

I first saw Huey in the summer of 1968. As a Laney College student, I used to go up to the "Free Huey" rallies at the Alameda County Courthouse. There were hundreds of people attending the rallies and Black Panther Party members were in full uniform (black leather jackets, blue shirts or turtlenecks and black slacks) on the courthouse steps. Beautiful Black Sisters were chanting "Free Huey, Off the Pig".

To get into the courtroom was a long wait. The courtroom was full of reporters and people from all over the world wanting to see this historical trial. The Court Police used to let 5 to 10 people in at a time. That was the first time I saw Huey, a nice looking light skinned Brother with a nice sweater on, sitting quietly listening to the DA lie about him. I joined the Party later that summer.

The next time I saw Huey was August 5, 1970 at the same courthouse when he was freed. Over 5,000 people came out that day to see Huey freed. It was a great day in Oakland. Huey was freed on Appeal, meaning that he had to go back to court. I was chosen by the Central Committee to be one of Huey's aides along with Clark Bailey, James Mott and Michael Torrance, and sometimes Mojo. We went to court with him daily and we had lunch together every day. Huey usually was in a good mood and always had a smile. I found Huey to be very smart and intelligent. Huey talked about improving the Party, establishing more social programs, and fighting to improve conditions in Oakland for Black and oppressed people. Huey was tried 3 times on the same charge of murdering a police officer and wounding another in October 1967. Clark Bailey and I sat through two trials.

Because I was a trusted Party member I was also assigned to help take care of Huey's parents. I would go over to Mr. and Mrs. Newton's three times a week and do odd jobs for them. I would go to the store for them and mow the lawn and do whatever they needed done. Mr. Newton had stopped driving so I used to drive his Blue Dodge Dart which he donated to the Party. Mrs. Newton loved to cook and I loved to eat. We spent a lot of time talking. Huey would come by to visit his mom and pops often. I would always try to look busy when he dropped by, but Mrs. Newton would tell me to relax and not to worry about Huey. She would say "I'm the boss here". Huey was good to his parents and they got along well. Sometimes she would get on Huey's case about something when she thought he was doing wrong, like a mother does. I saw a side of Huey Newton that not many people knew. Over the years, I stopped taking care of the Newton's and was reassigned. I never saw Huey do drugs or get high. Huey didn't cuss, and I never saw him drunk. Many police agents, provocateurs and other fools would follow Huey to start trouble where ever he went. He had to be on guard at all times.

Later, I was assigned to work as a section leader for Bobby Seale's campaign. I opened an office on 54th and E.14th St. It was a nice large office with two office spaces inside and an apartment in the back which I lived. Bobby Seale liked it so much that it became the main campaign office. We had six others throughout the city.

Huey didn't come around the offices very much because he was so busy. But one day he and Robert Bay came by to check out the office and he liked it as well. He felt comfortable there and started to drop by regularly. My staff at the time was all women; Robin Hart, Barbara Lee (now in Congress and the Black Caucus leader in Washington DC), Karimu, Vanetta Molson, Ruby Smith and Arlene Coleman. Later Brother Texas, William Cloud and Mike Ellis worked out of the office. After closing the office, I would go down to the Lamp Post and have a few drinks and network with people coming to the club. I would see Huey there and he would have Rob buy me a drink. He would tell me that his mom asked about me. Mrs. Newton even invited me to family outings. I remember going to a family wedding at Mills College and Huey was sharp as usual. He was always well dressed. I remember that he used to bring clothes to Central on Peralta St, to give away. He used to buy clothes for comrades, leather coats etc.

In 1974, I left the BPP because Huey was out of control and the Party was changing too much. I would see Huey on the TV news a lot. He later went underground and ended up exiled in Cuba for a few years. In 1977 I lived in Mt. View, California, a few miles from the Stanford campus in Palo Alto. I would go by JONEILs Club for breakfast sometimes. As I walked into the club one day, I felt something pulling at my pants. I looked down and saw Huey sitting at the table. He had a big smile on his face and asked me to join him for breakfast. I had just seen Huey on the news the night before, as he just returned to America from his Cuban exile. He was with his wife Gwen and Big Bob Heard. Huey said the Party needed me and wanted me to rejoin the BPP, but I had moved on. The next time I saw Huey was at the Berkeley Jazz Festival in the 1980's.

I was living in New York when I found out that Huey had been murdered. Despite his shortcomings, I am glad to have known Huey Newton, he was a spark that started a prairie fire.

Billy X Jennings