



Drawing by Greg Calibey

almost out of nowhere an unmarked highway patrol car with what must have been the brightest blue light in the world pulled us over. Immediately I told everybody not to panic. Then I began to think about what we had in the car and what my parents would say if we got arrested and I panicked.

"What are we going to do, man?" I screamed. "Pull the car over, stupid, and just tell him that we are going home!" hollered the oldest brother. I jerked the car over to the curb, but not before the brothers had stuck their weapons under the back seat of the car. The policeman was real courteous. "Get out of the car with your hands in the air!" he yelled. "Don't you boys know that there has been a curfew in Raleigh since 1 a.m.?" he asked. "Now lean against the car and spread your legs, you know the routine." Well, the truth was I did not know the routine, so I asked him: "What routine?" Cold blue steel has a funny way of helping you learn techniques quickly. The officer pointed his double-barrelled pump shotgun directly at my head and pushed me up against the car. I assumed the position and he patted me down. Meanwhile, his partner had searched my companions for weapons. He had a large bandage on his forehead. Apparently he had had an altercation with some rioters. It was obvious that he wanted retaliation. His voice was the nastier of the two, "Y'all come over here to burn up Raleigh, huh? I see you got a Molotov cocktail in the back seat."

After about what seemed like an hour we are on our way home for the holidays. Our school has been closed early because of Dr. King's death. That is just floor wax." The officer kept his shotgun cocked on us and smelled the floor wax. "Yeah, that's all it is," he said, regretting every minute of it. "Well, y'all better git the hell out of here before we lock you up for curfew violations." Left we did. Nobody said a word for 10 or 15 minutes. We just drove straight to this brother's house. It was not until we were safely inside that we talked about how close we were to going to jail. Everybody thought that the dumbest part of the whole episode was Moose's Molotov cocktail. I thought that it was funny too; funny that it was not a real cocktail. "That's what all of us should have had," I thought. But I could not say that out loud. There was too much unrevolutionary conversation going on. They wanted to know why we didn't get another Rocket from the bootlegger. Or why didn't we smoke another joint? Or why didn't we steal some portable color TVs?

The next morning around 8 we went back to Durham to attend a peaceful march set for 10 a.m. We had an hour to lie about what transpired in Raleigh the preceding night. We told most of the fellows that we

had had a shootout with some cops while were in the process of stealing some portable color TVs. We had gotten away, of course, and stashed the sets in a safe place. I got tired of hearing the oldest brother tell that story. I guess that's why I left them in the dormitory room asleep. I was sure that there would be some action. After all, brothers were doing it all over the nation. D.C. was in flames, so was Baltimore, New York City, Detroit, Newark and Cincinnati. Surely, the brothers in Durham were not going to be outdone. Besides, Howard Fuller was going to speak at the memorial service before the march.

The whole affair turned out to be a failure. There were passionate, pleading speeches asking the students to remember what Dr. King stood for by the college minister Dr. J. Neal Hughley, the college president Dr. Albert N. Whiting, history Professor Helen Edmonds and Student Government President Douglass Gills. Fuller did not even attend. He was replaced by Student Government Vice President Grova Bridges, who told the crowd that we would not leave campus until we understood that the march would be nonviolent. He made us promise out loud that we would abide. So we abided. Riot-equipped Durham police officers also made sure of that.

I was thoroughly disgusted after I left the march. As I walked up the hill from McDougald Gym to Chidley Hall I had only one thought on my mind: I just wanted to get away from Durham. It was a town full of rhetorical revolutionaries like Howard Fuller and all the other so-called black-power advocates. There had to be a place nearby where there was something happening. I could not go home, there was nothing happening there. I was almost positive of that. Meanwhile, in D.C., Stokely Carmichael was urging black folks to arm themselves. "We have got to retaliate for the death of our leaders!" he said. Nobody was listening where I was situated. Everybody was talking about going home for an extended holiday. I decided to take one of the "unholy quintet" to his home in Portsmouth, Va. "Maybe I could find some revolutionary brothers up there," I thought. Besides, my cousin and my best friend in high school attended school at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Va. I knew they had burned down a few buildings.

On the way to Virginia the radio blasted bulletin after bulletin describing the statewide violence. The National Guard was on standby in four cities: Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte and Winston-Salem. Even as we drove through the northeastern town of Weldon on U.S. Highway 158, I noticed that rioters had tried to demolish a bridge on the outside of town. "I'm glad we are getting out of this state," the Virginian said.

"You niggers are crazy down here." He did not know how correct he was. We arrived in Portsmouth at about 8 p.m. It was even quieter than Durham. My friend's parents informed us that we were fools for traveling under such hazardous conditions. Still you could see that they were more than delighted to see their son, especially since the Associated Press' lead newspaper story that evening was headlined "11 KILLED AND SECTIONS OF CHICAGO, WASHINGTON BURNED AS RACIAL VIOLENCE FLARES IN 12 CITIES."

His parents informed us that the Tidewater Area (which includes Portsmouth, Norfolk, Hampton, Newport News and Virginia Beach, Va.) authorities had kept local vandalism, fires and disturbances to a minimum. There was no curfew in effect. This was good news because my brother, a friend and I would be able to travel the 15 or so miles to Hampton and not have to worry about being harassed by the local police. The silly incident in Raleigh the preceding night had convinced me that the next time I would not be as lucky.

My homeboy at Hampton was happily surprised to see us. He explained that there had been little action at Hampton. He said that he and his New Jersey roommate had looted a local wine store last night but other than that most of the town was quiet. "The pigs were everywhere, man," he told us. It seemed that Hampton's officials were extra tight on the college campus area. The police had stationed themselves at the front and back entrance of the riverfront, picturesque Institute. By Friday morning, school officials had given the predominantly Northern-bred students an extended holiday. My homeboy was elated to see us for two reasons: one, he needed some help with the 10 or 12 bottles of wine; and two, he wanted a ride to Wilmington. "What you want to go to Wilmington for, man? Ain't nothing happening down there," I said. "It has to be more than what is happening here, brother, everybody has gone home," he replied. "Besides, I have to be out of the dormitory by tomorrow (Saturday) at 1 p.m."

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We left Armstrong Hall at about noon that Saturday with the intention of spending the night at the house of my homeboy's aunt. We ended up sleeping there Sunday night also. My friend's aunt complained about our presence the whole while we were there. She kept asking us if our mother knew we were in Hampton. I repeatedly assured her that everything was alright. We were simply visiting some friends in the area and would be going to Wilmington shortly. Apparently she did not believe me, because she called my parents late that Sunday afternoon and informed them that we were in Hampton, waiting for the revolution.

My mother was plenty mad, all right. She shouted at me over the phone and told me to leave early in the morning for Wilmington. She explained that there was a curfew on in the city. She insisted that we must get to Wilmington before 6 p.m. or we stood a good chance of being arrested. "What else is new?" I thought. "What is going on down there, Momma?" I asked. "Boy, you haven't heard? They having the worst riot in the state down here!" she exclaimed. "You better get your crazy self back down here. And come straight home."

As soon as the sun rose that Monday morning I was on my way back to North Carolina. By 1 p.m. I was passing through Dawson Street in my hometown wondering why the brothers and sisters had tried to destroy their own neighborhood. But, most of all, I wondered why I could not have been there. Today, I thank my lucky stars that I wasn't.

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