

JUANITA MORROW NELSON  
**THREE WORKS**



PHOTOGRAPH BY ED HEDEMANN, 2010

## INTRODUCTION

**AUGUST 17, 2023**, is the centennial of the birth of the radical pacifist Juanita Morrow Nelson (1923–2015). Juanita lived a singular American life: she was engaged in many of the significant social movements of the second half of the twentieth century—including civil rights, war tax resistance, and simple living/back-to-the-land activism. In several instances, the events of Juanita’s life were the precursors of those struggles on the national stage: with two Howard University classmates, she participated in a sit-in that integrated a lunch counter in Washington, D.C., in 1943; from 1948 on, she refused to pay federal income taxes as a demonstration of her opposition to war; a decade later, she would become the first woman arrested for this act of resistance.

A co-founder of the Cleveland chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), she and her lifelong companion Wallace joined forces in 1948; both also participated in founding the radical pacifist movement the Peacemakers. Wally was CORE’s national field representative, and Juanita served on its national board. In Cincinnati, they began the Cincinnati Committee on Human Relations (CCHR), which quickly became the Cincinnati CORE chapter. Their quest to live a nonviolent, simple life culminated in their move to western Massachusetts in 1974, where they became “self-provisioning farmers.” Living in a cabin built largely of recycled materials, absent electricity and indoor plumbing, they sought to reduce their material consumption. As she would write in her Manifesto for Living Peace in an Age of War, their goal was “to be neither oppressed or oppressor to examine what our needs are, as opposed to our desires. SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY!” These three selections from Juanita’s writings illustrate her early activism and her range of writing styles.

“I Invade Cincinnati,” most likely written in late 1953, is an excerpt from her unfinished autobiography, *From Rags to Rags with Not Much In Between*, that describes the strategies and tactics of two successful CCHR multiracial, nonviolent direct action campaigns.

*Jails and Justice* is from a play written during the ’60s and ’70s, detailing the experiences of a woman in prison on charges similar to those Juanita had faced. Noncooperation—e.g., refusing to walk, to stand for the judge, and to eat—was a strategy both she and Wally practiced during their numerous arrests and convictions.

The poem “Simple Life/Outhouse Blues” was written in January 1974.

—*Louis Herbert Battalen*



*Cleveland CORE*, 1946 JUANITA MORROW NELSON & WALLACE F NELSON PAPERS (DG262), SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

*These six members of Cleveland CORE participated in a September 21, 1946, direct action at Cleveland's Euclid Beach Park. Though all six were admitted to the park, Mr. Peters and Ms. Morrow were forcibly denied entry to the park's dance pavilion in direct violation of the 1894 Ohio state law. From left to right: Margaret Abbot, Juanita Morrow, Ruth MacLennan and behind them Wilk S. Peters, Carl Miller, and Charles MacLennan.*



*Juanita & Wally Nelson outside the Greenfield, MA, IRS Office, c. 2000*  
JUANITA MORROW NELSON & WALLACE F NELSON PAPERS (DG262), SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

# I INVADE CINCINNATI

**I WENT TO LIVE** in Cincinnati with no great expectations—and Cincinnati did not surpass those expectations. It was the last place on the globe that I would have selected as the locality in which I would put down roots. As it happened my roots at times were so weed entangled that I thought I'd choke.

But Cincinnati is a lovely spot physically. When I moved my suitcases into the Covington parsonage we thought we'd be there only a matter of weeks. We would find an apartment on one of Cincinnati's breathtaking hills and enjoy the view, even if we couldn't escape the stench of viewpoint.

Housing was the first stalemate we ran into. It was no simple matter for anyone in a modest income bracket to find a place to lay his head. For people with brown skins, even without children, pets, or bad habits, it was like asking for the moon on a platinum platter. We started out answering the ads. Occasionally we found an apartment advertised that hadn't been snatched before we got up to buy the morning paper. We'd call, to be told over the telephone the virtues of the place and receive a cordial, sometimes effusive, invitation to look the premises over. But when we arrived the place had "already been rented." In the case of the more baldly honest, we were told, *They were sorry, but they were sure we could understand that the apartment couldn't be rented to Negroes.*

A most wonderfully intricate policy was followed. Most neighborhoods were not opened to Negroes at all. Unless the apartment advertised was in the West End, Walnut Hills, or certain sections of Avondale (which Negroes were fast taking over), it was next to a sure bet that there was no point wasting carfare or shoe leather, no matter how hospitable the telephone invitation to look things over. But even if the "to rent" ad bore a West End address (the oldest section of the city, which had been almost completely turned over to Negroes), you couldn't be certain you weren't squandering the twenty-five-cent, round-trip bus fare. Because certain streets in the West End were still reserved for whites. And on some streets there were certain houses for strictly white occupancy.

The result was that we didn't get to live "over the river" for two years, when we happened upon an unbelievably spacious and reasonable third-floor apartment whose only drawback was that the entrance was only semi-private—and our marvelously long, eight-windowed living room

was over the bedroom of the seventy-odd-year-old landlady who had broken her leg the day after we put down our deposit. This accident made her even more crotchety than her usual crotchety self and unable to bear the least noise. We were unable to supply felt house slippers for all our guests and caution them to speak in whispers—so we reluctantly gave up the otherwise ideal place four months after we'd found it, taking the occasion to make the move when we left on a three-month trip out West.

When we returned, we moved back to the parsonage in Covington, where we remained until we set up housekeeping with Ernest and Marion Bromley and Lloyd Danzeisen in Gano—and that is a story in itself which will be dealt with later.

The combination of color, over which we had no control, and principles, which controlled us, kept me in the ranks of the idle poor for many months. I had joined Wally in becoming a full-fledged tax refuser. I had been dallying with the idea, the position of refusing to pay taxes for war, especially when most of the U.S. budget is spent on overgrown toys that go boom-boom, seeming a logical next step to declining to serve in the armed forces or work in war industry. But the stresses and strains of existence were greatly increased by the necessity to finding jobs where the taxes were not collected before one saw one's paycheck. Uncle Sam must have extracted enough money from me to purchase a year's supply of scrub buckets for the mopping up crew of a very small ship.

