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**Final Rites Of Passage:
A Salute To Brother Eugene Godfried
In Struggle Spotlight
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Life has a hard way of reminding us that our passage in this world is not permanent. This lesson, while known to us is reinforced when we lose our family, friends or love ones. Their loss is often a difficult transition to make. We get caught up in the wonderful and joyful memories we have of them, and then have to come to the hard reality that their physical presence will forever be gone. This is generally a difficult emotional void and transition to make. For many family members, friends and love ones of Eugene Godfried – his departure creates a disbelief we have to reconcile.

Because Eugene was an internationalist by his spiritual and political practices, many family members, friends and love ones were unable to participate and say their last goodbyes and salute Eugene in his final rites of passage, his transitioning into the spiritual world of the ancestors. I was fortunate to be in Curacao to pay my respects and give a final salute to my friend, brother and comrade Eugene Godfried.

Upon hearing of his death, I cried every day until we laid him to rest in peace on April 4th, the anniversary day of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Eugene's send off was very much in the tradition of African descendents customs and cultural practices of Curacao. Like the customs and cultural practices of my family in Suriname, another "former" Dutch colony, family members host a private mourning time so that they can speak with the departed and release their spirit. Often family members take pictures and pose by the decease. I was invited to be with the immediate family, to mourn with them and to say my final goodbye, to salute Brother Eugene's physical form. The family also selected me to be one of comrade Eugene's pall-bearers, helping to carry Brother Eugene's casket to the church service and to his final resting place.

At the church service, the governor of Curacao, along with many former and current elected officials came to pay their last respects. This was very important to the family, especially his Aunt Crisma and Wife Angela. Eugene left Curacao because of differences

with political officials who were in power. Those differences casted a negative shadow over Eugene's work and presence in Curacao. Both his Aunt and Wife, were also very pleased that Eugene was able to come back and spend the last couple of years in Curacao. They were so proud, along with his daughters Yomini and Nohraya of Eugene when he was honored with full protocol in January at the Governors place. It was a victory that will be marked in history and overshadows the negative shade that forced his departure from Curacao many years ago. According to his Aunt and advisor, Crisma, Eugene was proud as well. He was excited that his country had honored him, a humble grassroots man whose sacrifices his family had to endure. I could hear his proud Caribbean accented voice and his laughter and see his smile when his Aunt told me how they stayed up to 3 o'clock in the morning discussing the occasion.

In some way, the trip to Curacao was like a reunion. While I had seen Eugene's Aunt Crisma in Havana in 2001, I had not seen Betty, his Uncle Omalie and Dr. Claude Makouke from Guadeloupe since 2003 when all of us were in Santiago de Cuba for the christening of his daughter Krisjocelyn. Betty who resides in Holland and Dr. Makouke stood in as godparents. Betty told me that she had recently been in Santiago and spent time with Krisjocelyn, her mother Josefa, as well as her grandmother and neighbors. Betty showed me pictures and I could see how tall Eugene's daughter has grown. Unfortunately, Eugene never saw those photos of his beautiful daughter – but I was absolutely positive that he was happy that Betty was on the case in her role as Godmother. This is exactly why Eugene chose her as he expressed it to me in Santiago.

I was able to spend time with his daughters – Nohraya who I hadn't seen since 2000 after her visit to Boston and Yomini who I last saw in Havana in 2005 after Eugene's leg was amputated. Both of them held up well and stood strong knowing that their father left a proud and rich legacy of international struggle for equality, humanity and social justice. As usual, whenever I would visit Eugene, I ended up with new friends and another assignment. I got to meet with some of Eugene's childhood friends and seasoned comrades Rudy Lampe, a member of parliament in Aruba, and Claudio Martina, Vice President of a new movement Eugene was President of, Plataforma Agrario Nashonal (PAN). I also had some time to talk with the Former Prime Minister of Curacao Don Martina; Pablo Cova, President of one the major unions in Curacao with 10,000 members; Navin Chandarpal of Guyana an Adviser to the President on Sustainable Development and the Honorable Selmon Walters, Minister for Rural Transformation, who was in Curacao to officially represent the Prime Minister of St. Vincent. I also got to met Eugene's cousin Rutger who worked very hard making sure friends and family visiting the house to pay their condolences was comfortable.

Navin Chandarpal, the Honorable Selmon Walters and Rudy Lampe all gave wonderful and comforting talks about the significance of Eugene's sacrifice and work. I also spoke briefly and brought greetings and condolences to the family from friends and comrades in the United States as well as special friends in Boyeros and Guantanamo Cuba. Eugene's daughter Yomini spoke of what she learned from assisting her father in his work in Cuba.

In reflecting on all of this, it is also hard to think about some of the people who were family to him in Cuba and the United States – people who supported and looked after him. Eugene was a major presence in their lives. In Havana, my good friend and sister Rosa and her son Alexandro; Niyurca and her daughters Glenda and Glevies, her mother and brothers Bobby and Julio; Martha and many other who lived in the Boyeros community. In the United States exile community, I thought of Sister Assata, Nehanda and Brother Charles, and without doubt, his many comrades and co-workers at Radio Progreso in Havana.

In Santiago, Eugene's daughter and her mother Josefa comes to mind along with her aunts, cousins, the neighbors next door and Rene, who was very fond of Eugene. I think about Rudulfo who is the President of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artist (UNEAC) in Santiago, and Aberto Lescay, a member of the People's Power and one of Cuba's national artists who designed and built the wonderfully huge monument of General Antonio Maceo in the center of Santiago de Cuba, both respected friends of Eugene.

