

CARTON 7:27

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

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My mother took me to live with my grandfather when I was five years old. Grandfather owned a farm of many acres in Marrot, Louisiana. He raised cattle, chickens and hogs. Grandfather was well known, loved and respected by everyone who lived in Marrot, Louisiana. His name was Lee Brown Senior. Everyone called him Uncle Lee Brown. When I was born in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana, May 28, 1921, I had been named after him, Lee Brown.

Grandfather's farm was so huge he had to hire men to help with the work around the farm. Some of the happiest moments that I can remember were when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those rugged dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him. Some Sundays we would go to the church and take food and stay all day talking with the neighbors and exchanging food.

Grandfather was a solid, strong man. He often would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "As far as your eyes can see--one day this land will be yours". I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge.

To me there was no wiser or beloved a man than my grandfather. Grandfather taught me to share with others who were less fortunate. I shared my toys or whatever he gave me with my friends.

We lived among hardworking farmers, who were very poor. Grandfather delivered freight. He met the train for supplies, and then delivered the goods back to different stores.

I sincerely loved my grandfather, and he loved me. Every morning we had our breakfast on a long diningroom table: my grandfather sat at one end and I sat at the other end. Living on the farm, listening to different farm sounds, were my happiest moments.

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My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes. My father was killed when I was very young...On his way to work one morning he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunder storm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

We lived in the countryside where people were very friendly, and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

One morning my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I were really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the farm. My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. She was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She lived on the farm with my grandfather and I. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. Her long black hair hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah was a kind lady.

Grandfather didn't believe in banks. He would let his neighbor (one that he trusted) keep his money in an old sack until he got ready to use it.

One day some neighbor's children and I were playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn

bent over, blood running down his leg. He cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. Hospitals were miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a physician. Things weren't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. Later he married her. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy".

Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after my grandfather died...One night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that were in the room at that time had to pull me away from him. My grandfather was such a kind man. Everyone, Black and white, liked him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellow burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and also carried swords--a symbol of the organization. All the women wore white. I also was dressed in white. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since he had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. She was a cruel woman with little education or knowledge. I never knew anyone could be so cruel and selfish. We never had much contact with each other, either before or after grandfather's death. She was never pleased with me or any-

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thing I tried to do.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man whose name was Buster came to live with us on the farm; he also brought a wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. In addition, since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.

The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. But my grandfather left all his land to me. When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Apalousie, Louisiana to try to get my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that all the land belonged to me, and the land couldn't be sold.

My land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one: by that time I would be old enough to decide (legally) what I wanted to do with the land. When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was so accustomed to eating upon. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised any-

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more over any stupid thing she did. There were times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. She would often beat me for no reason. My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They didn't have anything to do with such a weak woman.

Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. Then Aunt Betsy brought her sister to the farm to live with us. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me: more so than his sister. But my visit was cut short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Marrot, Louisiana about the way they were treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, Black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Burguard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Burguard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

Things began to shape up for me. Finally news reached my cousins who lived in a small countryside of Lamond and Marrot, Louisiana. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out

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Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.

All the children in this small community went to the same school. Most of the children were from the the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these Black families were sharecroppers. Mrs. Ida , our teacher, respectable as she was, taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in Lamond, Louisiana. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. School buses weren't available for Black children. Clearly then, I realized for the first time I was living in an evil Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses were available only for white children. For this reason, I had to learn what was behind these problems that existed for Black people.

I learned how to read remarkably well. Then, reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school were over, I went back to help my cousins. When we weren't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One

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thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fire place. I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

Sometimes when the neighbors were out of food, a lady named Jew Mama, who operated a grocery store in the Black community, would let Black people have credit and tell them to pay whenever they got some money.

The sharecroppers were very poor. But I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Bay gave me pork and beans and a cinnamon roll to eat every day for lunch. I noticed one day when I was walking down the street that some people were coming out of a building carrying bags of food. I asked the people if I could get some of that food. They told me to go on in and ask for some. When I got inside the building and asked for the food, a lady, who was sitting behind a desk, told me to sign some papers. When I signed the papers, I got the food. I was so glad to get this food I couldn't wait to get home to show Aunt T-Bay and Uncle Tot what I had. When Uncle Tot saw the food, he got very angry at me. Apparently the building I went into to get the food from was the Welfare Office. Uncle Tot explained to me I shouldn't go to the Welfare Office to get food because that food was for people who were out of work and didn't have any other means of support. Even though I didn't quite understand what he was talking about, I didn't go there ever again. Nevertheless, I had been given some cornmeal, flour, plums and grapefruits.

