

FORUM

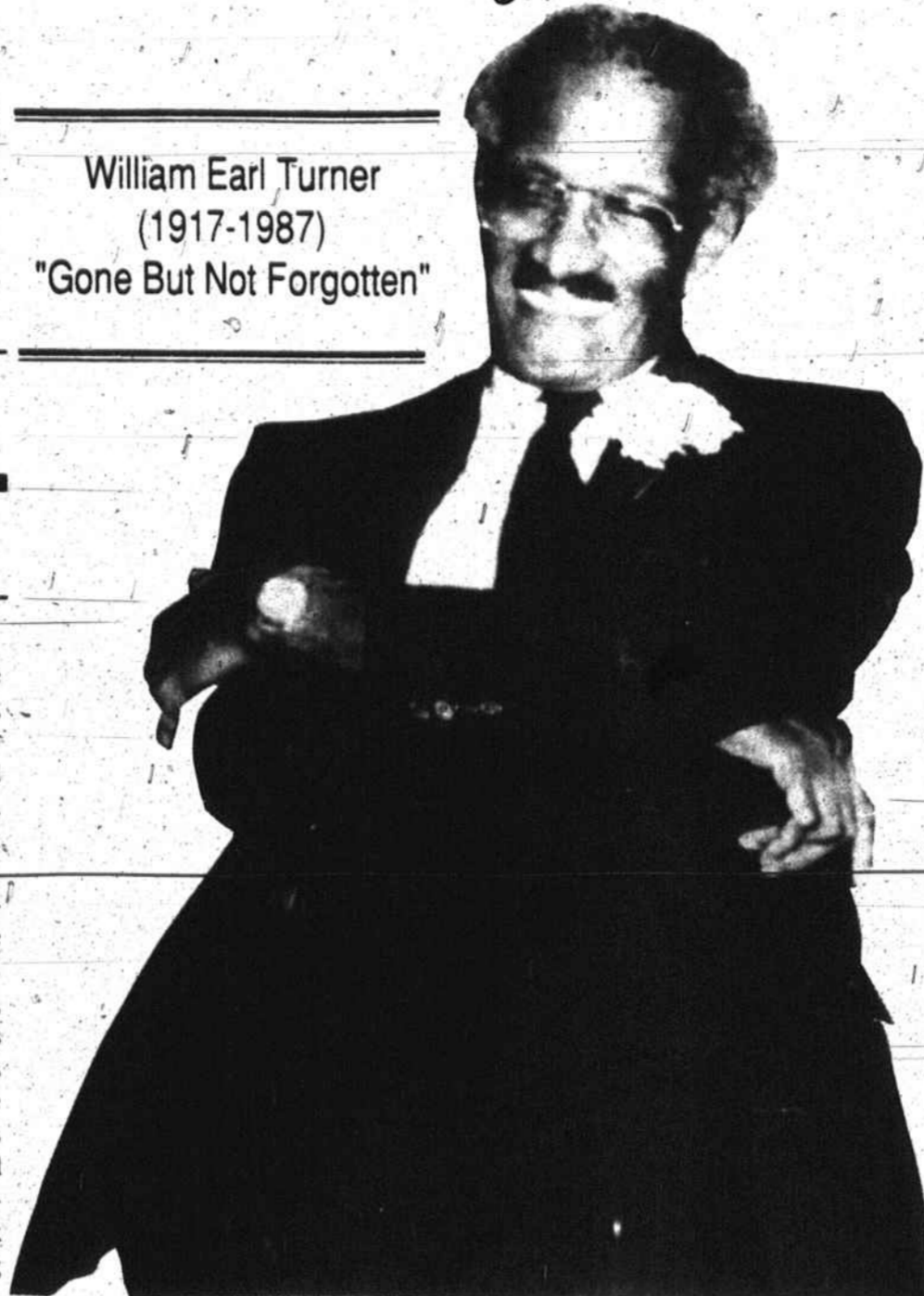
The Big One That Got Away: Gone But Not Forgotten

This week marks the seventh year since our Daddy got away from us. October 22, 1987 at 3:44 a.m. My brother Tony and I were sitting on either side of his bed when he took his last gasp.

