

Jimmie Rogers

MAY. 1966

Jennifer Lawson and James Tolman

Jimmie: I remember the time when Stokeley Carmichael and Chris Wiley and myself, went up to Greensboro in Hale County to pick up the Lowndes County Car and the people in Greensboro had been demonstrating for about

three days and everyday, people were being sent to jail; so on this particular day, when we arrived, Chris Wiley always liked to participate in demonstrations. So he decided that he was going to stay and that he was going to try to join the march. Well the march was over and he decided that he was going to join the marches.

The march was over and all the marchers had been arrested, so what he did was,

C he tried to slip in the line and the state troopers wouldn't let him. So he thought the best way to get arrested was to stretch out across a state troopers car, which he did. This was in Greensboro, up in Hale County.

O So the state trooper came and asked him to move and he refused. They asked him about four or five times to move and he still refused. So they went away and came back and he was still stretched out across the car. So he was finally arrested and taken to jail. He's in New York now. I don't know just what he's doing, but from what I understand, the New York office is in contact with him.

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Y Talking about demonstrations, I remember another time. There was a demonstration, right before Daniels was killed when we were down in Fort Deposit which is in Lowndes County. We didn't think, by we I mean the staff people of SNCC, that a demonstration at that time would be a very good thing because we were working on voter registration and the federal registrars had just come into the county. So Stokeley Carmichael and others decided that they were going to let me handle the demonstrations, seeing that it was ⁱⁿ my area. I really wanted to work on the voter registration and I wasn't too interested in demonstrations, but this is what the people in the community wanted to do. So on Sat. morning, preceding the death of Jonathan Daniels, we assembled in front of the Methodist Church, in Fort Deposit.

This is where we held workshops of nonviolence techniques, etc. Then, we loaded up on a pickup truck. We also had two SNCC staff cars there-and the rest of the people went down town in the staff cars and some walked. After we got downtown, we formed into three groups. I was leading the group down to a place called the Community Grill which is a segregated restaurant in Fort Deposit. When I arrived at the Community Grill, I met Walter Stokes, one of the Special Deputies in Lowndes County and he had a long shotgun. As I was walking down the street, he was coming up the street dead for me. So what I did was wait until he got about 50 feet from me and I turned around and walked back up the block, the same direction in which he was going. Then he started running and he tried to jump in front of me. So I turned around again and went back down the street. So what he did is he went back around the other side of line and met me. Then he pointed the shotgun in my face. He said, get down the street, you're under arrest.

So I said, you can't arrest me. You're not a law enforcement officer. He said, get down the street. So I said alright. I really wasn't going to argue with him then. Not with that shotgun in my face. So I decided, at that time, the best thing to do was to lead the rest of the people down to the other people who had been arrested and to where there were other law officials. We stayed in jail in Fort Deposit for maybe an hour to an hour and a half. The staff people were Ruby Sales, Jimmie Rogers which is myself, Gloria Larry, Willie Vaughn, Jonathan Daniels and Richard Morrisroe. The rest of the staff decided that they were going to just observe. You know, that everybody shouldn't get arrested. So I guess they were reporting what had taken place to the Atlanta office. However, when we were released from the Fort Deposit jail, there was a big garbage truck outside and on this garbage truck, I saw Stokeley Carmichael, and Chris Wiley. They had been arrested while we were in jail. From what I heard, they were chased by some whites in a pick-up truck

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and Chris Wiley was driving and he was quite nervous. Then the pick-up truck over-took them and Chris stopped. Instead of backing up, he was so nervous that he went forward and hit the pickup truck. A man jumped out with a shotgun and Stokeley jumped out of the car and said, never mind that, let me see your license. So the white man was so hung up when he heard this statement, that he reached in his back pocket and pulled out his wallet.

By this time, the police arrived and Stokeley and Chris were promptly arrested.

C However, there's one thing about that that I don't understand. Chris was driving, but yet and still, they arrested both of them for reckless driving. Now if Stokeley wasn't driving the car, I don't understand how he could be arrested for reckless driving.