In Guantanamo, Vivian and her family, Luis Bennett, Jorge George and members of the British West Indian Welfare Center and Carmen, the former Minister of Culture in Guantanamo, and of course members of the Guantanamo radio station. There are so many others whose names I can't recall now, but who will miss Eugene dearly. Even in his passing, Eugene has made some good friends. Eugene made friends very easily. Some of my students who stayed up with me late in the night for three days putting together a short documentary of photos and video I have taken of Eugene since 2001 were so moved by the experience that one of them said "I love Eugene, he's the man!"

The excitement of my students reminds me of what Eugene's wife Angela told me about him when they were in Grenada and met with Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, I think in 1980 or so. While in Grenada Eugene had wanted to meet with the Cubans and finally got the chance. Angela said that Eugene was so excited that he stayed up talking with them all-night. She said that was it for him – and it was Cuba every since. Make no mistake, he loved his native home Curacao, but as his long time childhood friend Rudy Lampe said at Eugene's Funeral, Curacao was too small for Eugene's ideas.

Eugene loved Cuba. He knew that society very well. He carried the banner of the Cuban revolution to his death. Wherever he traveled he would educate people about the proud history of the Cuban people as a sovereign nation. I will never forget during the 2004 National Democratic Convention in Boston when Eugene tried to interview Jesse Jackson about Cuba. The expression on Jesse Jackson's face was priceless as Eugene, with just a cell phone in his hand tried to get Jackson to comment on the U.S. Blockade against Cuba. It was because of Eugene that I visited Cuba to get an understanding for myself. As Eugene took me around to see various places and meet the many people I did, Eugene would say, "Brother Tony you have to understand this reality for yourself, you have to see the good and the bad." Eugene dedicated his life to the Cuban revolution.

In many ways, Eugene reminds me of something Queen Mother Moore said to me: "You have to enjoy struggle, you have to make it fun." Queen Mother Moore is the one who publicly on WILD Radio Station in Boston, 1979 gave me the name Menelik. Queen Mother Moore was a very active and influential force in the Black Liberation Movement in the United States, who passed away at the age of 97 in 1998. Although Eugene had some difficult times in his life, he enjoyed struggle and had fun doing it. Eugene was a multidimensional person. While he was serious and focused on the work at hand, he made sure that it had life, reflective of the joy and not just the agony, the victories and not just the losses and the smiles, not just the tears.

Eugene was not born with such a perspective – it was something that developed over a period of time. I find it interesting that Eugene wanted to be a catholic priest. It seems to me that his spiritual passion for humanity was something that stayed with him in his quest as a developing revolutionary. While Eugene missed many years with his children and wife as a family man, he made extended family where he was. Yet, he was nostalgic about his direct family. From what I observed of him, music helped him cherish, reflect and recapture those special moments.

The process of working with my students and their getting excited about putting together our documentary project was also something I'm sure Eugene is happy about – it engaged my students with informal work they enjoyed and they were able to learn about the struggle for equality, humanity and social justice from their own engagement. It was also a lesson for them on using their talents and skills to promote what Dr. King calls a "people oriented society and not a thing oriented society," an idea Eugene also believed dearly in.

Eugene was constantly growing and changing from his experiences. He was able to absorb so much so rapidly and synthesize, internalize and apply it. He had a brilliant mind, but while he knew about a lot of things, whenever a new perspective was introduced on something, he would say "oh! You made think of something I hadn't thought about, now I have to think about these things and start to apply it." Eugene reminds me of what Mary Catherine Bateson, said in her book *Full Circles, Overlapping lives: Culture and Generations in Transition*: "Learning, I become something new. Now we need a new definition of the self: I am not what I know but what I am willing to learn. Mystery waits in the mirror. Curiosity and learning begin before breakfast. Growing, we move through worlds of difference, the cycles and circles of a life, fulfilled by overlapping with the lives of others."

In the sacred text of Ifa there is a story that also reflects Eugene's life journey. In a story in Odu Ifa: Ofun Meji, chanted by Dr. Wande Abimbola, one of the foremost Ifa scholars and practitioners states:

The person we are looking for

Who sometimes we may meet on the way

Ifa Divination was performed for Orangun of the City

Ifa Divination was also performed for Orangun of the Village.

Tell Alara (King)

I have found good fortune

Tell Ajero (King)

I have found good fortune.

Tell Orangun, King of the city of Ila

That good fortune which has been lost has now arrived.

Just as this Odu speaks of a person living between two Kingdoms looking for someone or something, Eugene's life was also divided between Curacao and Cuba. He was searching for the Ideas that can make a better society to live in. Besides the ideas he found in Cuba, the Caribbean and throughout the world, his family was always his good fortune. Fortunately, in his last years he rediscovered the good fortune in his family and began to say so. While Eugene was materially a poor man, he was substantively very wealthy. His experiences, work and all of us in his life made him a man of good fortune. Therefore, he too is our good fortune we are looking for.

I am fortunate that Eugene and I have met on the way. There are few people in life that you get to share the warmth, love and camaraderie in struggle. Eugene makes me

appreciate more, those that I found on my way - as a young man who was a member of the African People's Party over 30 years ago and met comrades who I love dearly and have been able to stay in touch and work with.

Our Comrade, Brother Eugene is gone. We will miss him dearly. We salute his contribution to the struggle for equality, humanity, and social justice. We will learn from his dedication and experience so that we can continue the struggle for a new society. Until we meet again, A Luta Continua!

Dare to Struggle!

Dare to Win!

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