In Cincinnati I took my stand. No job where taxes would be withheld. And since the government required business establishments to act as internal revenue agents, I narrowed my chances considerably, already slim enough with my lack of skill and my excessive coloration. I could type, I could file indifferently, and I knew the difference between a noun and an adverb, thanks to my English major. In addition, I prided myself on possessing enough mental ability to do anything requiring normal intelligence. (I once put this last attribute in an ad and received some very suggestive replies.)

Fortified with these qualifications, I proceeded to answer employment ads. I got the same song and dance we'd encountered in house hunting. An insurance company had no facilities for employing Negroes. I suppose that that meant they had no brown-skinned typewriters or chocolate-colored paper, or mahogany-tinted walls. A concern which manufactured golf balls and other sports equipment did not, apparently, go in for cricket. They hadn't made the necessary adjustments for hiring Negroes. I had an hour's talk with the personnel manager, who asked me,

as I wearily gathered my gloves and pocketbook, if it were true that Negroes had Eleanor Clubs, the members of which were dedicated to bumping white people off the sidewalks on Thursdays. He asked this in all earnestness. A dress manufacturing concern was working toward integration, but had just taken on several Negro girls in the office, and wanted to “wait and see how things worked out.” And so it went . . .

One day I was hit with the sudden inspiration born of desperation. I remembered a girl at Howarth Co-op who’d made a living as a model at the Art Institute. I had admired her courage in posing for life classes. This was polite terminology for posing in the nude. Why couldn’t I get such work? Theoretically I was all for bowling over meaningless conventions, and I saw nothing at all wrong with exposing one’s limbs. I promptly called the Cincinnati Art Academy, where it seems that they were always in need of fresh figures and faces. The interview was merely to ascertain if I had any scruples about exposing my unclad anatomy to a bunch of students. I said no, but the answer was backed up with the shakiest of convictions. I reported for work the first evening with a great deal of hesitation, wondering if theories would be enough to break through the bonds of prudishness in which I was enmeshed along with almost everybody else. I am afraid that I was more sustained by simple economics than by convictions. Curiously enough, though, I found that once I had, with a tremendous effort of the will, loosened the belt of my housecoat and timidly let it fall from my shoulders, I felt perfectly at ease. I wasn’t a woman—I was a model.

The job was made to order for me. The Academy cared not a whoop about color—as a matter of fact they were delighted to get all sorts of shapes and profiles. I could arrange to work only enough hours to keep me within the bracket where no withholding taxes were taken out. And I found that I could sit still for an awfully long time.

There was only one thing that really bothered me. The classes were three-hour sessions, and the sittings were divided into two forty-five-minute and one thirty-minute periods. Forty-five minutes is a long time to hold any pose. No matter how simple it seems, if it’s just sitting in a chair with your hands folded, as you’ve done countless times at long-drawn-out meetings, you can get awfully cramped. That I could stand—I found that I could hold a pose with little trouble. The thing that got me was that I couldn’t scratch when I itched, and I never itched so much in my life!

After a while the modeling petered out—my face and figure got stale.

But soon thereafter I hit upon a scheme which worked out admirably. When I'm in need of employment I simply turn to the yellow pages of the telephone book. I call place after place to ask, "Do you need any part-time clerical help?" I have found that social service agencies are the most likely—they're least apt to draw color lines, they pay better than private concerns, and very often they have on their staffs people a bit more willing to countenance people with different ideals. I worked one summer for the Anti-T.B. League of Hamilton County. I typed fifty thousand envelopes that summer, about one-third of the total.

It was on a piecework basis, and I steamed along in the summer's heat at something over two hundred envelopes per hour. So furiously did I type that I threw my middle finger out of joint and was more than happily out of commission for a day. We needed the money so badly that at the time the job didn't seem too bad, but when I think back now over those fifty thousand envelopes, I wonder that my mind didn't get out of joint.

The addressing job was seasonal, so at the summer's end I once more went job hunting over the telephone. This time the Girl Scouts were lucky enough to need help when I was available. There I stayed, reminiscing occasionally about my own Girl Scout days, until, with my efficient typing, the organization made so much money on the sale of cookies that they were able to stretch the budget to make my job a full-time one. This would have meant withholding taxes, so I reluctantly gave it up. For one day I held a job with a man who sent out small machine parts from an office in the basement of his home. This job I found in our neighborhood newspaper. I fully expected to be put off when I put in a personal appearance, but the man seemed delighted to have the opportunity to hire a Negro. Unfortunately, I discovered during the course of the first morning's chores that most of the items I was to send out went to firms producing war materials. Another promising prospect all fouled up.

For over a year now (an achievement for me, or a defeat) I have held down two part-time jobs located over the Bell Telephone System. Two days a week I work in the lower regions of the library building of the University of Cincinnati for the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio. I like to roll the title around in my mouth. The other job is a mouthful, too. Two days and a half of each week I toil for the United Jewish Social Agencies. It is a happy blending of working with the mistakes of the past and the blunders of the present. Neither institution

agrees with my no-tax stand, but we are able to discuss it without high blood pressure on either side, and they seem to be happy enough with my veneer of efficiency not to worry about my idiosyncrasies, as long as they're not involved. As a matter of fact, one of my employers rather surprised me by acquiescing to my demands for a higher hourly rate, even though it meant a cut in hours, so that I could still squeeze under the non-withholding wire! We agreed that there was nothing immoral about working fewer hours for the same amount of pay.