Those who have seen a loved one ravaged by leukemia must share the twisted sense of "relief and sorrowful delight" that we experienced when we heard the sound made when the final shutter of death went through his frail and ransacked frame.

Otherwise very high-strung and excitable people, we, including Mama, were relatively calm and composed on that cool fall morning because

William Earl Turner
(1917-1987)
"Gone But Not Forgotten"



Each conversation with a brother or sister embraces something we easily recall Daddy having said or done. A chat with Mama inevitably ends with some reference to "you remember the time your Daddy... (so and so)."

I am glad that no one is in my car with me on those frequent occasions that I am literally talking with Daddy -- gaining his wise counsel -- on a challenge I might be having in my marriage, with my children, in my relations with people, in my work, or especially when I am grappling with myself.

I believe in the realness of ancestor worship and communications with the dead. A lot of other people must too for how else would they justify putting "Gone but not forgotten" on tombstones. I therefore sincerely believe that Daddy hears me and his voice is surely the whisper in the wind. The dark mahogany hue of his skin is the same as the color of trees in the month of his death. And, the surest reason I will always love to fish is because when Daddy took me fishing as a boy, I was happiest.

Gone, but not forgotten. How can I forget this man? Unlike I do with my children, he never tried to be my pal. He had the guts to be my father! He has but one great son, and it was all seven of his boys. He often told us that we would never be men until he died! He enjoyed fatherhood and hung onto it until the final moment. Although I was 42 when he died, he still called me "Billy." I called him Daddy. Not Dad. Not Father. Daddy.

Now in both my weakest and strongest moments, I find myself saying, "What would Daddy do?" "What would Daddy say?" He was always there for a hurting child or for the widows of his fellow coal miners who preceded him in death. He gave them fish he caught.

He was a respectful and respected friend to both those who were thought by many to be outright ruffians and to those who thought of themselves as the upright and reverent. The most exalted testimony to his standing in our town was when equal numbers of black and white folk attended his last rites. For me, funny enough, the greatest testament to his influence in my life hits me each morning when I apply Murray's Superior Hair Dressing Pomade to my hair!

Seven years have passed now. Along with my brothers and our kids this weekend we are meeting at home to go fishing in Daddy's honor. I am going to offer my suggestion for what to put in the space on his tombstone. It should read: "The Big One That Got Away." Fishermen like Daddy often recounted tales of the Big One... the one that go away! The stories of such experiences get bigger with each recounting of the tale. Daddy gets Bigger and Bigger!

OK we'll put "Gone but not Forgotten," too.

For those favored enough to still have your Daddy, please go to him and hug him and do something special with him, before he is gone... before he gets away.

(William Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle).



LIFT EVERY VOICE

By WILLIAM H. TURNER

Daddy had taken his demise so unruffled and with such dignity. When we went to the visitor's lounge to tell Mama and the rest of the family gathered, few words were spent. We didn't have to say much because our big family of ten children -- plus the grand and great grandchildren -- had shared countless words the entire year preceding those eerie decisive moments. There was little else to say, Mama she said she saw it in our eyes. We took it pretty well as they say.

Last weekend, while visiting home in the mountains of eastern Kentucky ("Take care of your Mama and Granny, Billy!"), I called on his grave site for the fifty-fourth time since 1987.

The most common epitaph on gravestones in Eastern Kentucky reads, "Gone But Not Forgotten." This expression is so commonplace that it rings with neither originality nor sincerity. When the handsome marker was placed, we left blank the space for a catch phrase on his tombstone because we could not settle for anything as banal and as ordinary as as trite as "Gone, but not forgotten." Our Daddy deserved something more profound and more penetrating and more philosophical than "Gone but not forgotten." Time would heal our wounded spirits and give us the chance to think of something profound, something regal and benefitting this our Shining Prince.

In the meanwhile, our baby brother, Jeff, had a man catching a fish etched in the granite. Now that was the picture of Daddy! Fishing. Rod bent and line taunt. Straight out of *Field and Stream*. Our friends tell us that the man catching the fish on Daddy's tombstone is distinct and extraordinary. But, that blank space is still there, a constant reminder that something is missing in our lives: "Gone, but not forgotten." Truth be told, however, it is

not such a superficial cliché after all. Boy! Do we miss him. We think about him every day.

