

By Doris Ewing

In the early 60's I spent the summer after graduation working and living in New York City. This was the time of Martin Luther King, freedom riders and sit-ins at Woolworth lunch counters in the South. I had been radicalized at my liberal white college and wanted to do something to help black people. I joined CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, and attended the meetings. Interestingly, there were very few black people in the group. One of our leaders had been badly beaten during a protest in the South and I greatly admired him.

CORE decided to protest at the Woolworth in Harlem in support of the sit-ins in the South. A friend and I carefully made our signs and took the subway up to Harlem. Before long we were surrounded by an angry crowd. The Black Muslims were picketing us and their message was clear. Whitey go home and leave our Woolworth alone! We don't want you here. Some stayed but my friend and I left. As a white, privileged do-gooder I was clueless and way out of my depth.

Powerful forces were at work of which I had little understanding. My efforts to help were trivial, irrelevant and perhaps even harmful. Looking back, I am reminded of a saying; "Do not mess in the affairs of dragons for we are crunchy and taste good with peanut butter."