

SANDI SMITH: KILLED BY THE KU KLUX KLAN, NAZIS, AND

GOVERNMENT AGENTS IN GREENSBORO, NOV. 3, 1979

by Cora Miyoshi

Never knowing Sandi Smith personally, I wanted to draw her because she died fighting the forces which oppress us today. I saw the movie and read the book about the Greensboro Massacre, and realized the depth of Sandi's dedication, the feelings she had for people. She worked side by side with everyday folks, preparing for revolution.

Born to a working-class black couple, Sandi grew up in South Carolina. She came to Greensboro, North Carolina, to go to college in 1969. As Paul and Sally Bermanzohn write in their moving biography of Sandi, in 1969,

"defiance was in the air, rebellion against all the wrongs of the Jim Crow South. Sandi's anger was close to the surface. Just thinking about her father, slaving year after year at J.P. Steven's textile mill, made her blood boil.... It made her mad just thinking about her grandparents and other kin in rural South Carolina, still living in plantation-like conditions.... Looking for an alternative, Sandi decided to go to college in Greensboro, a center of the movement for black liberation."
(THE TRUE STORY OF THE GREENSBORO MASSACRE, Bermanzohn and Bermanzohn, Cesar Cauce Publishers, 39 Bowery Box 389, New York, N.Y. 10002, \$3.95.)

Sandi served as president of the student body at Bennett College for 2 years. During this time she became a communist, because she saw it as the best way to fight for the liberation of black and all oppressed people. Then she went to work at a Cone Mill's textile plant where she headed up a vigorous union organizing drive. Sandi's co-workers are interviewed in the dramatic film "Red November, Black November" (Reelworks, 39 Bowery Box 568, N.Y., N.Y. 10002). They remember her as a dynamic leader. When there was a problem in the mill, everyone turned to Sandi.

Sandi was particularly concerned about the problems woman workers faced:

"Supervisors: keep your hands to yourselves! One big headache for women workers all over the mill is supervisors making passes at them, pestering them to go out with them, etc. Some of these men have even told certain women, 'don't worry about making your eight hours here if you'll just...' Women workers should not have to put up with this garbage to hold onto their jobs!" (ibid)

Sandi loved life, but she knew revolution took sacrifices. Vanessa Gallman, a reporter, noticed this quality when Sandi spoke at an anti-klan demonstration just months before her death. "She talked about how the Klan would have a devastating impact on the kids in the future," Gallman reported in the CHARLOTTE OBSERVER. "they expression on her face was that she was willing to die to save the children. Tears were coming out of her eyes. That sister was sincere."

On November 3, 1979, a caravan of Klan, Nazis, and government agents ambushed a peaceful anti-klan demonstration. Sandi was the attackers first target -- they clubbed her in the head. As always, Sandi thought not about herself, but others. Despite the injury, she herded the children in front of her to safety. When she looked back around the side of a building to see if any other children were in sight, a Nazi shot her between the eyes. Four of Sandi's comrades in the Communist Workers Party were killed as well. They too were leaders in the textile mills and hospitals. At least two government agents were involved, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms Agent Butkovich and police informer Edward Dawson.

"She worked and died as a communist," said Dot Johnson, a long-time black community leader in Greensboro. "She fought and died for her people both black and white. I feel like she was a child of mine. I'm proud of her." (ibid.)

The wounded survivors and the widows of the Greensboro Massacre are suing the federal, state, and local governments, the Klan and Nazis in a \$37 million civil rights suit. Money is urgently needed. Send tax deductible contributions to the Greensboro Justice Fund, 853 Broadway, 19th floor, N.Y., N.Y.