

and John Huggins, both shot, and in Chicago, young Fred Hampton, killed by police as he lay sleeping in his bed.

"We put the guns in a special place for safe keeping," Ford explains, "so when the stuff was to come down, we'd have access to them and we could defend ourselves."

As it turned out, the local chapter never suffered a police siege. The Portland party's success, Ford believes, was partly due to the strong coalitions it made with the white community. The party collaborated with many progressive groups whose white members helped it establish the Fred Hampton People's Health Clinic. In late 1969, the Panthers invited members of the Multnomah County Dental Society to attend a meeting at Geneva's, a popular black nightclub, to talk about the possibility of starting a dental clinic as well. According to Gerald Morrell, DMD, then on the Dental Society board of directors, about 20 of the city's leading dentists showed up. "The Panthers had an empty office on Williams Avenue," Morrell recalls, "and we got some pretty archaic equipment donated. My own dental assistant came down and washed instruments."

That was the beginning of the Malcolm X People's Dental Clinic, which lasted 10 years. "But there were a lot of people we couldn't get to come down to Albina at night," recalls Morrell, who served on the board and recruited other dentists to help. "The clinic had a big picture of Malcolm X in the window, so that freaked a lot of people out.

"In those days, all you were hearing about were Panther shootings in Oakland. But local Panthers weren't interested in creating a national black uprising; they just wanted to create in their own community—Portland—a better life for black people, especially in terms of health and dental care.

"We didn't check race or income," Morrell says. "Essentially a white or a purple person could come down. The thing that was really neat was that Kent and Sandra, in their interaction with people, always stressed you can like or dislike people, but do so on the basis of who they are, not on the basis of their race. At night after the dental clinic, Kent and I would go out to have a beer and shoot pool. I came to love him for who he is."

DADDY KENT

Ford married Sandra Britt in summer 1970, and on March 9, 1971, their first son was born. "Kent was a very kind partner," Sandra Ford says today in her soft voice. "He was just the most solicitous husband when I was pregnant. He indulged my cravings and my temperament and all of that.

"Lumumba was like a gift for him. He was so amazed. And so grateful. He would stand over his crib—I can remember that. Especially at night, he'd get up 'cause he wanted to make sure he was breathing. 'Do you think he's all right?' 'Yeah, he's all right.'"

In naming the baby, the Fords summoned all the qualities that Patrice Lumumba represented for them: ardor, idealism and endurance. "We are going to show the world what the black man can do when he works in freedom," Lumumba had said in his 1960 Independence Day speech, "and we are going to make the Congo the center of the sun's radiance for all of Africa." Kent Ford bought his young son a biography of the Congolese leader, and he framed a magazine photo and hung it above the child's bed.

Sixteen months after Patrice Lumumba Ford was born, the couple had their second son, and Kent named him after Sekou Touré, under whom Guinea had gained its independence from France in 1958.

"Kent was a very hands-on parent from the beginning," Sandra recalls, "even when the boys were babies. He never was afraid of them like lots of men are. He helped take baths, comb hair, feed

them, cook their food, help them make their bed, dress them."

"What did I like about being a dad?" Kent Ford asks. "God, something real simple. Just having the kids calling me Daddy Kent."

When Cindy was ready for second grade, the Fords transferred her from Humboldt Elementary to the Black Education Center, which had been founded in 1970. In turn, they enrolled Lumumba and then Sekou in the school, and all three thrived in the environment of small classes and devoted teachers.

"Lumumba is an extremely smart kid," Percy Hampton says. "All of Kent and Sandra's kids were, to us laypeople, like *geniuses* as far as books and schooling and education. They had really produced a very fine batch of kids."

In the late '70s, the Fords' marriage began to crack, and they were divorced in 1979. Today, neither of them is very articulate about how or why the breakup happened. They agreed on joint custody. Although Jimmy and Cindy were never to live with him again, Kent Ford kept Lumumba and Sekou two weekends



a month and visited them every day at Sandra's, if only to make sure they were doing their homework.

Lumumba's favorite subject, Sandra Ford relates, was Chinese. He first got interested in it so he could read martial arts texts in their original language, and he applied to Lincoln High School because it was the only high school where Chinese was offered. The boy loved his adopted language. "His first set of grades, he got a D in English and an A in Chinese," Ford recalls. "And Kent looked at it and he said, 'There's something wrong with this picture here.'"

