



Sr. Patricia Geuting

Dear Diane,

I thought the attached might be of interest for your project on work with the poor. It is taken from a letter to my parents from Stuart in Princeton where I was living after returning from Probation. The letter is dated June 6, 1967. It describes in some detail a day spent cleaning up a migrant camp in the area.

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Then, Sunday, was the migrant workers Project - what a day! New Jersey has many migrant workers during the summer and, despite the fact that in New Jersey they are supposedly better off than in most states, the conditions under which they live are unbelievably bad. Apparently the farmers, who cannot (at least the small farmers) afford to provide really adequate, decent housing, bribe the state inspectors to OK the filthy, leaky huts in which the migrants are forced to live. The children here have become very interested in the problems of the migrants and last summer some of them helped out in the school and day nursery <sup>by the state (?)</sup> with the help of the OEO for the migrant children while the parents worked in the fields. Some will do this again this summer. However, the children also raised money to buy supplies for fixing up one migrant camp. Arrangements were made with a farmer and last Sunday we went out - 6 nuns and roughly 50 children, including 9 boys, representing not only St. Ann's, but also several other schools and youth groups in the area. Working in teams of about 6 under the direction of a "crew leader" (in most cases a nun, although several teams were led by children) and following a carefully worked out work schedule, we worked from 11 A.M. until 4:30 P.M. We began by washing everything (walls, ceilings, floors) with disinfectant and, under the direction of the farmer, throwing out several truckloads of junk. After lunch we painted, repaired in some places, patched leaky roofs, as well as holes in the walls of some of the shacks, cleaned layers of grease off of stoves, scrubbed ice boxes (some of which contained bits of rotten food left there last summer), painted beds, pounded and sprayed with lysol mattresses that ought really to have been burned except that we could not replace them, made and installed shelves and clothing hooks, and cleaned out and burned the debris under some of the shacks which constituted a fire hazard! All told, we cleaned up and repaired as much as possible, a dilapidated farm house consisting of 8 rooms, 5 cinderblock shacks (filthy, but otherwise in good condition), and 7 other shacks made of a



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rotted material little better than waterproof cardboard, as well as a wash house consisting of 2 showers (no water came from either one) and two laundry tub sinks, one of which produced a trickle of water. The only operative source of water in the camp was one outdoor faucet to which we attached a hose for the day. About 4 migrants live in this camp all year round, but from July to October 40-50 people live here! Everyone worked really hard all day long, despite the heat, and followed implicitly all instructions - including the health precautions laid down: drink no water from the camp (we supplied several hundred soft drinks), use no facilities (we ran a car back and forth to a decent rest room periodically), report immediately for first aid if you get so much as a tiny scratch, under no circumstances go barefoot. By the end of the day, all were exhausted but happy that they had come. We know that much we did will be undone before the summer is over, but we hope that the little we could do will be at least a hopeful drop in the migrants' bucket of misery and will serve to make even a few of the 40-50 who will move in in July realize that someone respects them as persons. Despite warnings from OEO personnel that the migrants living there would resent us, we found them both grateful and respectful, especially to the religious. In the beginning they kept asking the children if they had been forced to come (all were volunteers), if they were being paid (they weren't), if they were all Catholic (they weren't); apparently they found it hard to believe that we would do all we did simply because we were genuinely concerned about them! As a result of OEO warnings, we at first assured one migrant living in the farm house that he need not worry as we would not touch his room or any of his belongings. After he realized what we were doing, he came and begged us to fix up and paint his room first of all. We tried to avoid any publicity about this project, since we had trouble, at first, convincing the farmer to let us come, but the "Trenton Times" got wind of it and sent out a photographer. As a result, my picture is in the Trenton Times for Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>. I look a little like something from outer space as I have on a coverall apron and have a cloth tied around my head to protect my hair.