

A reflection on Selma by Therese Stawowy

"On a dreary day on March 10, 1965, some 50 of us boarded small planes for Selma, Ala., to march with many others who answered the call from Rev Martin L. King Jr. to march for the right of all to vote. My being among those on the plane was because I had heard that priests were going from St. Louis so I called the chair of the Human Rights Commission, Father John Shocklee, and asked if Sister Christine Mary (who was living with me for a few months in the inner city) and I might join them as we felt a strong need to represent ourselves as well as our neighbors in this cause. After a quick call to the then-Cardinal Ritter, we were advised to go, but that four other nuns would join us: two from St. Mary's hospital and two from Fontbonne.

As I reflect upon that today, 50 years later, my heart is beating as fast as it was the day of the march as I can still feel the tension and see the faces of the people who lined the streets of rural Selma. For me, it was very important that I stand and represent a presence, to put myself forward to stand up for injustice and ask for human dignity and the right for all to vote. We do live in the U.S. where race, color and creed were supposed to be enablers rather than obstacles, isn't that what our Constitution tells us?!

After that march, I received many hate letters, some from friends and members of my own Community. For me, it was the right thing to do and I would do it again. Did it help?? Yes, I think it did as it brought about the voting rights act and awakened the conscience of the country. We are still fighting the old problem of race and inequality but the dream of overcoming is still challenging us and my heart still beats with the love of "keeping on".

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