Even before I discovered the telephone as a sure bet for getting work, I was far from idle. Wally had a CORE group going when I got to Cincinnati, and I plunged into the thick of the activities of the Cincinnati Committee on Human Relations, which had chosen the path of least resistance (who wouldn't with such a name?) and come up with the alphabet soup designation of CCHR. It was born of a Conference on Human Relations which had almost single-handedly organized.

Shortly after the first meeting I attended, I found myself occupying a stool in Zoutis Sandwich Shoppe, tucked in a building on Government Square. It was a nice enough place, but all refreshments were a cent or two higher than at the neighboring hot dog and orange drink stand, and I would not ordinarily have gone to Zoutis, as a matter of simple economics. We were there to convince Mr. Zoutis and company that he should join the ranks of downtown spots which served all comers. We paid the establishment three visits on consecutive Saturday nights. The first time Wally and I went in alone, after we'd heard of their refusal to serve several teenagers. After we'd sat for two hours, we figured our investigation was complete. It seemed to us that, as an arbitrary figure, two hours was a long enough time to determine that Zoutis did not desire our patronage. The next Saturday night we went in with reinforcements and occupied most of the seats at the counter. We had written to the management asking for a conference and revealing our intention of returning. The conference was denied, and the welcome mat was not out.

We sat as patiently as it was possible to sit while being sprayed with water, muttered at under breaths, and pierced with acid looks. We were finally offered services from a menu which announced the price of coffee as fifty cents and other edibles at corresponding robbery: ham sandwich at a dollar, Cokes at seventy-five cents, and sundaes at a dollar twenty-five. When we declined the offer, we were referred to prominently displayed signs which grimly declared, "We reserve the right to change prices with-



out notice.” After several hours of this sort of horseplay, Mr. Zoutis decided to close his shop, several hours before the usual curfew. We lingered outside long enough to make certain that the desire for the after-movie trade wasn’t greater than the determination not to serve us.

Zoutis was elaborately prepared for us the third Saturday night. There was not a special menu. All the menus had been printed up with the inflated prices to comply with the law prohibiting discrimination in public places. More than one befuddled patron walked out when confronted with the bloated figures. This time we had enough people to sit at the counter and to occupy several tables. The police were called twice, and they looked as if they might have adored taking us for a ride, but we could see by the head shaking that they were telling Mr. Zoutis that there was nothing they could do about us, inasmuch as we were conducting ourselves like the ladies and gentlemen we were not.

When the police failed, Mr. Zoutis enlisted the aid of two husky flower vendors who had a shop between the restaurant and the next building. The hefty florists entered with ugly looks, but one came over on our side when he heard our version of the difficulty and promised to talk with the proprietor in an effort to arrange the conference we’d so far been denied.

We were feeling the glow of creativeness, having made one convert, when a slightly built man strode from the back regions, the veins in his neck swollen with rage. He came out yelling and cursing, vowing to kill the so-and-so’s who were trying to wreck his father’s business. We didn’t think he’d go back for the gun he threatened to blow us all to hell with, but again, we didn’t know. It was a moment which took all the non-violent willpower we could muster to hold us in our seats.

The junior Zoutis did not go for his gun. But he belligerently yanked Wally, they were about the same size, and Mike Robinson, who towered a foot and a half over him, and dragged them out the door—one at a time. Mike and Wally offered no resistance; more than likely they gave a little more ground than necessary. The rest of us followed, on the theory that the situation had become hotter than we had expected, was really sizzling, and that we’d better digest the events of the last few moments, even if we had no food to digest.

Some of us looked forward to the next trip with anticipation, some with trepidation. We needn’t have concerned ourselves. It happened that the next time any of us went into Zoutis we were served without epithets and at the usual prices. News of the situation was broadcast,

and the Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, semi-official human relations group, was able to arrange a meeting with Mr. Zoutis and his lawyer where we had failed. With the Mayor's Committee as intermediary, Mr. Zoutis agreed to call a halt to hostilities and to instruct his waitresses to serve all customers. When Wally met Mr. Zoutis on the street some time afterwards, each wore the puzzled expression of memory searching for the time, the place—at about the same time, both realized the circumstances under which they'd met and exchanged cordial greetings.

The lively and successfully concluded Zoutis incident was only an interlude in the interminable music schools's campaign. Since its inception, CCHR's main project had been to get the College of Music and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music to admit Negro students. Both schools had over seventy years of operation under their belts, and it was like pulling an impacted wisdom tooth to get them to see the light. The matter was of grave concern to them, we were told by the boards, and they were studying and discussing it continually. But they were close to the South, most of the student body came from the other side of the Mason-Dixon line. It was well enough to talk of integrity and moral obligations and to point out that music knew no color lines, but if Negroes were admitted, the schools might stand to lose a great many insulted students and, thus, sufficient revenue to compel suspension of operation.

This story we heard, like a broken record, in repeated conferences with the executive directors and the boards. The influence of the South on the schools was remarkable, and I was surprised that the birds which nested in the College and Conservatory trees did not trill with a Southern accent. We could not, of course, prove conclusively that the schools would not lose students, nor could we, as was suggested by one director, start a subscription to cover any losses that might be incurred. We felt strongly that, nevertheless, the schools should open their doors even if it meant a calculated risk, and after a lengthy period of negotiation in which we used up all the patience and wind of which we were possessed, we took the issue to the community.

Our first effort was a "Statement of Concern," with the goal of ten thousand signatories to a statement asking an immediate change of policy. We secured ten clergymen who sponsored a "Call to Action" endorsing the Statement during Brotherhood Month of 1950. We came close to the goal and collected more than nine thousand names.

