

CHAPTER 8

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*“The future belongs to those who
believe in the beauty of their dreams.”*

Eleanor Roosevelt



“I was eight years old when I experienced my first taste of injustice. On our unpaved street in Selma, I was playing with the neighborhood children at dusk. When the first car began to drive past us, I noticed that the people inside the cars were wearing white gowns and had something white on their heads. While I had heard about the KKK, I had never come face to face with any of them. I had heard from older folks that the KKK was a hate group known to beat and lynch Negroes. The KKK were usually involved with violence and wanted to exercise control and keep Negroes in bondage. Even though I was only eight, I knew enough to feel fear when I saw the white hooded sheets on the KKK.

In March of 1963, when Charles Bonner asked me to go to the first meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church, I was an eager and willing participant. He was so excited about his meeting with Bernard and Colia that I wanted to hear more. I wanted our situation to change and wanted to be a part of this change. I was excited about all the new things we were going to be taught. During the meeting around March 19, 1963, with approximately 40 other students, we discussed the voter's test and each student was asked to fill out a blank form. After carefully filling out the voter registration forms, we went over the canvass forms and discussed the techniques of canvassing. After the tutoring and training was completed, we were taught freedom songs. Charles Bonner and Nathaniel Tate had written a new song, Hallelujah. In the latter part of March 1963, with about 30 of us present, we elected officers. Charles A. Bonner was elected president and Cleophus Hobbs was elected Captain of the Group Leaders. Terry Shaw was the Chairman. Cleophus, Terry and Charles frequently made speeches to the group, encouraging the already motivated students to bring others student to join the Movement.

In October 1963, after the sit-ins had begun, Charles and I, along with my cousin William "Rat" Dawson and Doris Packard, went to a sit-in at the Wilby Theater. This theater had never been integrated. We Negroes were required to sit upstairs in the balcony, designated for "Negroes". When we arrived at the theater, Charles told us we were going to sit on the main floor which was designated only for the white customers. I was so afraid! I did not want to suffer the abuse of the white customers. Charles and William paid for us to enter and we found seats next to the middle aisle. I did not want to sit there because the white customers walked directly past our group. I really did not want to start a disturbance, nor did I want to be part of one. I silently prayed like I had never prayed before, asking the Lord to keep us safe. I had no idea what the movie was about. I only wanted it to be over so we could leave without an incident. I breathed a huge sigh of relief when we walked out of that theater.

On another occasion we sat-in at the Thirsty Boy Café. Before that day we always had go to the back window, but this time we were not going to go the back window and ring the bell for

our food. Instead, we walked in, placed our order and found a seat. It was not long before the white people who were seated and waiting for their orders stood up and began to file out, muttering racist names mostly starting with the letter “N”, as they departed. Some even left their food untouched. We nervously joked that we could eat the untouched, abandoned food. We left without incident at this location as well.”