

St. Matthews, SC and Fifty-one Years
by Lynn Goldsmith Goldberg

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The summer of 1965 SCLC and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a project called the Summer Community Organization for Political Education, with the goal of informing and registering black citizens across the South to vote. Brandeis University, along with many other schools around the country, recruited students who were willing to give up their summer plans to head south and participate in the project. It was going to be a dangerous summer, but many students wanted to be a part of the bigger civil rights efforts.

While we were there that summer, six members of the Brandeis group spent our time in St. Matthews, South Carolina. We were looked after and cared for by a very close knit and warm black community. They became our family and bonds were established that have lasted even today. Our hosts and sponsors there were Mr. and Mrs. Furman Hart.

On July 23, 2016 I had the pleasure of visiting St. Matthews again, fifty-one years later. My husband, Larry, and I were invited to a family reunion held by the Mckenzie family. I had become especially close to them because one of vital local workers in the summer in 1965 was Harold Mckenzie. Harold, Furman Hart, Jr., Butch Jackson and John Lee Anderson were our guides around the miles of winding roads through Calhoun County. Harold later lived with my parents, Sonia and George Goldsmith in Princeton, NJ, for a year to further his high school education. Other Mckenzie members later met the Goldsmith family and became even closer with them.

Although there are many things that have changed in small ways, St. Matthews is still the sleepy small town in South Carolina that we knew the summer of 1965. The railroad tracks still divide the main street, but blacks and whites live on both sides. The Savitz Department Store is now the Town and Country Café—a slightly musty eatery that is loaded with yesteryear charm. Floyd's grocery is now a Laundromat, and Calhoun Road, which was the address of the Hart home, was renumbered so I was unable to find the house without help from Melvin Hart. Of course the overgrown vegetation has rendered many places unrecognizable, hiding places like the home of Hope Williams who was the most important leader we had that summer.

Reuniting with all the Mckenzies this past weekend at the home of Allen and Debbie Mckenzie was beyond a treasure. Harold was one of eight children so there were lots of people for us to meet. We immediately fell into their warm embrace and all the years that have past evaporated. There were some surprises too. Geneva Floyd, now 96 years old, was there as well. She and her husband owned the small grocery store where we were always welcome to come and have a soda or some food. Another person at the Mckenzie family picnic was Melvin Hart. His father, Furman Hart, was our sponsor in the town where we came to live while working in Calhoun County. Although I have known Melvin for many years, I had never actually met him face to face – he was too young that summer to be active in the voter registration project. Instead, he was one of the very first black students to integrate the schools in the town that fall.

I had the pleasure of giving a talk on the work SCOPE did that summer and how over the years changes have slowly come to the area. Many of the younger generations there did not know much about the Summer of 1965 in the South. Now they have learned about the courageous work their neighbors did back then. They can read more about it on my web site that was set up by Brandeis University. (Google: Lynn Goldsmith Goldberg papers)



SCOPE home in St. Matthews, SC July 2016