The next phase of the campaign was leafleting. We composed and mimeographed enough flyers to make several bestsellers. Most of them were distributed at symphony concerts and at the Cox Theatre, Cincinnati's legitimate house. They were thrust into the hands of the cultured in rain, in sleet, in fog, in slush, and when the music lovers moved to the zoo for opera in the summer, in sweltering heat. The reasoning was that people interested in the arts would be most concerned about the issue and that, further, some of these people would be those who supported the schools financially. (We were surprised and gratified by the response—meager in comparison to the number of people we contacted but nothing short of monumental when we considered our strength and our audacity at attacking such respected institutions. Some quite respectable elements in the community expressed the wish that the schools would come out of their seventy-odd-year coma. The endorsers of the change were not necessarily in sympathy with us as a group, sometimes expressly not in sympathy.) But though the schools were getting their knuckles rapped by the ultra-conservatives, as well as their ears deafened by the rabble-rousers, they continued in the path of least resistance.

We piddled along in this fashion for the better part of two years. I was getting the alarming feeling that persuading the music schools to play a different tune was going to be my life vocation. I could see myself—a middle-aged matron, a gray-haired dame, a doddering, senile wreck, having conferences with a board of directors on which sat the grandsons of the man who controlled the schools when first we set out on the project.

But just when we were foundering like a sinking ship that settles into a slimy ocean bed, somebody was struck with a stratagem whose brilliance would not have been matched by a ten-star general. The idea sprang from the brain of a student rabbi, one of the Hebrew Union College Fellows whose vitality kept the group going.

The plan was simple enough—or so we thought when we enthusiastically adopted it. It was to be a Concert to End Music School Discrimination. We would secure a big-name singer who would give his or her all for the cause—a singer whose name would attract throngs we'd never been able to reach. Secure the singer (as though that wasn't a big enough job in itself), and we seemed to think the rest would take care of itself.

That was one of the most rugged six-week periods of our lives: the six weeks from the time we signed a contract with Muriel Rahn to the night the concert came off. In the meantime, we were faced with raising an

amount of money which seemed astronomical to CCHR—twelve hundred dollars. Miss Rahn was glad to come, but though she was vitally concerned about this issue, especially since it was in the field of music, it would be impossible for her to come without a minimum sum to cover expenses for herself, her publicity agent husband, and her accompanist. The “expense” amounted to several hundred dollars, but the mere fact that one of the big names we’d contacted was willing to come, had even written, made us impractically optimistic about such little things as money-raising. A decisive factor in our assuming the indebtedness was the accompanist, Frances Benner, who was a graduate of the College of Music and expressed a willingness to make a statement for the press that she was in favor of seeing her alma mater make a change. The setup was a cinch with the addition of Angenette Haynes, a girl with a promising voice who’d been unable to study in her hometown. We had an unbeatable combination: first-rate music, glamour, pathos.

Added to the expense of the trio we were importing were the rental of the auditorium, newspaper advertisements, leaflets, programs, tickets, and all the incidentals which creep from every corner like termites.

The Emery Auditorium, where the concert was to be given, seats about 2,200. We had five thousand tickets printed, which we showered over the city. We followed the plan of obtaining sponsors who contributed ten dollars or more for the privilege of having their names on the program. The tickets we distributed to all who would take them, accepting donations ranging upward from twenty-five cents, for those who were so moved. Along with the ticket distribution, we took to the streets again to pass out thousands of leaflets announcing the affair. Symphony goers had got to the point where they were under the impression that we were a part of the symphony organization and that this was an innovation—getting their programs on the outside.

The afternoon of the concert several of us went to the Emery to check on last-minute details—like getting the grand piano changed. When I stood on the stage and stared out at the rows on rows of empty seats, I wished myself on the other side of the globe. There might be just about as many rows of empty seats that night. I began to count on my fingers the people that I now knew who were definitely coming—almost enough to fill the first row and a half. I found it impossible to dismiss from my mind the unpleasant thought that we were under no obligation to pay over several hundred dollars to Miss Rahn before the concert, money which we did not have all of.

The afternoon passed, as all afternoons have a way of passing, even in nightmares. I got into the dress I'd scurried around town to buy the day before, the first dress I'd bought for a number of years. (I'm the sort that's "just the right size" to inherit all the clothes people get too big for.) I'd bought the dress because I had nothing in the closet which would do for the mistress of ceremonies of a Concert to Protest Music School Discrimination featuring Muriel Rahn, the original Carmen of *Carmen Jones* and a young woman who might be missing her chance to shake the foundations of the music world because Cincinnati's music institutions were mincing along in the dark ages of harpsichords.

The words of greeting and introduction that had been cloying at my practically paralyzed throat came out full-bodied and flowing. People, beautiful people everywhere, even in the balcony! An unofficial count, and I'm sure a conservative one, gave us an audience of 1,200.

The evening tripped by. The audience loved Miss Rahn, who loved the audience and gave them everything she had. Angenette in a blue evening gown created the proper mood of indignation that a voice with such promise should be denied training in the city where the possessor of the voice had been born. The empathy between the audience and the people on stage continued through Wally's half-humorous collection speech, followed by the passing of the hat, into which silver jingled and there was heard quite often the reassuring rustle of money that didn't jingle. We collected enough money from the audience that night to make up for the sum we were to pay Miss Rahn and had a couple of hundred left over with which to play around. CCHR had no money problems for ages.

Wally and I and another couple with whom we had done the bulk of the work on the concert were at such a high pitch after we'd put our guests on the plane that we had to go somewhere and get it out of our systems. An evening of culture called for an elegant ending. We would go out to dine. We went to our respective homes to bathe away the perspiration of fear with which we'd begun the evening with the plan of meeting at the sign of the twenty-eight flavors, the local Howard Johnson restaurant.

Mike and Sally were at a table for four on the parasol terrace of Howard Johnson's when we arrived, studying the menu while an attentive waiter hovered. He hovered no more after we came in. Wally and I had barely got our backsides adjusted to the chairs when a black-gowned person, who said she was the assistant manager, came out to tell us that all seats were reserved. Observation of the empty tables and the alacrity with

which accommodations had been given Mike and Sally belied the intelligence, but how could we tell the woman she was lying when she claimed that people would be coming in at such and such a time?

