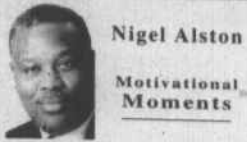


# FORUM

## Brian is learning to think positively



**Nigel Alston**  
Motivational Moments

"You can find your way by paying attention to what is happening inside you."  
- Gary Zukav

Brian has suffered depression for most of the past 19 years and about 18 months ago attempted suicide. He tried to decapitate himself, and, according to an open letter on an inspirational Web site, came "real damn close."

His life is moving in a different direction now, mostly due to a comment his sister-in-law made that opened his eyes and the suggestion of a nurse to focus on "three positive things" he could feel good about doing. He wants to be an inspiration to others, especially those who suffer from depression.

At the end of a relaxation session several months ago, a nurse suggested that he write down at the end of each day three things he could feel positive about. He didn't give it

much thought or effort until his sister-in-law told him something he knew all along. "Your problem is you have a negative outlook on everything," she said. That really hit home with him and he knew he had to change how he thought.

Depression and anxiety disorders - the two most common mental illnesses - each affect 19 million American adults annually, according to information from the National Mental Health Association, and there are many contributing factors, including negative thinking patterns and low self-esteem.

Depression affects everyone around you.

"If you don't change the habits that have an impact on your condition, you will never see more than a light at the end of the tunnel." I was told by a friend who has also experienced depression. He has been in this trap before and could identify with Brian's state of mind. "It is so easy to be negative," he said. "You get so used to feeling bad that your attitude becomes so bitter. It is a daily fight, and the habits you develop are the key to

your success."

Brian slowly began to realize that and put forth the effort to think about the positive things and it snowballed. "I started to see myself forming new, and positive, habits," he said and recalled reading or hearing a counselor mention that it takes 21 days to form a habit, or break an old one. "So I defined a new habit as one that occurred 21 times in a row," he continued.

"I bet he feels like the richest man in the world," my friend said, relating to his story as he read it. "It's like he planted a seed inside himself and it has grown consistently each day and the light at the end of the tunnel is within reach."

It's been 88 days now since he started his new way of living and his list of new habits is growing daily. They include the basics like changing his clothes and shaving daily, to brushing and flossing his teeth every night before going to bed. He takes a multivitamin every day, is becoming a vegetarian and sleeps just fine without taking his prescribed-as-needed sleep medication.

The most important new

habit of all, though - in his words - is "writing down three things I can feel POSITIVE about doing that day." He has hope. His list has included as many as 15 positive things in one day. He doesn't just stop at three. He writes down everything good that is positive.

I agree with my friend who believes these new habits are a lifeline.

"You have to get rid of the bad stuff," he said. "It makes you sad, mad, indifferent, and you run in the opposite direction. Inspirational articles and people that make you laugh and feel good to be around are like oxygen to an asthmatic."

Meditate on these words included in a poem Brian wrote that stress the importance of a right mental attitude.

"For you see, the key to having a positive outlook is having a positive look back."

Now that's a habit worth developing.

Nigel Alston is a radio talk show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at [www.motivational-moments.com](http://www.motivational-moments.com).

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## Voting equality remains a struggle



**By Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas)**

Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

"The Negro voting problem is more than a legal issue, for it takes courage, patience, and massive effort."

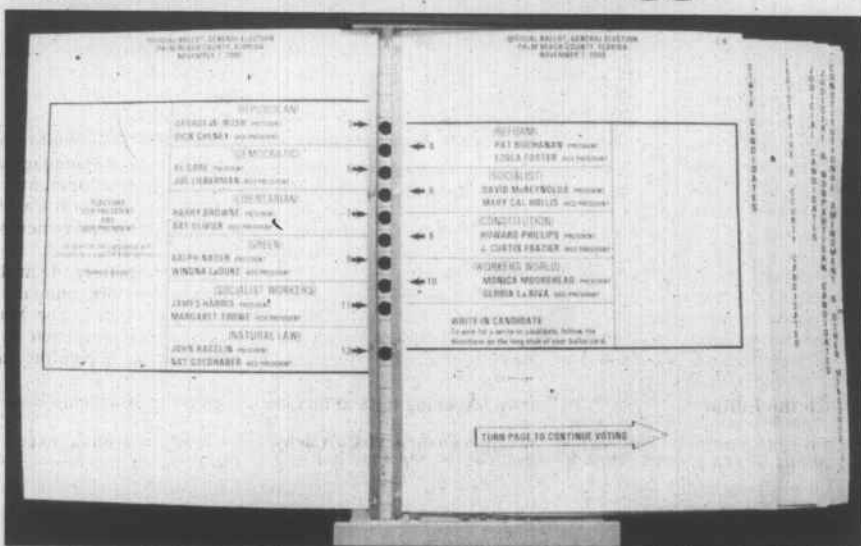
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1965

Dr. King wrote those lines two weeks after "Bloody Sunday" transpired on the Edmund Pettus bridge on the outskirts of Selma, Ala. On that day, state troopers on horseback used clubs and cattle prods to beat down protesters and those kneeled in prayer. They were there demanding nothing more than full citizenship through the right to vote.

As we celebrate Dr. King's birthday, it is instructive to review Bloody Sunday, which represents home-grown, American terrorism. It symbolized the blood-covered history of how peaceful citizens in search of their constitutional rights were met with brutality. The brutal response to the voting rights movement created such martyrs as Jimmy Lee Jackson, the Rev. James Reed, Viola Liuzzo and hundreds of others we may never know.

If it were not for those souls who braved the beatings and being trampled under horses in places like Selma, I would not be among the 39 black legislators in Congress today. In 1964, there were only three African Americans in Congress and 300 black elected officials nationwide. Today, those numbers have swelled to nearly 9,000.

With King at the helm, massive numbers of Americans, both black and white, showed the courage and



The butterfly ballot fiasco brought voting rights to the forefront.

patience to continue to fight for enfranchisement, which resulted in the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In 1975, provisions were included to protect Hispanics, Asians and others.

As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, I have been criticized for continuing to raise the issue of election reform, but I will not back away from the battlefield of voting rights and election reform. That is why as we reflect on Dr. King's birthday, I echo the sentiments of the gospel song, "We are no ways tired."

The 2000 presidential election and the massive charges of intimidation and voter abuse in Florida are ugly reminders of yesterday and how quickly we can lose our rights without constant vigilance. In that race, we saw that while the King movement had won the right to vote, it would take more effort to actually get every vote counted.

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission and the Congressional Black Caucus received testimonies from scores of elected officials, voters and other affected parties from across the nation, attesting to barriers to voting, particularly for people of color. For example, in Florida thousands of African Americans mislabeled as felons were purged from the voting polls.

This is unacceptable. On the battlefield of voting rights, where so many have fought and died, the caucus has come early and we plan to stay late.

As a group, we were one of the first congressional bodies to hold hearings on election reform. We have placed the issue at the top of our legislative agenda. Although a bill has passed the House, it is only a first step on the larger goal to make every vote count. We will continue our efforts in the Senate to produce legislation that will, at the very least, accomplish

such changes as uniformity of voting machines, ballots and poll closings.

We plan to stay late because we know that the American dream Dr. King so eloquently articulated from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 remains a nightmare for far too many. One-fourth of African-American children are born into poverty and, unlike their white counterparts, are more likely to go to jail than to college. African-American males, who have never been accused of terrorism against our nation, are racially profiled.

We have come a long way since King articulated his dream "of a nation where one day our children will not be judged by the color of their skin."

To turn that dream into reality, it still takes what Dr. King called for some 37 years ago: courage, patience and massive effort.



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