Only once does Kent Ford remember having to crack down on Lumumba: in his senior year of high school, he started chasing skinheads. "He and his friend cornered some skinheads down in the Pioneer Square bathroom," Ford says. "They walked in and Lumumba said, 'Skinheads?' And this one said, 'Yeah, but we're not racist.' That defused it," Ford recalls. But he told Sandra to send the boy to live with him. "I told her I'd nip that shit in the bud," Ford recalls, the exasperation returning to him after all these years. Patrice Lumumba Ford came to live the remainder of his senior year with his dad, and he would live with him again after he came back from doing undergraduate work in China. By that time he had graduated from PSU and was serving an internship in the mayor's office.

Through all these years, Kent Ford continued to help financially, making no distinction between children and stepchildren.

At one time, maybe 25 years ago, Sandra Ford was convinced that Kent should go to law school. "I just couldn't do it," he says. "I

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saw it as crossing over, and I couldn't, not with so many of my friends gone to prison."

Kent Ford's prominence in the Black Panther movement invited the attention of the police, and he used to get regularly picked up twice a month. "No license-plate light, or not signaling within 100 feet of a turn," Ford recalls, the annoyance still in his voice. Each time, the police would tow his car in and take him down to the station. "Every time I'd go to Chaivoe's office, I'd say, 'Man, I'm sick of this shit.'"

The Panthers' charitable efforts also made Ford a target. In August 1970, Al Leviske, general manager of a firm with six McDonald's franchises, went on local television and, as Kent Ford recalls, accused the Panthers of being extortionists. Kent

Neighborhood Service Center that he wanted a meeting. When they got together, Ford reminded Leviske that the day they toured the Panther programs he hadn't actually asked for any money; when he then heard himself called an extortionist on television, he felt double-crossed. Leviske said he'd like to reopen the Union Avenue store without the pickets. He offered to contribute 500 paper cups and 50 pounds of hamburger meat every week to the breakfast program and to promote blacks into management positions. "Me and that guy from McDonald's, after he got the F.B.I. out of the picture, him and me became pretty good friends," says Ford. In 1973, when the Panthers were promoting sickle-cell anemia testing throughout the Portland area, Leviske gave them 1,500 courtesy cards to offer to anyone willing to be tested. The cards entitled the bearer to a

'The struggle's the only thing I ever did know.'

and Sandra Ford were shocked: only a few days before, at Leviske's request, Kent had escorted him on a tour of Panther clinics and the breakfast program.

The Panthers decided to picket the Union Avenue McDonald's. Their leaflets cited McDonald's for a failure—locally and nationally—to award franchises to blacks, for racist hiring and promotion policies in Portland, and for disinterest in contributing to the children's free breakfast program. Leviske filed for an injunction, and Judge Robert E. Jones, then on the Circuit Court, offered to hear the matter. It wasn't a good sign. The Panthers used to circulate a list of judges they deemed so unsympathetic you never wanted to meet them in court, and the name at the very top of the list was Robert E. Jones. Jones' decision, though, was moderate. He permitted the picketing to continue, but told the Panthers to reduce their numbers on the line in front of McDonald's to 10.

Nearly a week later, the same McDonald's was dynamited in the middle of the night. Damage was not extensive. The Panthers pointed out that they'd had no motive to take their dispute to that level because the picket line was working: about 90 percent of the franchise's business had fallen off.

Before it opened back up, Ford recounts, Leviske sent word to the Panthers through the Office of Economic Opportunity's

free hamburger, fries and a beverage. Moreover, Leviske made the lobby available for blood draws four Saturdays in a row.

Ford's organizing did not advance him personally. In the opinion of Robert Phillips, who now serves as affirmative action officer for Multnomah County, "Kent was willing to sacrifice himself and the opportunities he might have had in the white community in order to promote justice in the black community."

Ford had dropped the candy operation in the late '60s, "and then I pretty much took on various jobs. Nothing really lucrative, you know, just enough to make a living. I managed apartments for a guy who had over 400 units up on 13th & Killingsworth, but I had to get out of there when the drugs moved in."

