

## I Invited Negroes to My Home

BY J. McREE ELROD

*After teaching and working as associate librarian of a Korean university, J. McREE ELROD returned to his homeland in the South, where he is a visiting professor in a Southern college. He here tells of the strident opposition he encountered when he invited Negroes to his home.*

WE LIVE in a frame house in a white neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee. We have received a bomb threat for having invited Negroes to our home. How could this have happened to someone whose ancestors since the Revolution have been buried in Georgia? We are forced by the dangers which now face our three preschool children to think back over the events which brought us to this point.

I was born in Georgia, a state which I had never left for more than a few days until I came north to Nashville for graduate study. Here I courted and married. I received my first M.A. from Peabody College for Teachers, and when I decided to become a missionary I went for further study to Scarritt College for Christian Workers, where I earned my second master's degree. While at Scarritt I was sent, as part of my fieldwork, to Negro churches of my own denomination; it was thought that this would be good preparation for working in a new and different culture. There I found a rich Christian fellowship and a warmth of reception which were repeated in my five-year experience as a missionary in Korea. Now my family and I are again in Nashville, where I am a visiting professor in a local college.

We found an apartment in a house situated between an insurance company office and the home of a college teacher of sociology, so the project of inviting a group from the churches with which

we had worked and which had kept in touch with us while we were in Korea did not seem to present a problem. A potluck picnic in our back yard was planned. However, between the time of the invitation and the day of the gathering, we moved to our present apartment, which is better suited to our needs. We questioned the neighbors who live on either side of us and found that they had no objection to our continuing with the planned visit of our Negro church members.

A group of almost twenty people, half of them children and the rest adults, arrived one Sunday afternoon in the summer, bringing Southern fried chicken, layer cakes, and other delicacies. The ladies wore stockings, high-heeled shoes, hats, and gloves with their summer frocks; the men were in business suits, and the young people in their Sunday outfits were as shiny as new buttons. The younger ones ate on the large front porch while the adults sat around in the living room, eating and talking with the two missionaries — one Negro, one white — and two prospective missionaries — both white — whom we had invited to meet the group. After an enjoyable afternoon, they drove away. Then the telephone calls began. Repeated calls disturbed both us and our landlady, who lives several blocks away. Reluctantly we agreed to have no more Negro groups in our home — "reluctantly" not because we had planned to have any more groups, but because we felt we should be free to have in our home whomever we wished so long as they were well mannered. My wife went with the children to her mother's for a couple of weeks to escape the turmoil. Following my wife's return, our landlady brought some furniture to our back entrance; the activity was noticed, and the rumor was spread that we had sneaked a Negro group in by the back door. In late August and early September, we left Nashville for a three-week vacation in Georgia. During our absence, our landlady used Negroes to help

move some furniture into the upstairs apartment in this two-family house. Again the rumor of a Negro group spread.

One day our Negro missionary friend, who had just returned from his vacation, stopped by to invite us and our children to go with him and his family to the state fair. The children and I went, and when we returned at four o'clock, my wife was on the phone with our landlady, who throughout has been most kind and sympathetic. Our landlady was reporting a bomb threat she had received. I decided that we should make some effort to understand, and perhaps overcome, the resistance which threatened to turn itself into violence. I had never met most of our neighbors, but I began calling at each house on our block and the nearer houses on the neighboring block. Calls which we had received had reported that "everyone on the block" or "every homeowner in the neighborhood" was determined that we should move. In the fourteen houses of this block and the six houses of the next block that I visited that evening, I was kindly received in all but two, and only four people voiced objections to our having Negro visitors. In one house Negroes had been entertained in the past, and in another Negro professional colleagues had been invited for an evening in the near future. At one house, however, I was ordered from the yard and called a "Communist nigger-lovin' son of a bitch," and at another the man of the house, planting his hands on his porch posts, kicked me in the chest as I stood on his porch step.

Last night and today many of the neighbors whom I met on my visits — ladies of the neighborhood, young matrons, professional women, and gracious Southern gentlewomen — have called to meet and sympathize with my wife. Encouraged by this and convinced that all Christians by the very nature of Christianity are committed to be "nigger lovers," we have decided to remain. We shall continue to welcome into our home our brethren, be they American Negro, the many Orientals among my students, or those of our white neighbors still willing to come. We wish that we could say that this decision was made completely on the grounds of principle, but just as the money value of his property motivated the man who kicked me from his step, we are partially motivated by the expense of moving.

There are, however, two principles involved in this controversy. One is whether we shall be allowed to enjoy the free use of our home for work similar to that which we were sent to the other side of the world to perform; the other is whether a bitter and vocal minority will speak for the whole neighborhood. This latter question seems to us to be one facing much of the South today.

## STILLNESS

BY F. D. DE CASTRO

Standing still — I never seem  
To know when it comes, the trance,  
I mean — I feel the stream hushed  
Under its thin glass,  
The horses, motionless, clinging to  
The hill, a cloud balancing the sun  
In a cotton hand.

I hold my breath. Then from the  
Mouth of a tree explodes a flock of  
Birds, flight and feather weaving  
A brittle spell: Beaks  
Spilling crystals lighter than dew  
On spider webs. So bright my sight  
I see the liltng

Notes leap, glint, hug and tease  
The air, nimble as motes, do almost  
Anything but disappear: with supple  
Twists perform like  
Aerialists. This miracle a canticle  
To the stillness all around. And  
Round the edges of

The sound of birds I feel a lit  
Stillness deeper than that of horses,  
Cloud and stream, a stillness bigger  
Than love, brighter than  
Light, or darker than the darkness  
That moves above or under the ground —  
Oh, a stillness more

Luminous than Death, and I feel  
It breathing in myself, no longer  
Standing still but walking away —  
The sunset on my back —  
My pious feet stepping on the ground;  
Behind me leaving no marks, no quiet,  
Or the slightest sound.