



## Mother of Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale dies

**Thelma Traylor Seale was 99; instrumental in civil rights group's formation in 1960s**

By Barbara Grady, STAFF WRITER

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OAKLAND — When the Black Panther Party was getting off the ground as a civil rights movement in the 1960s, Thelma Traylor Seale, the mother of party co-founder Bobby Seale, opened her living room for its meetings and later provided support ranging from bail money to speeches.

In fact, Bobby Seale, now 71 and still living in Oakland, said his mother was his inspiration. She was a pacifist who never became a formal member of the Black Panther Party, yet touched everything he did.

"I've had people ask me who is my ideologic mentor — Marx? Che Guevara? I tell them, 'My mama,'" Bobby Seale said.

Mrs. Seale died in her sleep Friday at Oakridge Care Center in Oakland. She was 99.

"Mama was a reference point for me," Seale said in an interview at a relative's home. Dressed in khaki jacket and pants and baseball cap that gave him a very different look from the black leather jacket and beret-clad demeanor of his political activist youth, Seale spoke nostalgically of his mother's legacy.

Born March 3, 1908, in Jasper, Texas, Mrs. Seale was the 15th of 16 children and spent her childhood on the extended Traylor farm. She

married her high school sweetheart, George Seale, in 1933 and they lived in several Texas towns, both working for the Air Force. During World War II, Mrs. Seale delivered mail at the Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

The Seales moved to California in 1943, first to Berkeley where they lived at Codornices Village Housing project, now called University Village. The couple moved to Oakland in 1960, settling in the 57th Street house the Seales still call the family home.

Bobby, her oldest son and one of three children, co-founded the Black Panther Party in October 1966 with Huey P. Newton in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and on the heels of the assassination of Malcolm X. The Black Panthers advocated civil rights, black empowerment, justice and armed resistance to achieve racial justice.

The group became internally at odds over whether violence was required to reach its goals and fell apart in the mid-70s. But for half a decade, the Black Panthers were among the most powerful forces within the civil rights and counterculture movements of the late 1960s.

"When I heard about Martin Luther King Jr. I got interested in the civil rights movement and grassroots organizing," Bobby Seale said. "But I give my mother credit for making me understand what fair shares equity is all about" — using a philosophical phrase of the Black Panther Party.

Daughter Bettye Seale Williams said her mother would receive threats and hate mail for defending her son in speeches she gave around the Bay Area while Bobby Seale was in prison for political actions.

Mrs. Seale spoke at Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco while her son was in prison, giving her

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some renown in the Bay Area at the time.

In addition to Bobby Seale and Bettye Seale Williams, Mrs. Seale is survived by eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. A son, John, and husband George preceded her in death.

Viewing hours to remember Mrs. Seale will be held 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the C.P. Bannon Mortuary, 6800 International Blvd., Oakland.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Mrs. Seale's parish, Allen Temple Baptist Church, 8501 International Blvd., Oakland. The Rev. J. Alfred Smith, senior pastor, will officiate.

Interment will follow at the Rolling Hills Memorial Park, 4100 Hilltop Drive, Richmond.

Contact Barbara Grady at [bgrady@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:bgrady@bayareanewsgroup.com) or 510-208-6427.

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