His work as manager had involved painting units when tenants moved out. "And so I just started painting. There was a gentleman who was a minority contractor, and he had a contract down at the Arlene Schnitzer when they was remodeling the place. I went to work for him as a painter." Since 1996, Ford has also worked part-time as a weight room attendant at Dishman.

Except for one year when he paid Lumumba's \$13,000 tuition at Morehouse out of pocket, Kent Ford never had the resources to send the four kids to college, and he is grateful that they were good

enough students to merit financial aid. James Britt, his stepson, went through law school at the University of Oregon; Cindy Britt graduated from Spelman College and has a good job in human resources; Sekou Ford graduated from Stanford Medical School and practices sports medicine in San Francisco.

Patrice Lumumba Ford took a year off after undergraduate school, then earned a master's from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, operated by Johns Hopkins University in Nanjing. There he met Shay, a Chinese journalist. They married in a traditional Islamic ceremony in Portland; their first child, Ibrahim, was born in January 2001.

Two of the Ford kids gravitated toward religion. "I took every religion class they ever offered at Spelman," Cindy Britt says. "Judaism made so much sense, but I think the ritual of Catholicism is what drew me." After years of going to mass by herself, she converted.

Sandra Ford believes Lumumba's conversion had been a long time coming. "When he was a teenager, he had started thinking about Islam," she says. "He said that Allah had part of his heart, but the world called louder; he had women and dancing and he drank some.

"Lumumba has a remarkable reputation in the Muslim community for charitable works," Sandra Ford says, "picking up people from the airport who are new to the country, helping them get situated, making sure they get clothes and food. The clothing thing is a big deal, so at the end of every season, if I haven't even worn something, I tell him, 'Just take that to give away.'"

For the next number of months or years, Kent Ford plans to shape his life around the struggle to free his son. He goes to meetings, puts up posters, talks to anyone who might possibly take an interest. "This is stuff I should have been doing two years ago," Ford says, "but I was just in a tailspin." In November 2004, he passed out "Free Lumumba" leaflets at Memorial Coliseum, where 3,000 Portland Muslims were celebrating the end of Ramadan. (In the process, he managed to get a citation barring him from the premises for 90 days.) "It's the only thing I know how to do," he says. "The struggle's the only thing I ever did know." His old Black Panther friends have been his most faithful supporters, but he finds himself missing Chaivoe, who died in 2000 at age 88. "He'd have made this whole thing go away," Ford believes. "My boy wouldn't be in jail if Nick was alive today."

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ECHOES

Ford feels his kids cannot understand the Black Panthers unless they understand the conditions in those days. "One time Lumumba asked, and I said, 'You guys don't know what had to be done in those times: the times take their actions, you know.'" He has always tried to give them enough information about the history of race relations in the United States that they aren't taken by surprise, while not filling their heads with the fears he hopes they'll never find justified by society.

In 1971, the Black Panther Party suffered a leadership split, exacerbated by F.B.I. brown mail, between Huey Newton, its founder, and Eldridge Cleaver. When the split came, Percy Hampton says, Portland just drew back from Oakland headquarters. "With a lot of people going to jail and dying, it just kind of dissolved over the years."

Hampton especially missed the breakfast program, which closed in the mid-'70s. "We were kind of forced away from it," he says. "We had food handlers' cards and everything, but the city of Portland didn't want a breakfast program by the Black Panthers; they started one of their own. I still maintain my friendships with all the Black Panther Party members, but there came a time when we had to figure out what we were doing with our lives."

Kent Ford stayed in a little longer. "Lots of defections in the mid-'70s," he says. "The health clinic and the dental clinic, we ran those up until 1980. But as soon as Reagan got in there, we just couldn't sustain the funding anymore.

"The main thing was just harassment. They arrest you by day and harass you by night. I'd go down to Dishman to work out, and no sooner would I leave, than they'd go in and talk to the instructor there. And they did that every place we went.

"In the old days me and my friends always judged people by: How much dues have you paid? How many times have you ever been arrested? How many times have you had your door kicked in? How many times have you been stopped on the street when you were planning to go to the movies but were taken downtown instead?"