O This reminds me of something that happened to Sammy Younge and Wendie Parish, when they were both trying to integrate C _____ State Park and they were both arrested. Wendie was driving the car, but yet they arrested Sammy too and the charge was reckless driving. I guess this just goes to show what kind of justice they have here in Alabama where Negroes are concerned, because all of these people that I've just mentioned are Negroes.

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Y Forman: I'm interested in knowing why you decided to quit school. You just quit this February to take time out, ~~reigh~~ right?

Ruby Sales: I quit school, but it wasn't exactly a volunteer job completely. I was on scholarship and the people who had given me the scholarship, withdrew it. I could have applied for a loan and stayed in school, but I always felt that sooner or later, I would drop out of school.

And I would be working full time with SNCC when I dropped out of school. This would be my purpose in dropping out. So when this opportunity came along and they withdrew the scholarship money, I just took up on it and said, well fuck school and here I am.

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The reason I always knew that I would drop out of school, was because at this point, it was sort of useless and sort of irrelevant to me in terms of here I am sitting in a classroom learning about the green stuff that grows on trees, I was a biology major, where there are people out here that like to hang people from trees. So, to me, this little green stuff that grows on trees really had no relevance in life at all. I just couldn't see the classroom situation unless I could apply it to my everyday life and I couldn't. Here, I can apply things to my life, because I'm from Ala. and these are conditions that are general throughout Ala., if not throughout the whole South. There are some things I would like to see changed. I know that the only way, well there are some changes that I can bring about myself, by being out here. If I do nothing but get more students involved, that will be something.

Like my first year in school, I was a typical Tuskegee student. I was in the dormitory and ate my meals in the cafeteria and I didn't have to leave off campus for a thing, you know. It's all provided for you right there. I could just see that there was so much in life that I was missing. You pass a shack coming into Macon County on your way to the school, but that's sort of irrelevant, because you're coming to the campus where you're going to be in a nice warm dormitory. So if somebody's outside in the cold, it's not your problem. And then the answers people give you in terms of what you're moving towards. You're moving towards the fact that someday you'll be able to afford a nice house, a nice big car and everything and I just couldn't see that being everything. So I started looking for the answers myself. Like what am I living for? Like what meaning has my life.

I think I've learned more out here than I do in school.

Forman: Why do you say that.?

Ruby: Well like I was saying about things I can apply to, in everyday life. And in terms of that, I've learned more out here. And in terms of what I really read, like I'm still reading a lot, and I can read things and can see what problems they're approaching and why this is a problem and what answer a particular author is taking towards this problem. Just like, if I had been sitting up in school and I was reading something like Walden II, it would really been a sort of fiction to me, you know. Like why would people think they needed to move towards a utopian society? Why would they have a need to change the beautiful society that we have. Because there in a classroom you hear all the great theory of the democracy and you swear that it's working. Out here, you know that it isn't. This is where it really is.

To me, this is just a big classroom right here. I've travelled a lot and seen most of the United States, except for a little corner up there, meaning Oregon and those states. I also spent some time in New York. That's another thing. I was working a 9 to 5 job in New York, that was great for preparing you for a future at Sloan Institute for Cancer in N. Y. This was cancer research. I had all these great promises of how when I finished school, I could move right into this top position and how the institution would pay half my expenses if I would go to Cornell and work on my Master's. It was really a great life. If I wanted to go to Med. School, there were people there who had already seen about getting me into Cornell Med. School. But while I was up there working this 9 to 5 job, I was reading everyday about Jimmey and Ruby Sales down in Lowndes County. All the while, I felt out of place, because I should have been in Lowndes County. That I should have been in Alabama. When Jonathan Daniels got killed and all the things

arising from that, I felt that I should have been here. See, I plan to live in the South someday and since this is my home state, I really had felt that I should have been here then. That's another thing that sort of pushed me towards dropping out of school. The first semester, I worked with Jimmie here in Macon County and I sort of did that to sort of ease my conscience from not being here over the summer. Most of the kids in school are working towards the day when they get their degree and then the first thing they talk about is leaving the South for good.

