Surrounded by so many of our friends, we felt like prisoners in a holy war.

The police wanted nothing more than to be rid of us, so they reduced the bail from $100 to $3 each.

But it didn't matter.

We weren't about to cooperate in ANY way with the system allowing the very discrimination we were protesting.

It didn't take Nashville's powers-that-be long to realize it was impossible to force us to pay our way out.

Around 11:00 p.m., we were all released.

Back at the lunch counters, police could hardly keep up with the waves of students quickly filling the empty seats. No sooner would one group be arrested than another would take its place.

82 of us went to jail that day.

We were jubilant as we filled the jail cells.

We shall all be free someday.

we are not alone...
That Sunday morning, Fisk University president Dr. Stephen J. Wright addressed more than 1,000 students jammed into the university chapel.

Dr. Wright was the first black college president in the country to take such a stand.

To the students who took part in yesterday's actions, I say to you — I stand with you.

Nashville stands with you.

We were euphoric.

The next day we ALL went to court.

Z. Alexander Looby, an older man from the West Indies, was our lead attorney, and the first black man on Nashville's City Council in forty years. He had also worked with Thurgood Marshall.

Three amazing lawyers came to our defense, refusing to charge even a dime.

First off, y'all should know we're gonna be trying the defendants in groups of half a dozen or so.

Your Honor, I OBJECT — Overruled.

Your Honor —

Motion denied.

So the trial proceeded.

These young people were NOT disturbing the peace — FAR from it.

They were peaceful customers, fully compliant with the law, who were harassed and beaten.

What would you call it?

Oh, what's the use?
When the city followed through with its workhouse routine, it prompted outrage from all over the country. Telegrams of support arrived from Ralph Bunche, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harry Belafonte.

At the same time, MORE students volunteered and the sitting continued.

Much like Nashville itself, Mayor Ben West had a relatively progressive reputation on race. It did not, however, necessarily mean he was willing to risk his job and reputation to help.

But on March 3rd, Mayor West ordered our release.

We left jail with a sense of triumph, and West also formed a biracial committee to study segregation in the city. In return, he asked us to temporarily halt our sit-ins while the committee worked, and we agreed.

That same day, the Chancellor and trustees of Vanderbilt University ordered the Dean of the Divinity School to dismiss Jim Lawson.

Cut off the head, the thinking went, and the body would fall.
But for Vehement, things didn’t work out as planned. Instead, dozens of faculty and staff threatened to resign in protest, making national headlines.

By the end of the month, we decided we’d waited long enough. So on Friday the 25th, more than a hundred of us marched from First Baptist Church to nine downtown stores.

There were no arrests that day, but after Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington saw footage of the day’s protest on the national news, he was irate.

These sit-ins are instigated by and STAGED for the convenience of the Columbia Broadcast System.

Quietly—almost invisibly—within the local churches, a black community boycott of ALL downtown stores began—what some people called a “selective buying campaign.”

Would everyone in the congregation who has NOT spent any money downtown please STAND?

Sir, you’re the owner of this establishment. Can you tell us what business has been like?

You could not a bowling ball down Church Street, and not hit anybody.

On April 5th, those empty streets brought an offer from the mayor’s committee. It proposed a system of “partial integration”.

Which was the same to us as partial segregation.

But it was supported by two black committee members—Fisk president Wright, and T.S.U. president W.S. Davis. This felt like betrayal, and was more evidence of the differences between our generations.

We saw that evidence the next time Thurgood Marshall spoke at Fisk.

Thurgood Marshall was a good man, but listening to him speak, convicted me more than ever that our revolt was as much against the traditional black leadership structure as it was against segregation and discrimination.
Five days after Marshall spoke, we resumed the sit-ins.

The next weekend — Easter — a conference organized by Ella Baker of SCLC was held at Shaw University in Raleigh.

Baker asked Jim Lawson, whose message appealed to the young people listening, to give the keynote speech.

The NAACP** is too conservative —

we must tap into our greatest resource, a people no longer the victims of racial evil, who can ACT in a disciplined manner to implement the Constitution.

The weekend closed with the creation of a student-con group that would coordinate and organize the entire sit-in movement, and whatever lay beyond.

That organization became known as the STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE, or SNCC — which we pronounced simply as "snick."
April 19, 1960

I was on my way out the door to our 6:30 a.m. Nashville Student Movement Central Committee meeting when the phone rang.

STUDENT: please be mindful of others who are studying, thank you!
BERNARD!
We've gotta go--

They've BOMBED the Looby's house!

Well, at 5:30 a.m., someone threw dynamite at the Looby's house from a passing car--

I think so. It looks like, miraculously, no one was injured.

The blast tore off the front of the house, and people are saying it shattered windows a block away.

We can't let this intimidate us.

What about the Loobys? Are they okay?

We've gotta do something, and it's gotta be now.

If we're to make ourselves heard, we must dramatize the situation, and we HAVE to stand together. Our own government CANNOT allow this violence.

We have to march.

Let's get the word out to our people and send a telegram to Mayor West--

Agreed.

Let him know we're on our way to SEE him.

By noon, thousands of people had gathered at Tennessee State to march on City Hall.
We are all Christians. Let us pray together—no race, no color, no idea. No hatred.

May I speak, Mr. Mayor? I asked the mayor to end discrimination.

Yes, Mr. Mayor. What do you recommend doing next?

Well, I believe in the power of education. I think it's the best way to deal with this issue.

Do you mean desegregating the schools?

That's what I recommend.
The next evening, Dr. King arrived to speak —

... and at 3:15 pm on May 10, 1960, those six downtown Nashville stores served food to black customers for the first time in the city's history.

"... I came to Nashville not to bring inspiration, but to gain inspiration from the great movement that has taken place in this community."

"No job can live forever."

"Let us not despair."

The universe is with us.

Walk together, children.

Don't get weary.
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John Lewis

I want to thank my Mom for the opportunities in my life that her hard work and sacrifice made possible. I am forever indebted to John Lewis for his remarkable life, his trust, his faith, and his friendship. I am in awe of Nate Powell’s talent and grateful to work with him. I want to thank Sara for her patience and support, Vaughn for his guidance and friendship, and Don for reminding me to have fun. I wish Jordan could see this. And thank you Mr. Parker, Mrs. Fuentes, Jacob Gillson, A.D., Professor Uchimura and all of the teachers and mentors that gave me the courage to walk this road.

Andrew Aydin

I'd like to dedicate my work on this book to the memory of Sarah Kirsch (1970-2012), whose compassion, humanity, vision, and talent deeply shaped the direction of my life from my early teenage years; to my wife Rachel, a true original and cranky do-gooder committed to helping those who need a hand; and to our amazing daughter Harper, in hopes of her growing into a world more humane, more considerate, more loving – a world she and her entire generation will inherit. Let's make the world worth it.

Nate Powell