

**ALABAMA CENTENNIAL**, by Naomi Long Madgett

They said, "Wait." Well, I waited.  
For a hundred years I waited  
In cotton fields, kitchens, balconies,  
In bread lines, at back doors, on chain gangs,  
In stinking "colored" toilets  
And crowded ghettos,  
Outside of schools and voting booths.  
And some said, "Later."  
And some said, "Never!"

Then a new wind blew, and a new voice  
Rode its wings with quiet urgency,  
Strong, determined, sure.

"No," it said. "Not 'never,' not 'later.'  
Not even 'soon.'  
Now.  
Walk!"

And other voices echoed the freedom words,  
"Walk together, children, don't get weary,"  
Whispered them, sang them, prayed them, shouted them.  
"Walk!"  
And I walked the streets of Montgomery  
Until a link in the chain of patient acquiescence broke.

Then again: Sit down!  
And I sat down at the counters of Greensboro.  
Ride! And I rode the bus for freedom.  
Kneel! And I went down on my knees in prayer and faith.  
March! And I'll march until the last chain falls  
Singing, "We shall overcome."

Not all the dogs and hoses in Birmingham  
Nor all the clubs and guns in Selma  
Can turn this tide.  
Not all the jails can hold these young black faces  
From their destiny of manhood,  
Of equality, of dignity,  
Of the American Dream  
A hundred years past due.  
Now!

[From *Star by Star* by Naomi Long Madgett.]

Taken from website: <http://www.crmvet.org/poetry/amadgett.htm>

## **June Brindel**

### **THE ROAD FROM SELMA**

The road from Selma stretches in the rain  
white as a shroud, rimmed with stiff troopers.

The marchers stand bowed, hands joined, swaying gently  
their soft strong song stilled.

Then up from a Birmingham bed  
rises a gentle Boston man, Jim Reeb,  
steps softly back to Selma  
and moves among the stilled marchers.

The troopers stir, link arms,  
close ranks across the road  
stretching from Selma in the rain  
white as a shroud.

The Boston man, Jim Reeb, walks toward the troopers  
and they straighten and stand guard tight as death.  
But someone moves behind them, waves his hand.  
"That you, Jackson?" Jim Reeb peers ahead.

"That's right, Reverend. Come on through."

The troopers tighten guard, straight as death  
But Jim Reeb doesn't stop.

He goes on through,  
right through the stiff ranked troopers  
white as a shroud  
rimming the road from Selma.

And Jimmie Lee Jackson takes him by the arm  
and they march down the road to the courthouse.

Over in Mississippi Medgar Evers stands,  
three young men rise up from a dam in Neshoba County  
and they all go down the road  
and walk right through the tight stiff trooper line  
and down the road from Selma.

And from all over there's a stirring sound.  
Emmett Till jumps up and runs laughing like any boy  
through the stiff white rim.  
Four small girls skip out of a church in Birmingham

and the tall old man in Springfield gets up  
and goes to Selma.

And down from every lynching tree  
and up from every hidden grave  
come men, women, children, heads carried high,  
passing a moment among the bowed, stilled troopers  
and down the white road from Selma.

Until the age long road is packed  
black with marchers streaming to the courthouse.

And the bowed stilled group in Selma  
raise their heads, hands joined,  
swaying gently, in soft strong song  
that goes right through the stiff ranked troopers  
white as a shroud  
barring the road from Selma.

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