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One evening passing the dock I noticed some men were giving away bananas. They gave me some, so I took them. I didn't know what reaction Uncle would have. But he didn't say anything to me about that. I just wanted something different to eat for a change.

One night Uncle Tot and Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a white man put his hand on Aunt Bernice's breast. As soon as this was done, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang throughout the bar. The white man was shot; and, before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man.

From then on, white men rode horses all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. At night the neighbors gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. Uncle Tot had hidden out in a church for two weeks; later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Bay moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen, Louisiana. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time, when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Bay and she gave me a good spanking.

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Aunt T-Bay decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized, in the local Baptist church, one Sunday morning with three more children. I won't forget how the preacher gave a long sermon over us, as if he were at a funeral. After the baptism the three other children and I changed our clothes in one of the member's houses. From then on I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.

At about the age of 10, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but quite large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Dad Howard, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Howard had a large family. Everyone had to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me as one of the family. The field hands' days-off were on Saturdays.

One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents. I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melvin, Louisiana. I went looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reeve. When I caught the freight train to Melvin, other hobos were in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to jump off.

Off The Plantation

My salary was two dollars a week, plus meals. When time came for me to eat, they brought my food out to the yard. This went on until Mrs. LaBlonche's daughter, who came from New York, explained to her mother that she didn't like the idea of serving me food in the backyard. Having spent time in the North and overcome most of her prejudices, she wanted it stopped and wanted me to eat at the table with the other children. Mrs. LaBlonche's daughter further explained that she didn't believe in discriminating against any race of people. Afterward, I was treated better than before around the house. I continued selling my vegetables.

I got acquainted with the Black maid who worked upstairs. She was forty years old. She was a very nice lady. She fixed my breakfast every morning.

I worked for the LaBlonches for two years. One Sunday morning when everyone was attending church, I packed my suitcase and left to look for some work which paid more. I went back to cousin Esther's house to live. Things began to get unpleasant around the house. It seemed to me that cousin Esther's daughter was disturbed. Often we got into arguments. She slapped me in the face one day. I told cousin Jessie about how she was acting around the house when everyone was out. He didn't like it, and told her never to slap me again. I didn't want to make matters worse, so I left Melvin, Louisiana and went back to Dad Howard's plantation and stayed one week.

I went to a little farm to visit some friends of mine. When I arrived there, they were out in the fields planting potatoes. I stayed and helped them plant potatoes for about a week. When I finished I told them I would be back one day to help eat them, but the last

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Every time both the Black families went to Los Angeles, they would come back and tell me how large and crowded the city was. One time they brought me a newspaper back from Los Angeles. I didn't ask the families too many questions about Los Angeles, because I didn't want them to know I would be traveling to Los Angeles one day. I only said the city sounded like a good place to live.

A Mexican fellow who was working on the section hand brought his family with him. We talked together all the time about Mexico. He said he took his family every place he went to work, because he didn't have a house where they could stay and he didn't know how long any of his jobs would last.

As time passed, Los Angeles kept coming, more and more, to mind. I hadn't ever been in California before; so, after careful consideration, I decided to travel to Los Angeles. After working on this job for three months, I left one morning after being paid. I arrived in Los Angeles, California at four o'clock that evening. When the train pulled into the station, I was astonished to see how large and beautiful the station looked. I wandered in the station for a while, then I saw a Black man standing in the station. I went and asked him if he could tell me where the Black people's section of town was. The man said: " Central Avenue" and " Catch the Central streetcar when you see a crowd of Black people----that is Central Avenue! "

In all the excitement in this crowded city, I caught another streetcar but transferred to the Central car. I stayed on the streetcar until I came to a crowd of Black people who were standing on the corner. I got off the streetcar at Twelfth and Central Avenue.

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The next morning Sydney and I had a great laugh about the whole thing and remained good friends.

I went to the R-K Studio in Hollywood on Melrose Avenue and got a combination job: washing dishes and busboy. I was working on this job for three months before I was told it was a union job. The employer came and told me: " This is a union job," and brought a white union man to replace me. If I had been told before this happened, I would have joined the union. Well, after all, it became clear to me that it wasn't just a union job---it was another one of those prejudiced jobs!

