

Remembering Fred Bennett

Black Panther Party Captain/ Field Organizer/ Leader

Recently one of my old friends from Grove Street College called me and asked if I knew a Panther who was killed by police in Santa Cruz. I told her yes and why did she ask? She told me that she knew Fred's younger sister, Ann. They ride horses together as part of the Black Cowboy Association of Oakland. I got in touch with her and sent her a few photos of Fred. She replied back that the family was so happy to get those photos. So now I'm in contact with the family and Fred's son is now my friend on Facebook.

I knew Fred Bennett when worked together in 1970. He was put in charge of the East Oakland office of the Black Panther Party. Our office then was located at the corner of 73 Ave and E.14th St (now called International Blvd.). I was his right hand man; the Officer of the Day (OD). My job was to assist in running the office and social programs and keep everything running smoothly as much as possible.

Under Fred's leadership, we moved our office from 73rd Ave to 99th, because the 73rd street office was too big to defend. It was on the main street, isolated at night from the community. We moved into a large house and were soon welcomed by the community. When we first moved in, Fred make sure the Party members spend a lot of time going door to door talking to everyone in the neighborhood. We had programs going already when Fred came, but he made them more effective. We had 3 Breakfast programs located across East Oakland. Fred started working with all the groups in the area. One of the groups (The Brown Beret's) wanted to work in the community, so Fred got them to take over one of the Breakfast programs in the Fruitvale area.

Fred was a quiet, very serious, and dedicated person, but I could often get him to laugh or smile. He was well dressed. He always wore sunglasses that got lighter inside and would turn darker outside. His political awareness level was very high and he was a very good marksman. His favorite handgun was the P38. He made sure our office had the correct weapons to defend ourselves if attacked. Fred was always reading and studying. He taught Political Education classes to the comrades and on Saturday evenings at the center, Fred taught PE. classes to the community. We would have 35-45 people attend every week. Fred help start an armed

Community Patrol for the neighborhood and even some of the Older Sisters were involved.

Fred wore many hats and one of them was that he was the liaison person for the BPP with the Soledad Defense Committee. The Committee was put together to organize support for three brothers accused of killing a prison guard in Soledad in 1970. Angela Davis was the main spokesperson for the Soledad Brothers along with George Jackson's mother, Georgia. He was always busy; he drove a Black and White 1967 GTO which was very fast. His car was on the To Stop list of the Police. I remember a couple of times being pulled over for nothing while with Fred. Sundays were the worst, trying to get to P.E. classes at National HQ's. The police would lay for us, no matter which route we took. I remember one time we took a back route and there they were waiting on the side of the road. They got behind us and put on their Red lights, (we were in the Oakland/ Berkeley Hills early in the morning). Fred didn't stop. We kept on driving until he saw a gas station with customers open and then he stopped. The police made us get out of the car and did not ask for ID. When I asked why we were stopped, the Police said, "Shut up Jennings." They knew who we were. They delayed us getting to P.E. and gave Fred a ticket for driving over 2 miles while they had their lights on.

Fred was always cool. He knew they hated him and he would always stick to Party rules on legal aide and not talk to the police. He did not let them provoke him into anything.

Fred was missing for a period of time. Then we heard that his body was found in Santa Cruz. There are a bunch of theories and unfounded lies about what happened to Fred. I bet you the FBI and State Police were directly involved. They used to follow Fred all the time. Sometimes Fred would park his car somewhere else and walk to the office, just to throw the pigs off.

Fred was a good brother and I miss him. February 1, 1971, was the day they found his body in Santa Cruz. Long live the spirit of Fred Bennett, a for real Panther.



