman of the Student Non-

violent Coordinating Committee came to testify in behalf of Harold Reape, Richard Crowder and myself.

James Foreman was in the midst of the violence that broke loose around the court house that August 27, 1961 that triggered the later situation in Newtown. Foreman's head was bashed by a racist in full sight of Monroe's "finest." Soaked in his own blood James Foreman was carried to jail. Nothing we had to say or was said for us made any impression on the judge and jury. When they went out to deliberate we took bets, Harold Reape said 20 minutes, Richard Crowder said 10 minutes and I said 30 minutes. Haffner hit the nail on the head. He said 35 minutes.

In exactly that time the jury came back with a guilty as charged verdict against all four of us. Friday morning, bright and early, Judge Walter Brock sentenced us all as follows: Mae Mallory, 16 to 20 years; John Lowry, 1 to 3 years; Harold Reape, 3 to 5 years; Richard Crowder, 7 to 10 years.

Normally appeal bonds are \$500. Ours were tripled to \$1,500 each. Our appearance bonds were raised by one third for the black defendants. John Lowry, the lone white defendant is the only one out at the time this is written. We three black defendants languish in Union County Jail. \$32,000 is a lot of money to raise, so we must wait as the fight goes on. We are all victims of an outlandish frame-up and now are on the sacrificial altar to pay obeisance to the decadent god of white supremacy.