In less than a week I was working for Hills Bros.' Chemical Company on a stock time machine. During this year, 1942, I joined the Youth NAACP and also got the President and Superintendent of Hills Bros.' Chemical Company to join. I met a lady named Miss Bass who was the Editor of the California Eagle Newspaper and also a member of the NAACP. Sometimes we went to the Lincoln Theater to see stage shows and motion pictures.

One night we met at the YMCA with other actors and actresses to discuss getting better acting parts for Black people in movies. Some Black actors and actresses came that night and told the NAACP that they wouldn't play any more Uncle Tom parts in the movies. Lena Horne, Hattie McDaniel couldn't come that night but sent a telegram. The Youth NAACP had two hundred members, beside the actors and actresses. In other words Uncle Tom parts for Black actors and actresses were encouraged by film producers in Hollywood. This was one reason Black

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actors and actresses weren't able to show how truly great or excellent they were in their performances. The great talent they had to offer to the public was denied; Uncle Tom parts were the only kind they could get. This is why the Youth NAACP had to step in to fight for better parts in movies and on stage for Blacks. Man-Tan-Molin, Willie Bess, Darwin Jones, Benny Carter and Peterson were wellknown for playing these Uncle Tom parts in movies.

Man-Tan-Molin, Willie Bess often came to the YWCA and got in an argument, in a friendly way, about whose eyes were the largest, which one could roll their eyes the best, and who ran the fastest in films. Both actors came to the YWCA and talked about parts that were given to them in pictures. Everyone in the YWCA would start laughing at the way they would act.

I got a chance to meet quite a few movie stars, Black and white. Old Man Gray was a member of the Screen Actors' Guild. He was the only Black movie star who had gray hair in Hollywood. This was one reason he got to act in many films.

Nevertheless, Hollywood was exciting, fascinating: more so to me, because I was acquainted with some of the stars, and I actually took parts in several mob scenes in pictures. Some films called for extras to play in scene parts. When this was available, I usually applied for the parts. Everyday I looked on a board to find out if extras were needed.

Old Man Gray told me where to buy clothes on credit. With new clothing and a few dollars in my pocket, I started acting the part of a movie star. I wore only pointed-toe shoes, triple A's. I would

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often be seen at the Dunbar Hotel, drinking only Tom Collins. My hair stayed gassed back; I only let women barbers fix my hair.

The movie stars gave me a name Cocemo, because of the jungle scenes I was often seen in. But this later became a problem, as one night I took my girlfriend to the theater to see some scenes I was acting in. It was an Uncle Tom part; so, my girlfriend got real angry with me because she became embarred by the movie. She told me: " You should be ashamed to play in scenes that are so degrading to Black people, because you fight in the NAAC P for better playing parts for Blacks. When my girlfriend spoke those words, I really felt ashamed and discouraged with myself. I stopped right then and didn't try to get any more parts. However, the director said I could act in a good religious scene, but I made no attempt to get the part.

For those interested, here are the names of two pictures in which I acted in a mob scene: " I Walk With A Zombie", "My Heart Is In Dixie" starring Darvin Jones, and others.

One Saturday night I went to a theater and got a chance to see the heavyweight champion of the world, Joe Louis. He came into the theater with some friends of his. Joe Louis was dressed in his army uniform. I didn't get a chance to meet him, but I was glad to see him. I was sitting five seats from him in the same row. The movie that was playing was "One Dark Night ". Also present were Man-Tan-Molin the comédian and Pig Meat Market and a few more actors.

One night I went to a rally at the Shrine Temple in Los Angeles. Several movie stars I was acquainted with were present: Lena Horne, Edward G. Robertson, Pig Meat Market, Monty Holly and many more. Paul Robeson was the guest speaker. This was my first time hearing this proud, brilliant man--foremost in the struggle for peoples' rights--speak. Paul Robeson spoke on freedom for our Black people here in

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North America. Paul said: " Black actors and actresses should quit playing Uncle Tom parts in movies. All Black people should fight for better schools, better education, and for upgrading of all jobs."

Paul Robeson spoke on many subjects that Black people were facing. After the rally, a donation was collected; I gave my last five dollars. Paul Robeson's speech kept my heart and soul together. To keep on dedicating my life to this hard long struggle for my people. Later, I had the opportunity to see Paul Robeson in a performance on stage, in a play named Shakespeare's "Othello". This impressive actor and songster was superb!