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It's like when you talk about people excluding other people, that's what you're learning in school. You learn to exclude people and these people are just like your parents and your grandparents. I was talking to a girl in Talladega the other day and she was talking to me about working for SNCC in the summer. So she said, oh no, my mother wouldn't let me do it, because she'd be worried because I'd have to talk to all those nasty people. So I said, what nasty people? And she said, oh, the people in those shacks. They're nasty and they're illiterate and my mother wouldn't want me talking to them. So I said, where are you from? So she said, Connecticut. Then I asked her, where are your parents from? It turns out her parents are from right down here in Macon County. So I said, are they from the city or the county and she said they were from the county. I said, your grandparents probably came from a shack. She said, yes they did. So I said, you can't talk to your grandparents? She said yeah. So I said, well why can't you talk to other people that are just like your grandparents. They're just like those same nasty people that you've just classified.

See, people go to school and they get in these nice little middle-class positions, and they put on their nice little pink dresses and then they can't talk to their grandparents or to their parents, because they're ashamed of them. You go to New York or you go up North and you forget the South is here. You read about something in

the paper and you say, oh those poor people down South. I have sisters that are doing this. They ^{feel} ~~feel~~ that I'm lost right now, because I'm not there and don't have a good job or back in school.

Forman: How many sisters do you have ?

_____ : Two. Both of them are in New York. ~~One went to Howard~~ One went to Howard for awhile and then she went to NYU. The other went to Fisk for awhile and then she went to Columbia. There are just so many ~~pep~~ people leaving the South. It's just too many of them that were born and raised here and gone to school here. But they can't take what they learned in school and put it back into the community and making a better community. Instead, you go and overcrowd the North, you know. I think that if there is any hope for this country, it's going to come out of the South.

Forman: I remember the time when SNCC didn't have "a" car. When we first started, with 16 people, we didn't have a car.

Jimmie: I don't see how you made it in that way.

_____ : See, that's what is so interesting. See, you can make -- it's very hard but it is much easier when you do have a car. You can do it. But then, I'm not so sure a car is that necessary. Like Sherrod and a few other people, they went down to Albany and got the Albany Movement going without a car.

Ruby: Even though it would be difficult, it would be more feasible in a city situation, but like out in the county. I just can't see it when you gotta work a rural area. I can't see it, in terms of your own security and everything. I mean, just like those incidents that Jimmie described; if I were in one of those situations and I had to depend upon my feet, I wouldn't be here right now.

Jimmie: Say you were in the rural area and you had to be in Nostacoga and Shorter which is a distance of something like 30 miles, and you had to be in one place at 8:00 pm and you had to be in another place around 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., and you didn't have any transportation. . . .

Forman: Yeah, but you see, the reason you set up meetings like that is because you do have some possibility of getting there or you just wouldn't set up those kinds of situations. I know when Block and Peacock went into Greenwood, they didn't have a car. Of course they needed one. So by that time, I think we had about, well, we had an old car, but at that time, we just didn't move around that much. Now when we went into Mississippi, the people had to take buses down to Meridian and you just stayed two or three days. In many ways, you had certain advantages. It does not give you the mobility that you need. . . . I mean there's no question about the cars. . . . because in my mind, one of the things that helped us open up the State of Mississippi, was the Freedom Vote. What happened there was that we rented about twenty (20) cars in order to get out the Freedom Vote for about three days. That was in 1963. This is when Aaron Henry was running for Governor. So we rented from twenty to twenty-five cars, because we never had over four or five cars in the state, at the most. Those cars showed us that it was possible to get a lot of people in motion and concerned, if in fact you had the means to spread yourselves out. One of the advantages of having access to transportation, but not every day, is that it forces you to really get more involved with local people. Because what would happen, is that you wouldn't go from town to town, You would get more intimately involved and get to know people in that particular area and somebody would be moving back and forth and you could just wait for that time and then you would go. Now, because of the tremendous need for transportation, and in a sense a dependency

that we have established on cars. . . . well, it's really not a dependency. It's just that the movement is at a new stage which demands mobility. But I was thinking of trying to find me a county, which I will never do, and go into that county with about ~~7~~ \$5.00 and no car. And to just develop a movement. I have confidence in the fact that I can do that. I have confidence that you can go in there with no money and ~~4~~ say to people, now listen lady, I don't have any money and I'm hungry.

C I need some food.

