

CONSTANCE KIMBROUGH ROZIER (CONNIE)

(BA Degree Fisk University)

*We shall not
We shall not be moved
Just like a tree that's planted by the waters
We shall not be moved
On our way to victory
We shall not be moved
We're on our way to victory
We shall not be moved*
Freedom Song



“The Call: When we were still students at R. B. Hudson High School I knew we were experiencing something historic and life changing. I watched classmates my age and younger show so much courage and dedication to the Cause. They stood up, spoke out, and went to jail; some on multiple occasions. I knew what was happening was important but my time was not then. After

graduation from Hudson High in 1964 I attended Stillman College for my freshman year in 1964-65, and Fisk University from 1965-1968. It was during that freshman year that I received my *Call*. I don't know what date or month it came but one day I, along with several female students from Selma were called to a meeting by the school administrators. I don't remember who spoke to us but what they were offering was to allow us to return to Selma, our hometown, for a limited time to work with an organization called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Our parents agreed, we packed, and were on our way. SNCC was amazing in its organization and strategic focus. Everything was planned and organized. SNCC knew that by recruiting females from Selma we would have a place to stay and that our parents could also provide housing for students who had been recruited from other colleges. It turns out that male students had been recruited from Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University. It was explained that the girls would assist the organizers with office duties and the guys would be trained to lead non-violent marches and sit-ins.

We met every day at Brown Chapel AME Church where a large group of volunteers gathered for training in non-violence. I watched while young men and women (really boys and girls) were called to the stage 2 by 2 to experience acts of pushing, shoving, derogatory remarks, and other training methods to help prepare them for what they would face during the marches and sit-ins they would soon participate in. This went on until the SNCC organizers felt that we were ready for our assignments. True to their word, the female students from Stillman were not put in harm's way. We were there to assist in office assignments such as telephone calls, typing, copying, etc. My specific assignment was to cover the telephone calls from the media to relay information regarding the number of people jailed that day, or the number that were hospitalized, etc. I was given the information by the organizers and I did my job, but the information I was relaying was about people I knew, people I had said goodbye to that morning, people I had prayed with before they left. It was heart wrenching, especially when the volunteers would return in the evening, some bleeding,

some so quiet, all of us needing to know we were safe for one more day.

The Resting Place: The highlight for the group was always when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to town. The First Baptist Church would be filled to the brim with people who came to hear him speak. For me and most others it fueled our dedication to the Cause. It solidified what we felt and what we were working to accomplish. Dr. King traveled a lot. My mother's friend, Mrs. Amelia Boynton, knew that Dr. King needed a safe place when he was in Selma so she had a room in her home set aside for him. I never saw him there but she showed it to me once and I knew in my heart she had done a good thing that would mean so much to such a busy, courageous man.

The Snake: Once while we were still working with SNCC, we ended a non-violent training session by going out to the steps of Brown Chapel AME Church. The steps are several levels and can accommodate many people, almost like bleachers. Anyway, the steps were filled, and in the center of the group on the sidewalk were several ministers. We were asked to bow our heads in prayer. One of the ministers had begun to pray when we heard the sound of cars on the street. The street had been empty of moving cars and everyone was silent for the prayer so it was easy to hear the sound of approaching cars.

I opened my eyes and the street was filled with police cars. White police. The car that appeared to be driven by the lead officer even had a pregnant white woman as a passenger. I suppose she came to see the spectacle of these "colored" folk. A pregnant white woman...what was she thinking and how safe she must have felt surrounded by these terrible men...white police officers. Remember, we had all been trained in non-violence and the training was taken very seriously. One of the policemen got out of his car carrying a snake, walked to the center of the group, stood in front of the minister who was praying, and threw the snake on him. Two men stepped forward to help knock the snake off the minister but no one else moved. We stood silent and non-violent. It fills me with sadness and horror even today as I write this. I knew then as I know now that what they did was a sin. I also knew that we would not ever give up, and that they would pay before God one day.

My Parents: My parents, James and Velma Kimbrough, were good people and among the very few blacks who were able to vote during my childhood years. They were met with many obstacles, but long before the movement my parents fought for this essential right to vote. When they paid the fee and passed the test, they had to prove they owned their home. When this was done they had to get letters of reference from acceptable white folks. These were just a few of the obstacles but somehow they met them and made sure that they voted in every election, and yes, they paid taxes too. They knew the importance of the vote and helped others who wanted to get registered. They were working people, my mother as a teacher and my father as a real-estate broker and a postman. These were considered good jobs and with a family of four children, they didn't want to do anything to lose those jobs. So when the organizers of the Movement came to Selma they attended Dr. King's speeches, but were hesitant to participate in all the activities. Adults and working people were openly threatened with loss of jobs, jail time, and even loss of life. My parents had seen the KKK drive the streets, cross burnings, some of their friends run out of town, and they knew the threats were real. But their *Call* came just as mine had. When the teachers and professional people were asked to join the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, my parents talked it over and decided to do it. This was the second march, the one after Bloody Sunday. Years later my Dad went on to become a City Councilman but I think crossing that bridge with my mother was the proudest day of the Movement for him."