One of the last times Kent Ford ever wore the Panther black pants and blue shirt was for a funeral. "The police killed a guy out at Rocky Butte who was trying to escape, and we felt he was trying to get free. We

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marched from Cox Funeral Home to where the Skanner used to be, there on Williams, 15 or 20 of us, and we had a barbecue. There was police and F.B.I. all over: we could see them everywhere. They could have come by to get some barbecue," he adds with a laugh. "That barbecue was *good*."

Ford's Panther past continues to follow him. "I was at Dishman one morning, in the game room watching CNN," he says, "and in walks this reporter from the *Tribune* and he hands me a stack of papers." It was September 2002, less than a month before the F.B.I. arrested his son. The *Portland Tribune* had come across copies of the surveillance files that the Portland Police Intelligence Division had collected and maintained in the 1960s and 1970s on hundreds of political and religious organizations and individuals, including Kent Ford.

"I said, 'What's this?' And he says, 'This is what they've got on you.' And I said, 'Who?' And he said, 'The city.' And he wanted me to expound on it, but I just told him, 'There's nothing new here. I know all this.'"

In fact there were some surprises, like the detailed sketch of one of his apartments showing a gun closet that never existed.

Some items were maddening, like the long lists of businesspeople the police interviewed, hoping to find someone who would accuse Ford of extortion because of his solicitations for the children's free breakfast program. Other items were comical, like the police account of the day Ford helped promote African Liberation Day by putting up posters: under "weapons used," the officer had written "paste."

And at least one item was gratifying. Finally Ford was able to hold in his hand and read what he'd long suspected: one day back in the early '70s, the F.B.I. had broken into his home and taken papers, photographs and his shotgun shells. "I knew it for years, but couldn't confirm it until I saw those files. Lumumba was only this big"—he holds out his hands to indicate 18 inches. "We were coming out of the house, and they were parked there underneath the trees."

From Ford's perspective, the F.B.I. used the same COINTELPRO tactics on his son—only now they called it the Patriot Act.

"I think at the time the Panthers thought they'd be the reason for change," says Kay Toran, director of affirmative action under former governor Vic Atiyeh, and now president and CEO of Volunteers of America. "But they didn't see that change happen. They were just young! And a lot of lives were lost."

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Yet there are some satisfactions. "I'll be in a store or some place like that," Ford says, "and some kid will come up to me and say, 'Mr. Ford?' And I'll say, 'Yeah.' 'Remember me? You used to feed us every morning.'"

GRIEF

On November 24, 2003, Patrice Lumumba Ford drew 18 years in federal prison. Kent Ford feels as though he went through the next four months in a daze. He heard that his son's wife, Shay, spent one entire night weeping and then, from all visible signs, it was over for her. Ford is in awe of her strength. He himself has had a hard time shaking off depression. "It seemed so unreal," he says now of the period immediately following the sentencing. "But I remember Coleman Brown, my old friend in the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], always used to say, 'Everything is real.'"

In March 2004, Kent Ford received a subpoena in the mail: now *he* was the one being called to testify before the grand jury. "Why are they messing with me?" he asked his family, rhetorically.

His daughter, Cindy, said, "You know."

The subpoena was signed by Judge Robert E. Jones, Ford's old nemesis from the Panther years. What Ford wanted to say now, appearing before Jones in U.S. District Court, was, "You've been after my black ass for years. If you want to put me in jail, you can. It don't make no matter to me."


Instead, he went before the grand jury wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with a blowup of the mug shot from his son's arrest. The grand jury was pursuing the imam of the Masjed As-Saber mosque, the same imam who had not been forthcoming when Ford went to him to plead for information about the ill-fated China trip. Ford pled the Fifth, despite having no pertinent information: he welcomed the chance to act, even if only by refusing to answer questions.

Ford recounts a time years ago when he was shot through the knee and hand in an altercation at a gambling game. He took the .32 pistol off the man who'd lost at dice, walked himself to his car, threw the gun in the Willamette River as he drove across the bridge to the hospital, and insisted to the police in the emergency room that he had accidentally shot himself. In Kent Ford's hierarchy of values, few principles are as sacred as keeping your mouth shut.

Ford keeps replaying a conversation he had with Chaivoe back in 1969, when he

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