In Los Angeles on 12th and Central Avenue, I met the creator of the familiar Johnson, "Old Man Johnson". He talked about the conditions Black people were facing...Just about all the familiar Black people I met were speaking about the hard struggle Black people were fighting against here in North America.

So, I started buying books of all kinds. I studied these books and started educating myself on different subjects, important persons, places and things. Then one day I met a school teacher who saw how interested I was in learning. She started coming to my room every night and taught me for six months. Her husband was a detective. He worked in a post office. One thing about this man--he didn't mind his wife coming to teach me classes.

During World War II, about 1942, there was alot of racial tension against both Blacks and Mexicans in Los Angeles. One time a riot started in Los Angeles between white sailors and Mexicans, which was announced over the radio. During that time men's fashion suits were called Zoot suits. A white sailor claimed that a Mexican man wearing a Zoot suit had raped his wife. Then the white sailors started fight-

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ing every Mexican they came across. The Mexicans started organizing and started fighting back...Then the police started helping the white sailors fight the Mexicans. The white sailors made a statement they were going to come down to Central Avenue and kill all the 'niggers', and cut all the Zoot suits off them.

Then the Black Zoot suits started helping the Mexicans fight. The Black leaders called on the Mexican Government to use its influence to stop the riot. If the riot didn't stop, they would open fire. No one got killed during the riot. I personally believed this was a lie and everyone said it was (i.e., about the Mexican raping the white woman). In the first place it was started to stir up hate and so the police could attack the Mexicans and the Blacks. I was in the riot: running down the streets with the Black and Mexican Zoot suits. The riot lasted four or five days.

I met a girl on my way to work. She was standing at a bus stop waiting to catch a bus. I introduced myself. She told me her name was Alice and she was married, but her husband was in the service. We talked awhile and she agreed to be my girlfriend, until her husband returned home from the service. I accepted her agreement with open arms. I worked eight hours a day: I needed a woman's companionship. It makes life worth living, I thought to myself, as we were getting more acquainted. Alice was living with an older man. Later, she wanted to live with me. If it was possible, I would have let her move in, but my room was too small for both of us to live in. I looked every evening for a room for Alice. Finally I found a room a half block from where I was living. I moved her into the room with the help of a friend.

Alice had a sister. She was fourteen years old. We got along

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fine, until Alice started bringing her along on our dates. It was all right sometimes, but she wanted to come all the time. We often had words about this until Alice stopped bringing her along with us. Alice was my sweetheart for almost two years. One night after eating dinner, she told me her husband was coming back and she couldn't see me anymore. We were on the same bus together; Alice spoke to me and went on her way. I often wondered whether Alice's husband really came back from the service or whether she told me he did just to break us up. I also would have liked to have known what happened to her sister. Well, I never did bother to find out. Just let everything between us stop.

One morning I went to the bus stop to catch the bus for work. A crowd of people were standing on the streets flagging rides trying to get to work. It was a bus strike. I had no idea how to get to work. I had only learned one way to work. I called the boss on the phone, and I told him there was a bus strike, and could he get me a ride to work...My employer said he understood the matter and gave me the direction to the red car, which was running a distance from the hotel where I lived. I walked seven blocks and caught the red car and arrived at work two hours late. The other employees came to work in cars; some walked. The Hollywood Boulevard Car was on strike for one week.

I hadn't made too many friends to visit on my daysoff. My daysoff were every Friday and Saturday. Alice wasn't around anymore. It became very lonely in Los Angeles. Theaters would stay open all night. I met lots of women who came and sat beside me in the theaters, but not one wanted to be my steady companion. Anyway my going to the theater did pass the time away on my daysoff. Plenty of people came to the theaters with blankets and stayed all day and night. This was

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how crowded Los Angeles was in those days.

I was standing on the sidewalk in front of a bar one evening when a man came out intoxicated. He wanted to fight whoever came close to him. After pulling his shirt off, this drew attention to a crowd of people who were passing by. Suddenly a police patrol car roared up and stopped. The policemen jumped out of the car and grasped both arms of the man. After putting handcuffs on the man, the police ruffed him up. His shirt was off---the police wouldn't let him put his shirt back on. Naturally, with compassion, I went and asked the police to let him put his shirt back on. To my surprise I was arrested, put in a patrol car and taken off to jail: charged with 'interfering with police officers'. I was taken to Newton Station. After interrogation, I was put in this huge jail in Lincoln Heights. The officer led me to a cell and closed the door. I sat on a cot uncertain what would happen in court the next day. I thought to myself: this is my first time being in jail or in any trouble with the law and I shouldn't have been put in jail this time. I didn't make a phone call that day, because I didn't know anyone to call.