Our triumphant evening made us much less able to cope with the situation than normally. It was often a surprise to be refused service in a restaurant in Cincinnati, but we were aware enough to know that it did happen anytime and usually took things fairly calmly, after the initial shock. This time I was ready to leave without protest and lick my wounds at home over a Coke and hamburger, and even Wally didn't bounce back. Mike and Sally rose to the occasion, though, and asked to speak with the manager. They returned with the news that we could have a table inside. The manager had evidently been quite put out with the assistant's to-do over the matter, but felt he had to back her up in the ridiculous assertion that the entire terrace was reserved. We ate inside, but the food didn't taste like the ambrosia that ten-cent hot dogs would have tasted like under the circumstances, if the atmosphere had been a bit more congenial. It was quite apparent that the assistant manager did not take kindly to her superior's agreeing to serve us at all. She made her way through the tables, stopping at each for a word about us. The words were undoubtedly not dripping with honey. We sat there like a quartet of trained seals surrounded by all manner of wild beasts, protected only by a steel cage. In this case the cage was built of convention and force of habit, much less sturdy material than well-tempered steel. Though we hardly thought that the bars would be let down, we were rather glad that we were leaving when we purposely heard loud muttering about how some glowering and, more important, hefty individual would like to make hash out of us.

Wally, looking really bewildered, remarked, "Somebody's crazy. We are or they are. It's a cinch we can't both be sane: we thinking we're all the same and they that Nita and I are a different species."

By that time we'd swallowed most of our food, we didn't know how it tasted, we'd regained some of our sense of balance. We would no doubt have suggested Howard Johnson's as a project except for a few factors: it was located quite a way from the center of town, the food is fairly expensive, and we still had the music schools on our hands. The concert had been successful, but the schools were still playing the same tune.

After the summer's hibernation, in which we did nothing more spectacular than passing out a few leaflets at the zoo, we cast about for more gimmicks to keep the intractability of the schools in the public eye.

This time we came up with “A Public Hearing on the Admission Policies of the Music Schools.” The idea came in a rush during the heat of midsummer. CCHR’s strength was small, with students home on vacation, other folks enervated by the heat, and all too many simply worn out by the length and seeming hopelessness of the case. Wally was in Puerto Rico on a Peacemakers’ mission. So was Ernest. Marion was recuperating from the premature birth of her second child.

I was only working eight hours a day on envelopes at the Anti-T.B. League, so that left me as the logical person to lay plans and conduct promotion for the hearing, amazed even now at the number of letters I wrote, the phone calls I made, and the people I saw in the course of setting up the hearing. I wrote lengthy letters, not just polite notes, to everybody we could think of whose words might add weight to the proceedings: heads of music departments of schools that did have open admission, Southern schools that admitted Negroes, music critics, students, teachers.

The night of the hearing we had rather an impressive array of witnesses: Walter Anderson, head of the music department at Antioch College; Josephine Johnson Cannon, a Pulitzer Prize winner who was Cincinnati’s outstanding resident writer; her husband, Grant Cannon, managing editor of the *Farm Quarterly*; Donald Jones, head of the Cincinnati NAACP; two students from the Art Academy of Cincinnati who produced evidence that the academy, which was possibly closer by a few miles to the South than the music schools, had not suffered by having Negro students. We read letters of endorsement and encouragement from Howard Hansom of Eastman (whom Wally and I had tramped over the bridge from Covington to Cincinnati to see when the region was suffering one of the worst snow storms in its history) . . .

One star witness was the sister of a fellow who’d been turned down by the conservatory and was then studying at the Boston Conservatory of Music, from which he graduated with honors and a scholarship to study in Europe. The other was Herman Griffith, who had been turned down by the TV department of the college for the previous summer session. Herman was our pride and joy. We had the names of numbers of Negroes who’d applied at the schools at one time or another, but a stumbling block was digging up current appliers. Herman was intensely interested in breaking into radio and wanted like everything to get some training and experience at the college, the first school to offer full TV training. He persistently knocked at the doors, so that we had always a current case to point to in discussions and press releases.

The audience was less impressive than the array of witnesses. Less than one hundred and fifty people showed up (a face-saving way of saying barely over a hundred), but enough energy was generated to get a large part of those present into high gear. The drive toward action was spearheaded by James Paradise, head of the Cincinnati Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, who as moderator had craftily prepared in advance a resolution which called for "continued effort, utilizing all proper channels."

A week or so after the hearing about thirty people turned out to the organizing meeting of a Citizens Committee on the Music Schools, prepared, it seemed, to really put their hands to the wheel. A second meeting for action was set up. But before the next meeting was held came the announcement—

A week after the public hearing the College of Music notified Herman that a special meeting of the board of directors had accepted his application. The news was completely unexpected. We were somewhat nonplussed, though, by the newspaper story which ended:

"Asked whether this would make a change in the future policy of admission at the College, Walter A. Schmidt, president of the board of directors, said "the College has never had a policy of discrimination. We will consider any qualified student for admission, as we always have."

Oh, Mr. Schmidt, you could have saved us so many reams of paper by telling us that two and a half years ago.

The conservatory lagged a bit, but made its announcement of an open-door policy shortly thereafter.

This was two years ago. From time to time, word comes that more and more are studying at the schools. We have not yet heard any reports of the exodus of Southern students, or any other kind. And passing by of an afternoon the tooting of clarinets, the trilling of scales, the scratching of violins seems to produce a cacophony of the same head-splitting deafness as was the case before fall 1951.





*Juanita Morrow Nelson with fellow CCHR member and Hebrew Union student Bill Seaman, early 1950's*

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# JAILS AND JUSTICE

## FIRST DAY

SCENE: Women's quarters in the county jail. Cell #17 dominates the stage, a barred cage 5x6 feet. Five other cells will be rolled onto the stage seconds after the curtain rises. The six cells are renovated antiques. In each an iron cot takes up most of the limited space. There is a tiny table for personal effects, two hooks for towel and washcloth. A slop jar with lid, for use at night. During the day those inmates in "population" use the bathroom and shower next to Cell #17.

