

By Clarence Mitchell

It was a beautiful morning. The sensitive child beside me on the front seat of the car was quiet and thoughtful. From the corner of my eye I could see the outline of his head that even then gave promise of being noble. Each <sup>time</sup> he glanced out of the window or shifted his position my heart strings stretched to the breaking point.

What was the occasion? It was 1954 and I was taking him to a newly desegregated school. All morning the radio had brought news of a boycott by white parents. There was the impending threat of violence. Already he had been punched by hoodlums and threatened by others. He was large for his age, but he seemed small against the background of the menacing events. I wanted desperately to be near him if trouble occurred. I wished with all my heart that my fears for his safety would be groundless.

At the school the milling crowds, the signs saying "N--rs go back to Africa." and "Stay out until the N---rs leave" and jeers from an assortment of ruffians seemed to indicate that entering the school doorway would lead to injury. Without hesitation and in the modest but courageous manner that is characteristic of him now that he is a man, he gathered his books, pencils and dignity. He walked through the crowds and disappeared into the school building.

What could one do? How could one stand between him and a thrown brick? How could one reach the class room in time make a savage counter attack if the hoodlums invaded the school building. Anger burned civilization from the surface of my emotions. Then reason returned. Plead with the children to go to school. Challenge the hoodlums to back up their jeers. Call the police to clear the area and point out the individual trouble makers. Hope that somehow the city would have sense enough to invoke the law and put the advocates of the boycott in jail. These were the alternatives and I followed each of them.

All of them worked. Some children responded derisively to my plea, but many were ready to take a rational suggestion from any adult. They went to school. The hoodlums, probably assuming that I had some hidden resources, would slink off when challenged. The police were magnificent in responding with action when I pointed out trouble makers. Finally, the city acted and the next day a patrol wagon was waiting to take some of those promoting the boycott to jail. Some halted their activity, but other did not and they were given a ride to the lock-up.