Monday morning a jail officer brought me into the court room. I sat restless, waiting for my name to be called to appear before the judge. Finally one hour later, I stood before the judge with no attorney to defend my case, except myself. The two officers who did the arresting didn't appear in court. However, the judge carried on with the case. I explained to the judge that this was my first time in trouble with the law and the way those policemen were treating that man, it was plain police brutality, happening on the streets. I asked the judge for a suspended sentence. Since the judge didn't have much of a case, with no officers appearing in court to testify against me, the

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judge then gave me six months' suspended sentence with a lecture about how this interfering could have incited a riot the same way it did in Detroit City. The judge said: " If you ever see police brutality like you saw on the street again, report it to the district attorney or a judge." When the judge got through talking, I started back toward the cell, but the judge called out: " The case is closed. You can leave."

When I was leaving the courthouse, a Black detective driving down Central Avenue offered me a ride. I accepted the ride. When we were in his car, he began talking about the conditions and problems facing Black people, here in North America. Black people's need to start joining the struggle for better houses, better schools and to struggle around issues concerning police brutality. He continued: " Black people should get a better education in every possible way that is available...on jobs, fight to get upgraded in every field...The most important of all---stop fighting and hating each other. All of these things the Black people must do. Not just for yourself, but for your children's children and for generations to come."

When the Black detective reached the hotel where I lived, he stopped the car in front of the hotel. I got out of his car and thanked him for the lift. Our conversation was very interesting. This is when I really started thinking about these poor conditions under which Black people are forced to live in North America.

Unfortunately, I wasn't in any permanent position at that time to start helping my people in this long hard struggle: fighting for the rights of the poor Black people. And I hadn't met anyone else to discuss my viewpoint with. The conversation I had with the Black detective did bring to mind about my grandfather who died, because hospitals for Black people weren't close. And many more Black people

New Orleans

In New Orleans, Louisiana, about the year 1948, there was 'The case of the 64'. Let me first give some historical background and then tell 'the story of the 64'.

The Progress Party was nationally known for running Henry A. Wallace for president of the United States in 1948. Members of the Progress Labor Party were very active in the struggle for the working-class and poor people.

I was a member of Local 207 , Warehouse and Distribution Workers' Union, affiliated with International Longshoremens' and Warehousemens' Union-CIO. Our union organized a Labor Committee for Henry A. Wallace for President. In fact, I was on this Labor Committee.

We went in rural areas teaching people how to register, so they could vote for Henry A. Wallace for president. We also explained to people why we thought he would be the right man for president. One thing, for sure, we explained that he was for small farmers and sharecroppers and the working people as a whole. He was for labor and supported organized labor: that was why we thought it was very important to become registered voters, particularly all the poor people. Registering voters would become one of the main weapons to achieve some of the things we wanted and needed to improve our living condition.

With deep concern for my poor Black people, I told them to tell all their neighbors and friends, whatever they do, ---try and get out to register, so they can vote! (not only in theyear 1948, but in future years to come.

It is known through experience that voting power is poor peoples' power. In my opinion, poor people should be educated politically and become Trade-Union-conscious, from the grassroot level. We as Trade-

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to be down to earth.

During the time Paul Robeson was in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Unions took every means of precaution for his safety. I was Paul Robeson's bodyguard every place he went in New Orleans. The restaurant he ate in was located on Orleans and Gavelson Streets. When Paul Robeson went to eat in a restaurant, sometimes I would stand up over him, sometimes I would sit down. I would check all public restrooms to see if they were secure.

One day we had a meeting in the community with the editors of the Louisiana Weekly Newspaper and other intellectual and professional Black people. Paul Robeson came to our Union meeting and made a talk to members of our local. He also sang at the Coliseum before leaving New Orleans, Louisiana. Everyone was so glad to see him. When he left, Black and white people shook his hand and told him: "You are welcome in New Orleans whenever you come back!"

I personally talked with Paul Robeson about issues facing Black workers and their problems as a whole here in America. I asked him: "Would socialism help some of the workers' problems?" Paul Robeson said: "Socialism would solve the workers' problems as a whole here in America. In order to fight racism, we have to fight imperialism, capitalism." Paul Robeson had progressive ideals for the advance of the working class.

