ANNIE PEARL WORMELY JUNIUS (SANDERS)

(Retired Federal Government Staff Assistant in the Department of Congressional Legislative Affairs.)

I'm on my way to the freedom land
I'm on my way to the freedom land
I'm on my way to the freedom land
I'm on my way, praise God
I'm on my way
Freedom Song

"Life for us when we were children in Selma was a matter of survival. We survived. Our parents were at about at the same level. They made sure that we went to church. We went to Sunday School, and we had to stay through church. And they fed us. They clothed us. We didn't have the best of food. We didn't have the best of clothes, but we survived. My mother worked at the cigar factory in Selma. She worked, I think a total of 37 years and when

she left, there was no retirement for her. They had no retirement plan at all. That's the way it was back then.

I realized early on that life for us black kids and our parents was different and unfair. Willie Moore was my first boyfriend, and when we went to the Wilby movie theater, we could only sit in the black section, up in the balcony. When we came out of the theater, four white guys confronted us, jeering at him, trying to start a fight, and Willie had only a little pocket knife. He was able to keep those boys at bay with that knife. He was moving it in a semi-circle, protecting me. There were four guys, jeering at him, trying to start a fight. He pulled that little knife out and pushed me aside. He put his hand across me to protect me. And he had knife in his right hand and said come on. And then they backed off. He did that for me.

And then we had to live with the black and white drinking fountains. I resented it every time I saw them. When we used to go visit my mother's sister, who lived in Prickett, Alabama, we rode the bus and we used to stop about half way there. The white section had a beautiful lit-up restaurant in the front. We had to go to a little hole in the back that was so dark, you could hardly see in front of you. But it was all we had. If we wanted to use the restroom or wanted to get a hotdog, we had to go to this dark hole in the back. I was really young when I realized that we were treated as inferior to the white people. I was about eleven years old then, but I always vividly looking in amazement at this big beautiful restaurant that was all lit up, and all the white people going in there, and feeling so hurt that we had to go in the back.

Our parents told us what the difference was, they showed us. Later, when we went to jail and they allowed the parents to send us boxes of food or other things we needed, some of the parents were afraid to send boxes because they were afraid of losing the little house jobs that they had, working for white people. My mother was not afraid. She sent a big box, and she put a note in there, saying to share with the other girls because everybody didn't get a box. We were 16 years old then.

I became an activist in the movement at age 16 because – to borrow a phrase from President Obama – it was the right thing to do. And I was not afraid. When I went to all the different jails they

first put us in the Selma City Jail. When it got overcrowded, they sent us to the Selma County Jail. When that got overcrowded, they took us to Camp Selma which is about 8 miles down Highway 80 West, and when that got overcrowded they finally sent us to Camp Camden. But I was not afraid, and on my travels from Camp Selma to Camp Camden I called out every posse man who was on my bus. I let them know, "I know you." I said, "You work in the service station on the cross of Selma Avenue and Broad Street. And you right here. You come down my street selling watermelons to us. Don't come down and mess with my street no more." I just told them. I was outspoken and because I was always labeled crazy, I just let 'em know. I said, "Don't come down my street no more haulin' those watermelons, 'cause we don't wanta buy no more from you."

We kept leaving school because we were trying to get to the mass meetings. We kept leaving school and we kept getting picked up. On one day when I got picked up four times, we decided to go through the white neighborhood to Brown Chapel Church because the police were out in the black neighborhood, looking for us. So we went up through the white neighborhood to get to Brown Chapel. There were about 6 or 8 of us who were walking together. We looked up on a high porch and all we could see were the posse. All we could see were green helmets. And we knew what it would have been for us if they had followed us. They didn't see us because they were not looking for us to be in that neighborhood. We got down on the ground and crawled on the ground until we could get out of their sight line, and then we jumped up and started running. That's how we got back to the church.

I didn't come in direct contact with Sheriff Clark or Chief Baker, but I was arrested by the Posse, and they were Jim Clark's men. When they took us to the city jail after we got arrested, we were pushed in like cattle into a very small space. There wasn't anywhere for anybody to sit down. There was no water. We were just pushed in like cattle, and if you push cattle to a place they stand up. When it got overcrowded, they took the older girls and took us to the county jail. It was the same thing everywhere we went. But in defense of Camp Camden, in Wilcox County, where

we finally ended up, those people cared about what we were doing. We didn't see it at the time, but when I thought about it afterwards I know those people were on our side. They treated us well. We had beds. We had good food. On the day we were taken from Camp Camden to take us back, they were baking gingerbread for us. We had to leave with the smell of gingerbread in the air and couldn't get any.