What was once a fairly spacious dayroom has been divided by a wall of bars. The cells open into this much narrower corridor, the section on the other side of the bars now being a passageway for prison personnel, including the matron; they may see and talk with the prisoners without being in contact with them. There is an opening in the bars through which food, mail, whatever may be passed. Inmates cannot see out the windows which are, anyway, opaque, though still some try to steal a glimpse of outside by standing on a stool or jumping as high as possible.

There is a partially automatic security system in the renovated relic of a building. Cells are opened and closed by the matron with the jangle of keys at her waist, always accompanied by a guard. But the door into the cell block and those which admit to the women's section are on remote control. Women are let into the outside corridor only to clean, with a guard present. They go off stage left for meals, visitors, infirmary, commissary. Otherwise, they pace the small area like captive felines.

The 3:30 soap opera is in progress (with which we shall become nauseatingly familiar.) The TV is hung on the wall in the outside corridor and is controlled by the matron, who sometimes accedes to the wishes of those inmates who holler loudest for a particular program. When the curtain opens a couple women are plastered on the bars looking at TV, Matron is pacing, Rita and Bertha are playing cards, Mary is sitting and staring, occasionally biting her fingernails. All marking time before supper.

Voices offstage gain the attention of a few. Most pay no mind to what's going on . . . new girls come in every day. And even those who turn an ear for a moment soon lose interest and return to reading or doing nothing, staring into space.

**MATRON** (*offstage*)

What in the world have we got here? What are you bringing me *this* time?

**GUARD JOHN**

Search me. They said bring her up, and we brought her up. Another looney, it looks like to me.

**MATRON**

Good god, that's the third one this week. We just got one off to the funny house, then this other one screamed all last night. At least this one's quiet.

**GUARD FRED**

And thank god she doesn't weigh much.

**MATRON**

Never a dull minute, huh? Okay, I'll process her. First we gotta fill in this sheet, and then you'll take off your clothes and stoop over so I can inspect your cheeks. We'll go over to the alcove for that. No peepin', boys. Then you'll put on this dress and go for your fingerprints and your picture. Got it? I like to give the new girls an idea of what to expect. Sort of makes it easier, you know? Now what's your name? (*long pause*) I said, what's your name. Didn't you hear me?

**ALICE**

I'm sorry, but I really don't care to give you my name. Not under these circumstances. Not for the jail records.

**MATRON**

Look, don't tell me. I don't make the rules. They're all made up, and we have to go by them. I have to get the information, and you have to give it to me. Then all I do is pass it on. Now, what's your name?

**ALICE** (*with a sigh*)

I have to? Why does everyone say you *have* to do things?

**MATRON**

Because you have to, that's why. Now look, Alice . . .

**ALICE**

If you know my name already, why do you ask me?

**MATRON**

We're supposed to get it direct from the girls.

**ALICE**

I hope you understand that I don't have anything against you personally, you or the guards. But I'm not going to give you any information for the jail records, and I'm not going to lock myself up. I just don't feel I can help you put me in jail.

**MATRON**

Honey, I don't know whether you helped or not, but you *are* in jail. That is a fact. Look, I didn't put you in here. You did something, and they sent you here. If you didn't do it, you'll get out. But while you're here I'm responsible for you, and as far as I'm concerned you're no better than any of the other girls.

**ALICE**

I didn't mean to imply that I'm any better than anybody else. I just don't think any of us should be here.

**MATRON**

You should have thought of that before you got yourself arrested. I am not going to argue with you. You can just go to your cell. I'll tell you one thing, though. Things'll be a lot easier for you if you don't give us a hard time. I treat the girls decent, these guards here'll tell you. Here's your gown.

*(silence)*

**MATRON** *(sbrilly)*

Pick up that gown. I said, pick up your gown.

**ALICE**

It's not my gown. I don't want it.

**MATRON**

You'll put it on all right. But first you'll go to your cell. (*obviously a bit rattled*)

**ALICE**

I don't have a cell.

**MATRON**

All right, if that's the way you want it.

**ALICE**

No, it's not the way I want it.

**MATRON**

Well, then, get going.

**ALICE**

I'll be glad to get going, if you'll open that door and let me go home.

**MATRON**

All right. Fred. You and John can just take her to Seventeen.

**FRED**

Oh, no, not again. Listen, why don't you just walk?

**JOHN**

We don't have to beg her. Just take her arm and twist it a little. She'll walk with a little persuasion.

**FRED**

For crissakes, we haven't done anything to you.

**ALICE**

Oh, yes you have. You brought me up here.

**FRED**

We didn't have a thing to do with it. We just . . .

**ALICE**

Follow orders.

**FRED**

So why are you giving us a hard time? Give us a break.

**MATRON**

Come on, let's go. I've got other things to do.

**ALICE**

You are twisting my arm.

**JOHN**

Sorry, sister. You wouldn't have to worry about that if you'd walk, would you?

*(Pause. Clang of cell block gate opening automatically. Fred and John walk in carrying Alice, preceded by Matron. Alice is in a terrycloth bathrobe, looking grim as she swings between the guards. Cell block gate clangs shut behind them.)*

**BERTHA**

God damn, I'll be a monkey's uncle.

**MARION**

Ain't she a pitiful sight.

**STELLA**

Tell me I'm dreamin'.

**MARY**

What's the matter with her?

**RITA**

Crazy. I sure hope they don't let her loose out here. I am scared of them kind of people.

*(Matron stands before Cell #17. Unlocks it.)*

**FRED**

Where do you want her?

**MATRON**

Anywhere. Just drop her.

