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Freedom Rings from Every Corner of Shalom Park in Summer '11

By Amy Krakovitz

Once again this summer, Shalom Park has played host to 25 African American and Jewish teens from the Washington, DC metro area. These young people are participants in Operation Understanding DC, a 17-year-old program that promotes understanding between the communities, as it teaches the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

After a visit to New York City's Crown Heights neighborhood and the Jewish Children's Museum created in memory of terror victim Ari Halberstam, the students came to North Carolina. The first stop was Greensboro, where they visited the site of the Woolworth lunch counter sit-in, an event that shook the world and sparked a national movement.

From Greensboro, they arrived here in Shalom Park. The first order of business in their visit here was an amazing homemade lunch, put together with love by the family of Madison Leathes, a student on the trip. Madison's grandmother and other family members live in Charlotte and were so thrilled to see her and her fellow travelers.

The lunch was followed by a presentation by two of the original Freedom Riders from Charlotte. In 1961, they, along with many other activists, stepped onto a bus on its way from Washington, DC to New Orleans, a test of the Supreme Court decision in *Boynton v. Virginia*, which stated that interstate travelers could not be subjected to segregation, regardless of the state's local laws.



Charles Jones, an original civil rights Freedom Rider from 1961, shows off the shirt that was given to him as a gift from a client from Ghana.

The first speaker, B.B. Delaine, was soft spoken and sincere. He never intended to be a hero, his only goal was to stand up for what he believed in. "Making a simple statement may move mountains," he told the group.

Mr. Delaine's quiet and heartfelt speech was followed by his



Lee Friedman and Madison Leathes hope that they will increase understanding between their communities.

lifelong friend, J. Charles Jones, who also joined him on that historic ride across the south in 1961.

Mr. Jones wowed the crowd by opening with an extemporaneous rap. Then he wove a colorful tale of his life's history, with tears, laughter, preaching, rapping, and song. Born in 1937 in Chester, SC, he was always told by his grandmother that he should never think that anyone was better than he was, but to remember that he wasn't better than anyone else, either.

Living out her words is what brought him to the Freedom Riders in 1961. In some places they stopped, the Supreme Court ruling was ignored, and many of the riders were arrested. They opted for the "Jail No Bail" route, and Mr. Jones spent three months on a chain gang doing hard labor.

Later in 1961, he was called as a witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, where he told the members of Congress: "It seems easier to be anti-Communist than it does to be pro-American. ... And what have you done lately for ME?"

Mr. Jones made sure that the



The participants enjoy the homemade lunch.

participants understood that the HCUA was one place that both African Americans and Jewish Americans were targeted and "neutralized." "Jewish people suffered discrimination in this country just like the black man," he told the enraptured teens. "If you don't know that, you need to educate yourself about it."

His days as a Freedom Rider were always close to him. He told the story to a client of his (he is an attorney) who was from Ghana, and when that client returned to his village in Ghana, the locals were so impressed by Mr. Jones'

bravery during the Freedom Rides, that they sent him a beautiful handmade shirt and matching hat from their village. As he donned the shirt, tears covered his face.

As a final exclamation point to his life, he was recently lauded for his heroism on the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Riders. First he appeared with 150 other Riders on the Oprah Winfrey Show. And then

Charlotte magazine did a profile of him that caused even more of a stir, because now, wherever he goes, people say, "Hey, you're that guy in the magazine!"

Every one of the students in attendance was blown away by Mr. Jones' spirited presentation. Though it was only day two of their trip, they were convinced that it would be the highlight of their three weeks, as they learn to build bridges between their two communities. ☆

Freedom School Keeps Chimes of Freedom "Flashing" at Shalom Park

Fifty students from Huntingtowne Farms Elementary school and Sterling Elementary School have been making the Temple Israel educational classrooms their home away from home for the past six weeks as part of the Shalom Park Freedom School. Volunteers, young and old, from across the community have come together to provide snacks, read stories, provide bathing suits and towels, and companionship to these kids ages 6-11. The scholars begin their day with a hot breakfast at Charlotte Jewish Day School, then proceed to Harambee (Swahili for "Lets Pull Together"), where a community member reads aloud a story. This is followed by 30 minutes of motivational cheers and songs. The scholars return to the classrooms until lunch to work hard to improve their reading skills. After lunch, they are treated to a wide assortment of afternoon electives, like yoga, photography, swimming, art, drama, and

science.

Summer breaks have traditionally been a time where reading skills actually slide backward in kids from underserved backgrounds. The Freedom School program is designed to curb this "learning loss."

National Studies recently released showed the Freedom School summer program stopped learning loss in 95% of participants, and that over 60% actually recorded reading improvement over the six-week program.

Deidre Grubb, Shirley Rosen, and Rabbi Schindler lead this visionary effort to establish the first Freedom School sponsored by all Jewish organizations. All participants at Shalom Park benefitted from this six-week program. Shalom Park Freedom School Partners made a three-year commitment to the program.

On Wednesday, September 7, the powerful documentary, *Waiting for Superman* will be shown in Lerner Hall at 7 PM. Tickets are \$10 and will benefit the Shalom Park Freedom School. This is open to the entire community. If you want to get involved or support the Shalom Park Freedom School visit www.spfreedom-school.org. ☆

—Gale Osborne



The amazing Teen Board of the Freedom School.

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