

CHAPTER 19
CLEOPHUS STRONG STORY
(Retired Farmer)

Which side are you on, boy?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on, boy?
Which side are you on?
My daddy was a freedom fighter
And I'm my daddy's son
And I will fight for freedom
Until everybody's won.
Freedom Song

“During the 1963 Selma Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee my first recollection of the movement was communication by word of mouth that at a designated time everyone would meet up at a designated church. My first participation in a Selma SNCC demonstration was in the spring of 1964. I was incarcerated in the Camp Selma Prison, charged with Illegal Assembly. During my two week incarceration, the conditions were pretty favorable due to it being spring time. The jail was very crowded but we had time to exercise, play cards and mostly talk. Most of the conversations were centered on the movement. Our Sunday dinner included two slices of fatback, syrup, and bread. I joined the movement because I was fighting for the future of the unborn generation, so they would have a voice and be heard!

I was born in December of 1945, the second of 12 children. I was the first of a set of twins. My twin sister Clementine died in our mother's womb from a head injury after our mother was struck in the stomach when she stepped on a gardening hoe. The conditions as well as the struggles of my family were different for my household than for many others, due to our father being an active service member of the Air Force, stationed in Georgia. My first memory of segregation was early in my childhood, once I learned to read and write. I remember noticing posted signs all

over the place saying, "Colored Only" and "White Only". After growing up and getting married, I too joined the military. I enlisted in the United States Army in November 1965 and served until being honorably discharged in November 1971. During my active service years, I was stationed in Ft. Benning GA, Ft. Ord California, Ft. Richardson Alaska, and Ft. Riley Kansas. Life after the military included starting a family, farming, and driving a cab in Selma, AL.

The impact SNCC had on America was that it started a movement across the country called sit-ins. Sit-ins caused a real shake up in the way policies and customs were conducted in the South in the 60's. Sit-ins were a tactic used to integrate public places. Sit-ins demonstrated that mass nonviolent direct action could be successful and brought national attention through the media. Also, jail-in tactic (not posting bail) to protest legal injustice became another important tactic. This was the first time that the battle to end racial injustice combined with legal action and direct public protest.

Another impact of the actions of the Selma SNCC was the passing of the 1965 Voter's Right Act, which was the result of thousands of Americans, blacks and whites, coming to Selma to join the march from Selma to Montgomery but were brutally and savagely attacked by state troopers at the bottom of the Edmund Pettus Bridge en route to Montgomery, an event which later became known as "Bloody Sunday." The marchers finally made it to Montgomery on March 25, 1965, but that same night, the KKK killed Viola Luizzo, a civil rights worker, while shuttling marchers in her car. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law.

The Selma SNCC also made an impact by getting the Fair Housing Act passed as the last major act of legislation of the civil rights movement. This act prohibited discrimination in housing based on race, religion, national origin or sex.

I have come to realize in these years of my life that my goal of greatness for this country and equal rights for all will have to be left to the future generations. The lesson in life I've always learned is that living as a good Christian is your key to a long life span. Too much of anything is not good for you. Today, the Civil rights

movement needs to focus on peace, unity and togetherness. Peace amongst ourselves. People need to come together regardless of their race, color, creed, national origin or religion.”