

## **The Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with the First Step: May 2006**

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**A**nd so my journey into the pages of history began with my first step, with my accumulated thoughts of righteousness and unity. As a young man I often found myself dreaming of a utopian society without being aware of what that term meant. I knew I wanted a society free of stress and poverty, crime and police occupation. I'd often observed older people's glances and postures of negativity whenever representatives of authority rode by. Why was that? Why were the police both feared and hated so much? I had no answers then but I saw the impacts nonetheless.

I cherish my growing up because it was never a path of hatred or isolationism. I was not taught to hate white people nor was that a hidden message amongst my peers. Instead I learned resistance to the class oppressor, the enforcer of racist policies. I saw in my own poor community, a love of family and commitment to joint responsibility for all the people's children by those older than me. That sort of collective living was what inspired me to dream; to dream of a just society, surrounded by people working together with each other.

As I grew older, I carried forth those impressionable remembrances of love and compassion, discipline and respect. In those days, people shared food, child-caring responsibilities and discipline for everyone else's children. When I grew up everyone was either auntie or uncle so-and-so. These were not titles but badges of respect. Elders gave children a sense of being a loved part of the community. Lessons at their feet taught respect, sharing and duty to pass on good teachings. And then I became older, independent, so to speak. I always knew I could make choices and could damn sure make them (that is if my daddy wasn't close by or another who would report me to him). I was coming into my own, thinking about non-traditional things, like what constituted a family? And what role should the male or female play in terms of authority? Of course I chose the male leadership (what else did I know?) but never as a first choice. Instead it was always a conclusion arrived at, but always it was debatable.

I saw myself as a change maker, and wanted no more brutal cops, no more racist posturing from anyone, no more of being made to feel inferior. I hated how young people like me were made to feel so inadequate, of being less than important just because one of the enforcers was near. I really hated it when one of the "pigs" would beat one of us—we were eight years old,

ten, never more than twelve. Many a time we were beaten for being in the wrong neighborhood, or just for being the color we were. It never required an exact reasoning, just the opportunity for the oppressor.

And then Vietnam came and manhood followed, based on the possibility I might never get back home. I grew up through troubled awareness in Vietnam. I learned to kill and avoid being killed and how much others suffered at the hands of the USA. I finally came home with a new mindset, capacities and leadership qualities, but I was still grounded in my earlier upbringing.

I was made for the Black Panther party. I felt its call, I called it, and it was my calling card to life. The work they were doing for community empowerment was part of my dream as well.

Joining the party was an invitation to aid and assist all members of my community. The Party focused on blacks as a whole but sought alliances with all races. Doing work to help out was like looking out for a newly acquainted niece or nephew. It felt good doing these things. My journey through the era of my Black Panther Party days will always resonate with a flood of pleasurable images and work worthy of remembrance.

But alas, there came a time when mere demonstration and resistance gave way to greater acts of destruction. From my observations I saw it as a time when the powers that be determined that we as a whole were expendable. There were stories then of members (both women and men) giving themselves up, hands raised high, who were shot down dead in the street by police. With madness and retaliation, both sides saw the necessity of the necessary. The end results were many funerals on both sides. Tragedies of warfare, yet unavoidable.

The journey of a thousand miles found me functioning underground. It was still necessary to feed and clothe the neighborhood residents, as well as to make commitments to protect them. Our works detoured and detained the inevitable, slowing the destruction of our youth and neighborhood by the stronger and more potent drugs then being introduced. I trust that had we not been in the wings, fighting, agitating, struggling and resisting, the numbers of people consumed and destroyed would have exponentially increased.

For those fallen, lost or astray the price was and remains high from that battle. Even today, we are blocked from having a say or impact in rehabilitation. But the struggle goes on, and many more battles demand our attention. There are cries of war heard over there, here, and around the

corner. Rumors, actions, with many fallen, broken or no longer living. And yes the war wages continuously, with many now in its ranks wanting its end. Negotiations are now the watchword and no longer saber-rattling or deadly, deceitful actions.

But the beat goes on, and the struggle continues. And always the cry of the needy, wounded, and oppressed people. And my and our commitment to see to the end of their oppression continues, because our cause is just, righteous and humane.

Brave is the warrior who braves a thousand cuts to unseat the Emperor. So many have died and so many are confined, and so many are marked for destruction. Yet the strugglers march onward, dutifully seeking to add their own contributions, braving the cuts, the losses, the pain, marching in step with humanity, and seeking a place in the ranks of those who have aided humanity. It is when the last page of the history of the destructive era is written, when those who contributed and sacrificed are recalled, and when those whose wounds can finally be closed and be eternally healed, that I will recall your names as I hope you will recall mine. And it is at the bed-times of our young and before large crowds of well-wishers who cheer that we shall do that. Then in honor and admiration we will sing of our sacrifices and determination.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Brave is the warrior who braves a thousand cuts to unseat the Emperor.

My name is Robert Seth Hayes and I am one of those warrior/soldiers. And like any other struggler, I hope that when I fall, the banner of duty and responsibility passes on to you and that it will be carried forward in the struggle for humanity's victory!

A Luta' Continua' (The Struggle Continues)