

# AMOS SNELL

(Retired. San Francisco Municipal Railway)

*Marching 'round Selma like Jericho,  
Jericho, Jericho*

*Marching 'round Selma like Jericho*

*For segregation wall must fall*

*Look at people answering*

*To the Freedom Fighters call*

*Black, Brown and White American say*

*Segregation must fall*

**Selma Freedom Song**



“I grew up in East Selma. This part of town was covered with little patches of farmland. My family lived in a three-bedroom house. My daddy’s oldest daughter by a previous marriage, my mother’s seven children, my grandmother’s five children and my great aunt who owned the place. We had a cow named Cherry. We grew yams, peas, string beans and raised rabbits and chickens. We didn’t have a lot of money but my folks sure knew how to barter to make things go around.

You needed the creek on summer days when the temperature was over 100 degrees and the humidity was about the same. We couldn’t afford the 20¢ for the Black pool called Moss Pool or the YMCA. So we had to go to the creek and swim with the snakes. But we couldn’t swim on Tuesdays because they slaughtered the animals and the creek would be full of blood. When we went to the creek we had to pass through the cemetery and the dump. What an interesting assortment of animals we would meet, possums, buzzards, raccoons, snakes and more snakes.

I must first explain where my fear comes from. In East Selma we were constantly patrolled by Klu Klux Klan’s parades. They came into the neighborhood with a cross on the lead car. A caravan of cars followed. If they were targeting someone they went to their house and put a cross on their lawn and light it. They sometimes delivered a lecture about “staying in your place” or you better leave town. Everyone had to stay inside and off the streets with their lights out, or they would shoot them out. If you were caught outside during the parade you were subject to harassment, beaten, castrated or hung.

One thing that deeply disturbed me was one day when my mother and I were walking downtown. My mother was talking to me about something, and out of the blue here is this White man yelling at my mother about “teaching this little nigger something about stepping off the sidewalk when you see a White man coming. Now if you don’t teach him, we’ll teach him something.

Do you understand me?" My mother grabbed me by the arm as she pulled me off the sidewalk and behind her and backed into the street. She responded, "Sir, we didn't see you coming, it won't happen again." I didn't like the way he talked to my mother and I didn't like the way my mother responded.

I was deeply moved by Dr. King's oration and as soon as he said, "We will arouse the consciousness of this nation and get a Civil Rights Bill," I knew in my heart it would happen. I had never seen a man so confident and proud. He made me feel the same way about myself. To close his speech Dr. King asked, are you ready to go to jail? I jumped up and said, you damn right I am. After we had a short course in nonviolence and how important it was for our movement, we gathered our placards and assembled. Some of the sisters at Brown Chapel had prepared some Spam sandwiches and drinks for us, 'cause we didn't know when we would eat again.

We left the church with lots of applause and cheers from the people in the church as well as the neighbors in GWC (George Washington Carver Homes). We marched along singing, "*Ain't Going Let Nobody Turn Me Around.*" When all of a sudden, every police car red light was flashing, every police car screeched to a stop, every gun was drawn and every mad Black folks hating deputy was surrounding us saying, "You better not move." It was about 85 of us and they moved in about three yellow school buses and jammed us onto the buses using their Billy clubs or butt of rifles or shotgun to poke us. We got into the Selma jail and it was one in-your-face encounter after another. I wish I had a nickel every time they said nigger. Everybody was threatened; all abused.

Very early, I realized that there was a living and breathing movement going on that was stronger than the wall of Jim Crow. With each small campaign led by us and Dr. King, the crack got bigger.

To illustrate, one afternoon about 200 of us held a mass meeting. We organized and set out to picket the Dallas County

Courthouse. As soon as we left Brown Chapel Church, we were confronted by “Big Bad Ass” himself, Jim Clark. He stated that he was preventing us from going downtown. “I am not arresting anyone today.” The crowd applauded wildly. And then he just had to tell us why. “Because we don’t have any place to put you.” We realized, along with Jim Clark, that the jails are full. And the “Niggers” are gone crazy because they don’t mind going to jail.

The plans of the class of 1964 were working. One day all the students marched and were arrested. About 1,000 of us. Next day all the teachers, about 300. Next day all the workers unlimited and now here comes another 200 that were released two day ago because you didn’t have space for them.

We didn’t think we would out-do old “Big Bad Ass,” did we? He went to the back of his patrol car and hunted until he found a rope. Then he saw a pedestrian crossing sign, brought it up to the marchers, tied the rope to the sign, and then to the telephone post. And then he told us that “if any nigger cross that rope we gonna beat the shit out of them.” We knew he was serious. This was our prison. We accepted it.

The police left to guard. They thought we would give up, but we were determined. Hours later, someone said, “I’m hungry, I’m going to get something to eat.” Someone else suggested since we were going to be here all night, why didn’t we sign up for shifts? We signed up for the night. About 50 of us stayed in the street in front of the rope, in front of Brown Chapel.

Around midnight some ladies came out of Brown Chapel Church with “Pom” sandwiches and coffee. Life could not be any better! In the morning there was more coffee and Spam sandwiches. Someone brought a table, and now people were signing up to be at the rope on their days off.

D. C. Allen came up with a song. Germany has their Berlin Wall to keep people from crossing. And we have our “Berlin Rope.”

*We've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall, Berlin Wall, Berlin Wall,  
We've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall, in Selma, Alabama.  
We're gonna stand here till it falls, till it falls, till it falls,  
We're gonna stand here till it falls, in Selma, Alabama.*