The Farmington Observer

Suburban Life

Loraine McClish editor/477-5450

Marching with King

'The marchers came to a bridge where they were met by a crowd of people and policemen with cattle prods and billy clubs who attacked them . . . I jumped up from my chair and shouted at the TV, 'You can't do that here. This is the United States.' '

— Don Morris
Oakland University professor

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

FOR THEM, the black-and-white images of the civil rights movement have softened in memory to a mirage of grayness.

But even then, they believed the quest for justice should be colorless.

One memory, though, is clear. And that is of a man who brought a housewife, a newspaper editor, a secretary, a teacher and a college student together, along with a multitude of other ordinary citizens, for a cause.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream, and they shared in it.

Dennis Jaworski of Westland, Aldo Vagnozzi of Farmington, Ethel Schwartz of Southfield, Margaret Tyson of Bloomfield Township and Don Morse of Royal Oak played a part, although seemingly small at the time, in changing history.

FOR SOME, it meant marching with King in Washington, D.C., and Detroit.

For others, it meant being arrested at a sit-in or pushing a fellow demonstrator from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., in a wheelchair in a peace march.

One person, along with seven other college students, risked his life going to Mississippi in order to register blacks to vote before the 1964 elections. Two people were killed in that state for doing the same.

Dennis Jaworski, a social studies teacher at Wayne Memorial High School, vaguely remembers what took place then. The names of those who went down there with him have slipped away through time.

"A lot of blacks didn't want us down there," Jaworski recalled. "I didn't understand it then but I do now. They figured 'you'll eventually go back north and feel good about what you did. We're going to have to stay here and live with our actions.'

"The whites in the South didn't want us there either. We found it very difficult to get gas or get accommodations."

Don Morse, an English professor at Oakland University, recalls a similar feeling at the time. He went to Alabama after a flash of reality came on his television about the Selma-to-Montgomery march in 1965.

"I LIVED on the East Coast (Boston area), and I was home watching television," said Morse, who was a teacher at a small business school at the time. "The marchers came to a bridge where they were met by a crowd of people and policeman with cattle prods and billy clubs who attacked them . . . I jumped up from my chair and shouted at the TV, 'You can't do that here. This is the United States.'

"A group of us went down there to march. One thing that I remember is that we expected to spend the night in a black church, but instead we stayed at a white Unitarian church in Birmingham, Ala.

"They couldn't get openly involved . . . These were really brave people. They were clearly marked because they were against segregation."

ON THE FLIGHT to Alabama, Morse struck up a conversation with a law student in a wheelchair. The next day, joining the march toward the end, he pushed the fellow demonstator onward to Montgomery.

Together, they moved in peace with King. So did Ethel Schwartz of Southfield, with some 250,000 others Aug. 28, 1963, in Washington, D.C.

"I was there," said Schwartz, a secretary for the UAW International, "and I'm still there.

"It was one of the most exciting things I've ever done. We took the train there, and on it I met so many different people who were involved with the movement.

"The excitement that went through the crowd that day — it was so electrifying."

CLOSER TO HOME, many people have memories of the Detroit march that preceded the rally in Washington, D.C. Aldo Vagnozzi, editor of the AFL-CIO News at the time, recalls the speech King gave, June 23, 1963, which drew 125,000 people.

"The speech he gave here was a forerunner to the one he gave at the Washington rally, the 'I Have a Dream' speech," said Vagnozzi, now an editorial consultant with Cy Aaron Publications. "It went over really well here.

"It was the beginning of the civil rights movement. Of course, Detroit had always been a leader in the civil rights movement."

And if anyone had a stake in the grass-roots movement locally, it was Margaret Tyson of Bloomfield Township. While racism was generally equated with the South, the housewife/activist has continued to make sure there's been equality in her own back yard.

TYSON, WHO also marched in the Detroit rally of 1963, was honored by the Oakland County American Civil Liberties Union in 1984 for her efforts. She's been involved with fair housing for blacks with the Birmingham-Bloomfield Open Occupancy Movement (BOOM), and desegregation with the Voice of Oakland County Action League (VOCAL) and is chairwoman of Friends of Oakland County Welfare Rights Organization.

She, along with five other VOCAL members, were arrested and jailed in 1969 during a sit-in at the board of eduction offices to desegragate Pontiac schools.

"I'm glad I did what I did," said Tyson, looking back at her involvement during the heyday of the civil rights movement. "I feel a great deal of satisfication in what we accomplished."

AS DO OTHER people in the movement. All of them recall bitter vignettes of racism they'd witnessed.

Many remember the segregation, such as "whites only" drinking fountains, theaters and restaurants. Others recall seeing blacks harassed and, in some cases, beaten.

It always gnawed at them and their sense of fairness.

It was King and his non-violent approach that made them believe they could make a difference. Some 24 years later, it can be said they did.

All someone, such as Jaworski, for instance, would have to do is look at Mississippi today. Blacks, whom he and his college mates helped register to vote, have been elected to both state and national office.

"MY FEELING has always been I don't like to see people taken advantage of or used for any reason," Jaworski said. "The thing that struck me was Martin Luther King's speech in Washington. It was probably the best speech I had ever heard.

"I hadn't given much thought to Martin Luther King before that time."

"I think he came along at the right time," added Schwartz about King, who would've been 58 this year. "He was vocal, and he had a business approach.

"He was a dynamic speaker," said Tyson, who remembered seeing King at a Detroit church with people piled to the rafters. "He was the type of speaker who could bring tears to your eyes."

MORSE, WHO'S lectured in Austria on King and the movement itself, notes the phenomenon the civil rights leader helped fuel in the country — especially how people from all walks of life rallied together.

It's a spirit, many of them say, that is lacking today.

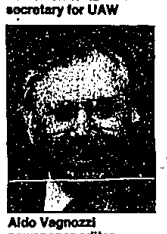
"The greatness of the march was the aroused citizen," Morse said. "They were the true heroes of this.

"I think he mobilized whites to believe in the sanctity of the individual and a sense of fairness.

"As one cog, I, like everyone else involved, had a small part in it."

Margaret Tyson
housewife/activist

Ethel Schwartz
secretary for UAW



Aldo Vagnozzi
newspaper editor

Don Morse
OU professor

Dennis Jaworski
high school teacher

Collage

Spontaneity creates surprises

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington Hills artist Sharon Stewart cuts mats for her mixed media collages.

By Loraine McClish

Aside from a basic decision on color and form, Sharon Stewart works so spontaneously that the results are sometimes even a surprise to her.

The Farmington Hills artist, whose favorite expression of art is mixed media collage, shows more than 50 pieces of her work in an exhibit sponsored by Cultural Arts Division of Southfield through the end of the month. The city's art gallery is in the lobby of the Parks and Recreation Building of Southfield Civic Center, Evergreen Road between 10 and 11 Mile.

Her work can best be described as abstract, sometimes without a recognizable theme, but not always.

"I use many kinds of paper in my collages, both imported and domestic, both moldmade and handmade. Most frequently I use paper that has been painted with acrylics. Occasionally I will use printed matter, small pieces of painted fabric, sand, wood, thread and other found objects in a piece," she said.

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— Sharon Stewart
Hills artist

Because paper is the basis for her collages and mat board is paper, she often considers the mat, or sometimes several mats, to be part of the overall design.

She always cuts her own mats, round, straight or oval and also does her own framing.

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