For example, when nothing else works, I invoke Daddy's name and honor when I wish to have my children take me seriously. With my oldest boy, I remind him that he is named William in Daddy's honor, not for me! Me? Be like Daddy, I wish!

Mandela Requests Economic Support From African-Americans

"To Black Americans I say thank you for your tremendous help toward the triumph we've experienced in South Africa. Without your lead and help I don't know how we would have made it. Even when I was in prison, I knew what you were doing here and I'm here to say that the efforts of Black Americans were very important in helping us to the position we are today. That's why as a symbolic gesture, the first time that I did on this my fourth visit to the United States since 1990, was to go to the Cannon Baptist

Church in Harlem," said Nelson Mandela at a breakfast meeting at the Blair House on the last day of his triumphant visit to America.

Speaking to a group of 15 senior editorial representatives from America's leading print media outlets, South Africa's first black president told the Black Press of America's representative that he wanted to get a direct message of "Thanks" to all African Americans who were concerned and committed to his progression from prisoner to president.

The silver-haired symbol of human endurance said to blacks, "I feel a special identity with you." Looking tired some of the time during the hour-and-a-half meeting, the 76-year-old leader's body moved mightily and his eyes gained a sparkle and gleam when he talked about the good old days of the "struggle."

I ask Black Americans to join me again. But, this time we are seeking to eliminate poverty, hunger, unemployment and lack of education.

— Nelson Mandela

But, Mandela's struggle today is not for political power but for economics. "I ask Black Americans to join me again. But, this time we are seeking to eliminate poverty, hunger, unemployment and lack of education," Mandela told the Black Press. Many experts feel Mandela's government, and its goals, offer tremendous opportunities for African-American entrepreneurs. Mandela said that he wants foreign investors to build houses, schools and medical facilities. His ambassador to the U.S., Harry Schwartz, reported to the group that South Africa's embassy receives a dozen calls per day from people inquiring about investment opportunities.

President Mandela reported that while he was in New York he had met with David Rockefeller and the Trade Council to discuss multi-national firms' investments. He, and Ambassador Schwartz, also pointed out that what they want most are major investors who will partner with black businesses in South Africa to form companies there. A high-profile group of African Americans have made the largest investment since economic sanctions ended. Blacks such as actor Danny Glover, publisher Earl Graves and

basketball star Shaquille O'Neal are joining Pepsi International and black South African business people in a \$15 million in a bottling venture. Mr. Mandela also reported that black former New York Mayor David Dinkins will invest in a building project in Johannesburg. Black Entertainment Television (BET) President Robert Johnson presented Mr. Mandela a check for \$50,000 while he was in the U.S. The check was the second installment of a \$100,000 donation to help Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) to further their voter education and rights programs. BET already broadcasts eight hours of programming in South Africa via a television network which has 500,000 subscribers.

In a White House meeting the week prior to Mandela's visit, the federally supported Overseas Private Investment Corporation announced the creation of two private equity funds, to finance U.S. businesses in South Africa. The funds will total more than \$75 million and African-American entrepreneurs are expected to benefit heavily from these funds.

The same is true of a \$100 million venture capital fund announced by the Agency for International Development (AID). Black U.S. Commerce



BUSINESS EXCHANGE

By WILLIAM REED

Secretary Ron Brown is telling blacks, "The trade and investment opportunities emerging in the new South Africa represent enormous potential for African American entrepreneurs."

In the few months since he became the country's first democratically elected head, Mandela reports that he has moved toward a free-market policy that will cut government spending, taxes, debt and bloat.

He points out that investments in South Africa also help that region of Africa. "Black Americans have knowledge and skills we would like for you to share with South Africa," Mandela said to the Black Press representative. "We invite you to come and visit and if you like what you see, let your money stay for a while." President Mandela quipped.

(William Reed is NNPA Director of Communications.)



South African President Nelson Mandela.

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