

On Visiting George

George Jackson was a legendary prisoner who was attempting to organize the blacks, Latinos, and poor whites under their common linkage as victims of an exploitative class system. At that time, he was incarcerated in the San Quentin adjustment center which housed the prisons most feared and dangerous inmates. The adjustment center also housed the political prisoners. Both Huey Newton, who had recently been released from prison, and Angela Davis, who was incarcerated herself, had asked me to “go see about George.” George’s attorney, John Thorne, had to get a court order to allow me to visit George.

On April 8th, 1971, I drove my bright red Plymouth Barracuda across the San Rafael Bridge to San Quentin, parked, and walked down the long lane to the opening gates of San Quentin. There, a short wiry guard, who George later informed me that he was a member of the John Birch society, searched my black medical bag. Another guard escorted me across the yard and along several dreary red brick buildings, winding our way to the feared adjustment center.

After being led into the adjustment center, I immediately saw a tall handsome man, locked into his holding cage which was the size of a small casket that was bolted against the wall. He immediately gave me the raised fist sign, power to the people as I nodded my head toward him.

A thin shorter gentleman, Ruchelle McGee, was sitting to the left, against the wall. He stared at me, asking me if I was an attorney? When I told him no, he smiled at me. Ruchelle was a jail house attorney who felt that he, himself, and many other prisoners were victims of glib attorneys. Ruchelle had a passionate dislike for attorneys.

The escorting guard told me that George was a very intelligent person; too bad, he got into trouble. He unlocked George’s cage and escorted both of us into a small office to the right of the hallway. We saw a layer of guards lining the room like corn stalks in a circle. George immediately pointed out which guards were members of the John Birch society. “Officer *so and so* is a member and so are his two sons; the john who searched you at the entrance is one of his sons.”

Using a hard oak desk as an exam table, I gave George a complete history and physical; George was concerned over the pain from his ingrown toenails; he wanted me to operate on him. immediately. I informed him that this was not possible. The San Quentin officials had ignored George’s request for medical therapy for over a year. I arraigned for George Rhoden, D.P.M., a Jamaican gold medalist in the Olympic 400 meters, to perform the surgery. In direct violation of the court order, Warden Red Nelson refused to allow Dr. Rhoden into San Quentin.

George told me that he realized that the podiatrist who operated on his toes was not referred by me, when the podiatrist asked George, “did he feel any pain?” George replied, “Yes”. The podiatrist then proceeded to cut on George’s toes. Immediately after the surgery, they made George walk 200 yards back to the adjustment center. Each step was quite painful for George. The guards claimed that George was too much of a security risk to stay in the infirmary. George

was not given any convalescence, because Warden Nelson didn't want an extra guard in the hospital. Knowing that George was allergic to codeine, they gave him codeine for pain. George was up all night vomiting. They refused to give him any other pain medicine. They gave George another prisoner's three year old dirty shoes and dirty socks to wear. He was given no follow-up care, no clean facilities, and no sterile gauze.

George was more concerned with the health of other prisoners than with his own health. He wanted me to visit an ill Ulysses McDaniels, the co-founder of the Black Guerilla Family. I was allowed to visit George three times before Warden Nelson had the judge rescind the court order. Warden Nelson claimed that I was a security risk

George's body bore the permanent scars of many a battle. In 1967, he was hit with a lead truncheon five times; he bore to his grave an indentation and scar on the back of his skull. After this beating, he had ringing in his ears for six months. On April 6th, 1971, a San Francisco sheriff's deputy kicked him into his mouth, knocking out three of his teeth. On April 6th, 1971 while handcuffed, George was cracked across his throat with a sap. He had pain over his larynx and he had numerous bruises over his neck. He had been hit in the nose numerous times He had a permanent nasal scar. The left frontal area of his head was swollen. His right shoulder had a bite mark. In November 1970, the prison guards broke and dislocated his left fourth finger. This was not treated. The finger grew back crooked. Even today, the San Quentin guards brag about the good old days in which they would take eight people to beat one prisoner down.

George was an amazing person, like Napoleon, he only slept four hours per night. He spent his days reading, writing, exercising, and doing martial arts. He did a thousand pushup per day in sets of one hundred. He showed me how he could do pushups, standing on his head.

George was assassinated in August 1971; He was shot in the neck while he lay helpless on the ground from a gun shot wound to his foot. When Mrs. Georgia Jackson heard about it on the radio, she called up San Quentin. The prison guard laughingly told her, "We killed one of yours sons last year and another one this year. Pretty soon you won't have any more sons left. I was up to 3:00, A.M., with an angry but grieved Georgia Jackson.

Enclosed is a telegram that I sent Mrs. Jackson on August 25, 1971: "Let George's fiery writings and iron deeds serve as a path to lead all of our imprisoned cadres to final victory. Let us mourn him. Let us love him. Let us miss him. Let us do as he did in the name of freedom. In our last hours, let us die as men and not as slaves. Long live George Jackson."

George was not a paper panther. In the Black Panther Party, we had many paper panthers, some in leadership roles that is why the first woman to join the panther party would be one of the first women to be beaten in the party. I would like to dedicate this poem to comrade George; I wrote it five years after George's assassination.

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p.s. The poem, The Heroic Guerilla, can be found on my blog, poems of tolbertsmall.blogspot.com/

