

Civilian Public Service Unit No. 62  
Cheltenham School for Boys  
Cheltenham, Maryland  
January 15, 1943

Dear Friends,

Back in New England I was forever talking about "the kind of work for which I was better prepared" and which I wanted to get into as soon as I had a fairly good understanding of Civilian Public Service. I wouldn't trade those eight months as a laborer in a fifty man camp for anything. In that "ideal community" I found most of what I had expected and a good deal more. But I was always looking forward to the time when that very indirect form of social service would come to an end and I would begin to meet the more vital needs of the day. Most of us in CPS are best satisfied with work which has its purpose the repairing of the damage wrought by the forces of war. "Rehabilitation" is the term which is usually applied to such work.

When war is looked upon not only as the preparation for and waging of combat, but of the social and economic struggle which precedes the declaration as well, then Cheltenham can be considered as a refuge for war victims and CPS 62 as an agency of rehabilitation. Some historical analysts contend that this war has been in the making during the past seventy-five years <sup>when</sup> that modern business and imperialism have been developing. During that same period big cities and their slums have been growing. In the great economic and social struggle for existence some of the heaviest "casualties" have been among the children of cities like Baltimore.

For more than seventy years the courts of Maryland have sent delinquent colored boys to Cheltenham, known during most of this time as the "House of Reformation". Until very recently it was nothing but a junior penitentiary to which most of the boys were sent until they were twenty-one when they usually "graduated" to prison. Cruelty and lack of both willingness and ability to understand the boys characterized the treatment they received. Just the other morning I was out looking for a boy who had run away, and upon asking a colored neighbor if he had seen the boy he said not but assured me: "If I see him I'll be sure to let you know. Was a time when we were glad to see the boys get away, but not any longer!"

The change came several years ago when people sincerely interested in the welfare of the boys gained control of the institution. For two years a capable and understanding superintendent has been trying to make it a decent place in which to live. Now, after a lull in which the demands of the war had stripped him of many of his personnel, he is hoping to begin a truly progressive program with the help of twenty-two C.O.s.

Each of us is supposed to have some particular skill. There is a cook, a hospital attendant, three social case workers, two psychological clinicians, and an accountant. The largest part of the work to be done is down where the boys spend most of their time: in the six cottages. Supervising the eating, sleeping, playing, and part of the work of fifty boys had been handled, for a while just before we came, from 7 A.M. to 9 P. M. by one man. Under these conditions pretty stern methods were necessary in order to hold such a large group of active boys in check. There was no chance for the development of a constructive and interesting schedule of activities. With the unit at its full strength next week twelve of the men will be in the cottages with six regularly employed cottage masters and they are looking forward hopefully to the development of a new approach to leisure time supervision.



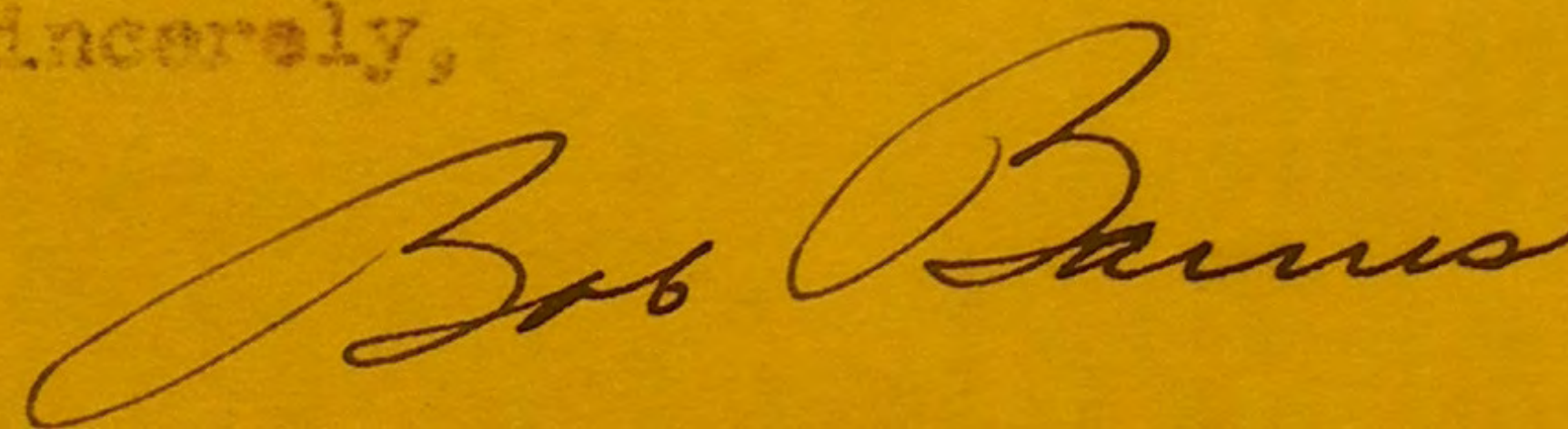
My application for this project expressed interest in case work, the psychological clinic, and cottage mastering. I was a master of none of these and find myself a jack of all of them and a few more. Most of my time has been spent in the office where I have handled the many records kept on the boys. I was preparing to replace a man who was supposed to leave but since he is not going after all I will work into something else. In the meantime I have been in turn night watchman, night supervisor in the office, and cottage master, relieving men in those jobs when they were either sick or on leave.

Ten days in a cottage seemed equal to all the other fifty days I have been here put together! I worked in each of the two cottages with the smallest boys, eight to twelve years old in one and eleven to fourteen in the other. It doesn't take long to understand the futility of a carefully worked out therapeutic program when the manpower for administering it is lacking. Even if a program could be good enough to occupy 90% of the group it would not be possible to carry it out since the other 10% would be getting out of sight and into mischief. It has seemed to me that most of the serious problems center around a few boys who bully and exact tribute of candy and other things. The exploited, if they are able, don't like to fight back since it gives them bad conduct records and thus they just have to "take it" as long as the cottage master doesn't see everything that goes on. If we can just temper a little these savage forces constantly surging through the lives of these culturally impoverished kids I will consider our stay here worth while.

Our project is the first of the sort that has been approved by the government for Civilian Public Service. There were many applications and those of us who were accepted consider ourselves lucky and hope that the others will find something equally satisfying very soon either in the same kind of work or something related to it. Everyone is familiar with the alarming growth of juvenile delinquency during these reckless days of easy money, broken homes, and lowered moral standards. Even if Cheltenham performed the miracle of completely reforming its several hundred charges replacements would be developing every day. While there is a great need for help in this sort of institutional work the means of prevention demand even more manpower. The vast majority of neglected children are still outside the institutions but need plenty of attention. I do hope that a real understanding of the plight of these kids may soon become common knowledge. When it does the aroused social conscience will do much to help them in one way or another.

I have gone on at pretty great length and yet there is a lot unsaid. I never could have told this much to you all though if I hadn't used this means. If you want to hear more let me know and I will do my best to get personal letters written. And if you don't want any more it would be nice to hear from you anyway!

Sincerely,



Best wishes to everyone. Hope ~~is~~ Bill is getting along well and that Fred's plans for the future are working out satisfactorily. I will be interested to hear how he makes out.