O _____: Well Jim, that's what we're doing in Cotton Valley. You know, all of us are on subsistence and nobody's gotten paid, except one person. It's just like P I can make it. In Springhill, where they have a Freedom House, people once got invited to dinner four times in the same day, ~~then~~ Their problem was not getting food but that they couldn't eat that much. They had been to three houses and then Y wa king down the road, this lady hollered out, hey you all, I know you're hungry, come on in and ^{best} eat. I got it all fixed up for you. They decided that it was/they accept the invitation rather than hurt the ladies ~~fi-~~ feelings by saying, no, we are full. She might not believe them if they said they were full. So they would go in and they would eat this big dinner again. And it happens just about wherever you're working out in the county, ~~pe~~ people know you're a civil rights worker and they have this idea that you're there to do something for them or to help them ~~d~~ do something for themselves, so they ask you in and feed you and you get acquainted.

Forman See, the thing that bothers me is I don't know where we can ^{get} ~~get~~ the money to do all the things we need to do. I mean, we're just going to be forced to say no cars, no money available, but the work has to be done.

That's why I think moving into these little towns is a very important point.

You get out there and you stay there and you really get in those communities and as Jennifer was saying, transportation wouldn't be necessary, which

Jennifer: I'm not saying that it's not necessary in all cases. Just like in some parts of this county, which is really ~~Black-Belt~~, Black Belt, it's perfectly safe to be walking down the road, I think. It's no big sweat. People are going to protect you and when you need a ride from here to Tuskegee, you can get one from the local people there. But in the Northern part, rather the NE part of Macon County, such as Brownsville, Bullock County, etc., even the area where Sammy Younge was killed. Where people live on white people's land, I wouldn't go in there without a car. I wouldn't walk a mile across a white man's land to a little house and then have to walk back out of there.

Forman: I remember when I was working in Fort Deposit, which was a heavily populated

Jimmie:
Negro area of Lowndes County--the county itself is a Black Belt County-- but this happened to be a place where you had one of the largest percentage of white people. At that time I was walking, because I didn't have a car. Everyday, people used to bring me messages about the white folks were after me; that the white folks were going to kill me; that they knew where I was staying and they were going to blow up the house. If the white people had attacked me in this small town, there would be no place that I could go. In order for me to get a way,.....

I don't believe any of them would have helped me, because they were so afraid of the white people. They wouldn't have done anything to help me get out of that situation if it had ever come to that.

Forman We're driving along on Interstate 85 from Tuskegee to Atlanta, at 75 miles per hour. We're 90 miles from Atlanta according to the sign on my right. This is a part of the SNCC experience, concerning the terrific shortage of automobiles and the need for them. That it can not be understood by people who live in urban areas, unless there is a great deal of empathy and imagination, to remember what it's like working in an area 40 miles wide and then there's the question of ~~area~~ security, which is extremely important.

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I would like to talk further Jennifer, about what you were saying about/moving out into these areas and what you plan to do and the necessity for cars in terms of further security, etc. We put that on tape, but apparently I didn't record it right.

Jennifer: - I was just saying that it's good in some areas, ~~at~~the extreme Black Belt area in the county, that it's pretty safe to be walking around, when the area is heavily populated by Negroes and very few whites. In an area like Tuskegee, it's okay because you can get with some of the local people and get where you're going. But in an area like where Jimmey plans to work, Shorter and Nogastago, where the white people mostly populate the area and where Negroes live on white folks land, it's extremely dangerous.

Forman: We just now entered Georgia, This is the Chatahoochee River.

Jennifer: You really need a car there and the car has to be in good shape. You know if you had one with tires like the ones we had on here, it's no good. The car would be of no use to you. It wouldn't do to go on that land and then have a flat.. Nogastoga is pretty dangerous. I worked up there for a couple of days on voter registration and I wouldn't particularly care to work up their extensively.

Forman: We've slowed down. A man in an old Chevrolet and a woman, a white couple, turning off the road, going down the dirt road at 20 miles an hour. Something about the red clay of Georgia. It's extremely sensual colors. There are splotches of dark red and splotches of light red. We've just passed two cliffs where the red clay is jutting out from the red rocks. The sun is shining and the trees are green. There are lots of pine trees, various kinds.