*(Alice is roughly deposited on the floor. Matron throws gown in.)*

**MATRON**

All right, girls, break it up. Just leave her alone. She'll be all right. Go on, now. I don't want you talking to her, understand? She's not really her, you know?

*(Goes offstage right, to do whatever Matrons do when they are not harassing prisoners. At first, the "girls" do leave Alice alone. Some go back to TV, to rifling through magazines. Bertha and Rita sit on floor and play cards in front of #17, as though Alice doesn't exist. Finally, Bertha, tiring of the game, throws cards down. All this time Alice has remained where put.)*

**BERTHA**

Hey, what's your name?

**STELLA**

Matron said not to talk to her.

**BERTHA**

Fuck the matron and fuck you too, chick. I talk to who I wanna.

**STELLA**

You'll get us all in trouble.

**RITA**

'Course you're not in trouble now, are you sweetie?

**BERTHA**

Shhh. They might put her in jail, don't you know?

*(back to Alice)* I asked you a question, what's your name?

*(Alice keeps eyes closed, no response)*

**BERTHA**

You know what, I don't believe it can talk. Maybe it's deaf and dumb.

**RITA**

One thing sure, she sure is dumb. Unless like I said, she's sick.

**BERTHA**

Maybe they beat the chick up so bad she's just passed out. Gimme a glass of water. If she don't say anything when I throw this in her face . . .

**ALICE** (*the grimness of her situation somewhat relieved momentarily—she's almost ready to giggle*)

My name's Alice.

**BERTHA**

Why the hell didn't you say so in the first place? I'm Bertha, this's Rita. I thought maybe you were dyin' or had the DTs. How come they carried you in here? Can't you walk?

**ALICE**

Not in jail.

(*They stare at her, not knowing what to make of such a remark.*)

**ALICE**

I mean I don't believe in helping anybody put me in jail. I don't believe people should be put in cages.

**BERTHA**

What they get you for?

**ALICE** (*rather wearily*)

I was arrested because I won't pay for murder.

**BERTHA**

Come again?



**ALICE**

I refuse to pay the federal withholding tax, the income tax. Because most of the money goes for war, and I don't like killing people or hiring others to do it. Seems that's a crime, I mean not paying for it.

**BERTHA**

Hell, you oughta know you couldn't get away with that. They wouldn't even let the Mafia get away with that. Shit. Everybody's got to pay taxes.

**ALICE** (*to herself*)

Everybody's got to . . . there it is again.

(*to the others*) That's not quite true. I haven't and . . . well, I wasn't arrested for not paying taxes, exactly. I'm really in for contempt of court. I don't fill out a tax form and when they asked me to give the information about where I work and how much I make and all that, I wouldn't do it, even after they served a court order. So here I am.

**BERTHA**

How long did you get away with it?

**ALICE** (*the question is familiar*)

I wouldn't exactly say I've been getting away with it. That's not the point—I don't try to hide anything. I even write to the president every year and say I'm not paying. It's a public act. Tax refusal, not tax evasion. But I don't want the government to get my money. And it hasn't for four years.

**RITA**

Four years? Hey, I thought you sounded like you were pretty smart.

**BERTHA**

Smart, hell. She got caught, didn't she? She's in jail just like me, ain't she? But I still don't figure how come they busted you. I've been delinquent but they never arrested me for *that*. You go down to the IRS on Broad Street and weave them a sad story, had lots of medical bills, somebody stole your money, you know, make it good. They'll let you pay five dollars at a time, even heard of a pimp paying fifty cents a week.

**ALICE** (*realizing they don't understand at all, not knowing where to begin or end, still feeling groggy*)

But I don't want to pay, I don't want to make any arrangements. They make it easy enough for me to cooperate. I don't even go to the office, but they send agents out to see me who ask me very politely just to tell them where I work or where my bank account is. (*realizing it's probably futile to go on*) Of course I don't tell them a thing—I just sort of preach them a sermon about how I think people were put here for doing better things than killing each other, like I'm preaching to you right now. It's not getting away with it, it's a matter of principle, of freedom. I believe in, well, the simplest way to put it I guess is that I believe in something called conscience. Where you try not to hurt anybody else, where you take the hurt yourself if necessary, but you have to do what you think is right. (*almost to herself*) That's what I "have" to do.

**BERTHA**

How long you been doing this, did you say? How long you been defrauding the government?

**ALICE**

It's not de . . . (*gives up*) Just about four years.

**BERTHA**

I don't know how smart you are, but you sure got a lot of nerve. And a lot of words. You oughta write a book—there's a whole lot of folks don't wanna pay taxes.

**RITA**

Includin' me, you better believe it.

**BERTHA**

But most of them are out there and plannin' to stay out. So you better not put in that part about goin' to jail. That's discouraging.

**RITA**

Any asshole would know you might end up in the hoosegow. Uncle Sam's got his hand in everybody's pocket and eyes in the back of his head.

**BERTHA**

I don't know, it took 'em four years to throw her ass in jail.

**RITA**

Hey, how come you got on that robe? They never gave us anything fancy like that.

**ALICE**

It's my bathrobe. It's what I got arrested in.

**BERTHA**

You mean they wouldn't give you time to get dressed? They sure wanted you bad.

**ALICE**

Oh, they wanted me to get dressed all right. They spent an hour begging me to put on some respectable clothes. They tried to make me feel that, if I didn't, I was immoral, indecent, unpatriotic, and ungodly. The problem is they came too early, while I was still in bed, and since I wasn't interested in going to jail, I didn't care to get dressed for the occasion.

**BERTHA** (*calling to the others who have gradually sidled near the trio, though obviously fearful*)

Hey, you hear that? She got arrested in her bathrobe—wouldn't get dressed. Ain't that a bitch?

**RITA**

Sounds to me like you might've been in a whorehouse. You sure you weren't in a raid?