I remember they took us to court, and the judge said, "Take these girls back to Camp Camden," but they took us back to Camp Selma. My sister Erilene and some other girls had broken out windows and some screens. They didn't discover it until we got there, and by then Eriline and the others were already out of jail. Because they discovered that, the judge said to take us back to Camp Selma. He said, "They have torn up Camp Selma. Take 'em back. Take their beds away." They fed us pork and beans out of the can with buttermilk. That was a concoction to kill you right there - cold butter beans and buttermilk. We were introduced to the cement floor. There were no beds in there. I went to the window and yelled out the window, "I don't know who took these beds, but they better bring us something because we sleep on this cement floor we gonna have the piles, and somebody's gonna be in trouble." And all of a sudden, the door swung open and mattresses just started coming in. I just wasn't afraid. I don't know why. I just wasn't afraid.

But Camp Selma was very different from Camp Camden. I really believe they were on our side because of the way they treated us. I am talking the whole place – white cops and blacks. We were treated 'humanly' at Camp Camden. There was one guy by the name of Abraham. He was one of the trustees at Wilcox County. He was in prison even though they had no business locking him up. I found out that he had been in a car accident where a white person hit him and pushed him into another white person's car, and that person died. And they locked him up, not the white guy who caused the accident. He liked me. He came to my house and asked for me. When I got out of that jail, that man came to my street in that big orange prison truck, and I told my mama go to the door and tell him he couldn't come into my house. As a trustee he could go and come as he pleased. He was a good-

looking black man, and he could look at all the records. That's how he found out where I lived. My mother told me he couldn't be coming to see me.

I went to all the meetings at Tabernacle. When I went to Brown Chapel, Dr. King was speaking. I have tried to tell my daughter how I felt. It looked as if he had a halo around his head. With all the people packed in that church—it was like a light was around his head. He was the most beautiful man you've ever seen. I was in the crowd, but he just stood out.

When Dr. King preached nonviolence, I understood where he was coming from because you get more bees with honey than you do with vinegar, and I understood that concept. And that was what we did, but I don't remember being hit or having the dogs set on me. It could be because we were girls. They didn't hit us.

When we were in Camp Selma I know exactly how many girls were there. There were 33 girls in the jail. The reason I remember that is that Gloria Harvey hollered across the yard, saying, "We need 3 drinks for 10 cents. We need 3 dollars and 30 cents to get some drinks. She meant Sodas by drinks. I told her that no one on that bus that took us to jail had any money for any drinks. She was crying.

Gloria Harvey was sort of shy, and she was scared to death when I kept yelling at the cops on the bus. There was a one fat posse. And I said, "you right there with your mule nuts," that's what I called him. And the rest of them, they were laughing. The rest of the posse, you could see their ears moving. I just called him mule nuts. I said, "You with your mule nuts—I know where you work. Don't you ever come back to my neighborhood." When we were in that big dorm or whatever they called the place we were in, they brought a big dog and some of the girls start crying. I told them, "Shut up. These people aren't that crazy. They aren't gonna sic that dog on anybody." And the men turned around and took the dog away.

The judge who sent us back to Camp Selma was Judge Reynolds. He punished us for what the other girls had done, even though we weren't even at Camp Selma at that time. The boys got out and we were taken back to Camp Selma.

Our class of 1964 played a big role in the civil rights movement. Especially the leaders, Charles Bonner, Cleophus Hobbs and Terry Shaw, they were our leaders. Cleo was teaching those guys in the movement. He was small statured, but he was big. He was big. And Charles was walking beside him, looking down on him like a telegraph pole looking down on a hedge bush. He and Cleo were true friends, all the way to Cleo's death. Every time he came back to visit, he drove to Cleo's and visited with him, sitting on the dusty couch because it was your friend's house.

What I learned from the civil rights movement was that we all have a voice. It's up to us to use that voice. I also learned that profanity never solves anything. I always made sure that I did not use profanity. I could tell you what I felt without using a four-letter word. Our activities had a major impact on this country, but some of what we achieved was lost. We were all fighting for a common cause, but I think that at the time we were fighting, the bigwigs had not even gotten involved. We paved the way and we caused the bigwigs to have to come in, Dr. King, Jesse Jackson and all the others.

Dr. King decided that Selma was the place to take a stand because of what we were doing as teenagers. He said Selma is hot. Let's go to Selma. The United States changed tremendously as a result of our activism. I never fail to let people know that I fought for that. Without me going to jail for 8 days and fighting for your rights, you would not be able to be what you are today.

When we graduated in 1964, I stayed around Selma. I was working on Bloody Sunday. I worked for Ike Dawson, who owned the city cab company. I was the dispatcher. I heard everything that was going on. I dispersed a couple of cabs to take people who needed cabs to get near the march, but I wasn't in it because I was working. During those days, I was working 12 hour days and being paid $2.00. Not $2.00 an hour. $2.00 for a 12 hour shift."