

Marching, Stomping, Sliding

By Unique Carper

I'm just a little stretch of Highway 80 in Selma, Alabama. I don't see much except for what comes my way, and what came that day I most certainly was not prepared for. I remember it like it was yesterday, March 7, 1965. I was minding my own business, like any other day, just being. The sun was shining on me so warmly, the birds were chirping, and the wind was howling. I had no idea that on that day, Bloody Sunday, I would be the foundation of a momentous event that changed history. The day started off like any other day, cars zoomed over me, bumping along the way, taking their passengers here and there, to work and school. Then there was nothing. I felt nothing. Not one tire strode over me. Not one horse trotted down my path. I knew the mood had changed but did not understand why. Then all of a sudden I felt it, hundreds of feet marching, stomping, and sliding across my surface, but for what reason?

I heard voices talking of freedom and justice. They were shouting and singing about equality for all. They seemed to have a sense of urgency in their voices as they were calling and demanding for change. I sensed in the marching, stomping, and sliding of feet that those people were progressive, resolute, and tired. The progressive marchers were actively seeking a change in our justice system to allow people of all color the right to vote. The resolute stompers were steadfast in their attempt to see that change come about. They were willing to do all that they had to do to let their voices be heard. And those tired, weary feet that were sliding across my cracked dark surface had been at this trek for so long that they could hardly take another step, but they continued to press on.

Just as those hundreds of feet were making their journey across the long, wide path that I had come to be, they were halted by an opposing force. White men in work boots, some marching and others riding horses, were gathered together to break the spirits of those who had assembled peacefully to march for change. When the protestors stood their ground and decided to voyage on regardless of the demons standing before them, the marching, stomping, and sliding of feet turned into running. Bodies were being pushed and struck by batons. I shook as people ran to get out of the reach of those wicked men; men who swore to serve, honor, and protect those very same people that they were attacking. As bodies fell across me I felt the blood of those who were beaten lifelessly because they marched for change. Bodies of colored people were dragged across my covering by white men because they stomped for freedom. And I felt the tears of the tired, weary cluster of people who tried their hardest to outrun the gas that filled their eyes and lungs, all because they hoped to see the fruits of their labor within their lifetime.

I was shocked and amazed at what was happening. I never would have imagined that people would resort to violence all because someone wanted to walk down my path. It wasn't until that day, after the blood, sweat, and tears rained down on me, did I realize how much hatred existed in the heart of man. Two more times after that day people marched, stomped, and slid their feet across my surface. They didn't allow the violence of man to deter them from reaching their goal. From those three marches, down my path, a change did come. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 proved to all of those protesters that their labor was not in vain.

I'm not sure how I became forged into this battle, or why they choose me, an old, gray, haggard little stretch of Highway 80 in Selma, Alabama, but they did. My picture was in news articles and on television, people talked about me for years. Had I realized that I would be a part of such a momentous and historic occasion I might have tried to tidy up a bit. I was minding my own business, like any other day, just being.

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