**ALICE**

I'm sure. I think I am. Although—the Establishment Whorehouse, of which this is only an anteroom. (OK, stretch a point and maybe I was arrested in a whorehouse.)

**RITA**

What the fuck is she talking about?

**ALICE**

I was saying, I was in my own house, in my own bed, sleeping with my own husband, when the agents and the police came, six of 'em.

**BERTHA**

Ah, she ain't got the build for it.

**RITA**

Bullshit. She ain't got the character.

**BERTHA**

You mean you just walked out in the street in that kimono?

**ALICE**

I didn't walk. I was carried out. By two strong men: one had me under the arms, the other grabbing me by the ankles—he did his best to see that the robe flew up over my head.

**BERTHA**

What you got on under that robe?

**ALICE**

Nothing. I sleep in the nude.

**BERTHA**

That must have been a sight. Just like when they brought you in here. I *thought* I was seeing all the way to China. Somebody's been carrying you around all day, huh? Like a sack of potatoes. I bet they'll make you get dressed before you go to court.

**ALICE**

They already carried me to court.

**BERTHA**

In *that*?

**ALICE**

The judge didn't mention it. Maybe because she wears a robe too, a black one. But she was upset because I wouldn't stand up. They put me

on the floor, and I stayed where I was put.

Actually, I couldn't see the judge, I could just hear her from just under the throne. Very strange. She did stand up once to lean over (and look at me) and shake her finger at me.

**BERTHA**

I sure wish I'd been there. I'll tell you one thing. It's a good thing you didn't have Judge McAfee. That dude don't take a thing off anybody. Right, Rita?

**RITA**

That bastard will give you ten to twenty without batting an eye. I'd rather be run over by a steamroller. Lucky you had a woman judge.

**ALICE**

That didn't seem to make any difference. When they put those robes on, they all think they're god. I tried to tell her that the robe didn't impress me, that I just wanted to talk with her, that she was just a human being like me. Not putting some people above others, that's part of what non-violence means to me.

**BERTHA**

She's human like you, but she can stuff your ass in the can and throw the key away.

**ALICE**

Right. I wouldn't recognize her authority, so I'm to be locked up until I'm willing to cooperate, act like a prisoner. I have no intention of doing that. Judges have power because we give it to them. Suppose I said to you, if you don't stand up when I come into the room, I'm gonna cite you for contempt. You'd just laugh at me, wouldn't you?

**BERTHA**

Hell, yes. But no policeman's gonna throw me in jail on your say-so, but when that judge says six months, or six years, you better believe somebody's gonna lock me up.

**RITA**

How long you planning to carry on like this?

**MATRON** (*coming from stage right*)

Dinnertime, girls. (*she stands near the door, keys jangling*) Hey, I told you not to talk to Number 17. You'll get yourselves in trouble. Line up. Come on, now. Line up.

**BERTHA** (*as she and Rita leave for lineup*)

Are they gonna let you out to eat?

**ALICE**

I'm not eating.

*(Rita and Bertha stare at her, then dash to the door. It clangs open, they all file out, the door clangs shut.)*

*During the exchange with Bertha and Rita Alice has been lying on the floor exactly where the guards have flung her. Now that the others have left, she begins to survey her surroundings. First she takes in all she can from where she is. Then she sits up, sighs, puts her head in her hands, and stays in that position.*

*Door clangs open again, guard enters with tray. He gives it to Matron and stands by as she opens No. 17.)*

**MATRON**

Here's your dinner.

**ALICE**

I don't care for it, thank you.

**MATRON**

I guess you want me to take a spoon and feed you, just like you make the guards carry you around. Well, one thing we're not gonna do is make you eat; if you don't eat you starve.

*(picks gown from floor and flings it to Alice)*

Why don't you put this on? Everybody else does.

*(goes out and locks cell, leaving tray)*

*(to guard)* She'll eat when she gets hungry enough.

*(Guard and Matron go to gate; it clangs open as the curtain closes.)*

# SIMPLE LIFE/ OUTHOUSE BLUES

Well, I went out to the country to live the simple life,  
Get away from all that concrete and avoid some of that strife,  
Get off the backs of poor folks, stop supporting Uncle Sam  
In all that stuff he's puttin' down, like bombing Vietnam

Oh, but it ain't easy, 'specially on a chilly night  
When I beat it to the outhouse with my trusty dim flashlight —  
The seat is absolutely frigid, not a BTU of heat . . .  
That's when I think the simple life is not for us elite.

Well, I try to grow my own food, competing with the bugs,  
I even make my own soap and my own ceramic mugs.  
I figure that the less I buy, the less I compromise  
With Standard Oil and ITT and those other gouging guys.

Oh, but it ain't easy to leave my cozy bed  
To make it with my flashlight to that air-conditioned shed  
When the seat's so cold it takes away that freedom ecstasy,  
That's when I fear the simple life maybe wasn't meant for me.

Well, I cook my food on a wood stove and heat with wood also,  
Though when my parents left the South I said, "This has got to go,"  
But I figure that the best way to say all folks are my kin  
Is try to live so I don't take nobody's pound of skin.

Oh, but it ain't easy, when it's rainy and there's mud  
To put on my old bathrobe and walk out in that crud;  
I look out through the open door and see a distant star  
And sometimes think this simple life is taking things too far.



But then I get to thinkin', if we're ever gonna see  
The end of that old con game the change has got to start with me.  
Quit wheelin' and quit dealin' to be a leader in any band,  
And it appears the best way is to get back to the land.

If I produce my own needs I know what's goin' down,  
I'm not quite so footsy with those Wall Street pimps in town.  
'Cause let me tell you something, though it may not be good news,  
If some folks win you better know somebody's got to lose.

So I guess I'll have to cast my lot with those who're optin' out.  
And even though on freezing nights I will have my naggin' doubts,  
Long as I talk the line I do and spout my way out views  
I'll keep on usin' the outhouse and singin' the outhouse blues.