Millions of Black people in the Southern States weren't registered to vote. Some white people didn't want Black people to vote. So it was hard to get them to register. Our union went to the country to teach Black farmhands politics and how important casting votes was.

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I had a feeling of joy, being able to help win those strikes, meeting new friends, and talking among all the workers. This gave me courage to fight more in my local and in the community for things the workers wanted and needed for survival. I continued working among workers in other places in the Deep South.

One evening I was sitting alone in the Elite restaurant located on Rampo Street in New Orleans. The Elite restaurant is where I usually enjoy eating. I sat down and ordered fried chicken and Miller's High Light beer. Suddenly a man came over to the table and asked me: "Is anyone sitting at the table with you?" I told him: "No, you are welcome to sit down." When the man sat down, I noticed he had a sad, worried look in his eyes. We started to talk on different subjects. He told me his name was Brown, that he had been working in Empire, Louisiana on a fishing boat, but had quit his job and come to New Orleans looking for a better job.

Then Brown began telling me this story: "All Black men worked on the boat. These Black men went out to sea to catch big fish to bring back to make fertilizer. Men would stay five to six months at a time on the water. Conditions on the boat were so bad that men had to sleep on bunks stuffed with hay. Food wasn't worth eating. Working conditions were bad. If the men caught a large sum of fish at ten cents a 1,000, the men had to pay for room and board on payday, when they came back to Empire, Louisiana."

After a short pause, he continued with his story: "Payday for the men was only when they got a good catch. This was the time the men were given money. When this captain of the boat paid off the men,

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Nelson got a phonecall from the Union Representatives. They said for him to start the ball rolling. Our Union Local 207 were sent pledge cards.

Brother Nelson, four Union Representatives and myself went to Empire. When we arrived, some fishermen were fishing, some were still on shore. One fisherman was put in charge to be responsible for pledge cards getting to the other fishermen who were out fishing. The fishermen on shore signed pledge cards. Shortly, this news spread like wildfire throughout several other Southern States, where fishmeal for fertilizer was being made.

After all pledge cards were signed, throughout several Southern States, all fishermen were organized. Later, we sent in Union Representatives to help draft a working agreement. This agreement was sent to all companies. Of course, the companies refused to talk with the Negotiation Committee in all locations. Unions had to call strikes. Then all Unions started calling other Unions for support. People started sending in money, food, clothing. All communities from different areas gave support.

Companies tried to break the strikes by using strikebreakers; evenso, that didn't work. Every trick was tried but nothing was able to break the strikes.

Finally after nine months, workers won the strikes in several locations in the State of Louisiana. Reporters printed these strikes in pamphlets, which one Union published. The pamphlet was named: "The Black Fishermen In The South Are Organized".

Organizing workers was another one of my ideals that started with overwhelming support. Therefore, our Union president and I, vice-president of Local 207 continued our struggles.

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When the ship crew came onto the ship, they voted not to stay on a ship loaded with scab meat. The crew threatened to walk off the ship. Then the captain of this ship had to call Armour Packing Company to get the meat off the ship and put the meat back on the dock. By the way, the name of the ship was "Looking Back".

Restaurants and people shopping at stores stopped buying Armour products. The public gave overwhelming support, particularly in the Black communities. Black churches supported our Union in their communities. In fact the people knew we were fighting for the interest of all workers in the communities. This was one reason Brother Nelson and I were being attacked by the reactionary forces. Brother Nelson and I dedicated ourselves to the Union struggle in the interest of the workers as a whole and believed a labor movement must be built in the South. If it took our lives, this was understood and we knew what we were up against.

Finally, after forty-five days of constant picketing, Armour Packing Company called our Negotiating Committee back in to start negotiating again on our contract. But we still maintained our picket lines around the building. None of our members on the picket lines ever weakened. The longer they picketed, the stronger and more militant they became to achieve the important things we wanted. Our Negotiating Committee didn't get everything we wanted; but, some agreements we obtained were in the good and welfare of our rank-and-file members. A special meeting was called with brothers and sisters who were working at Armour Packing Company. Our negotiating committee brought the contract to the membership to accept or reject. A majority of members voted in favor of the contract. Our negotiators were

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The Southern Conference Education Fund was in New Orleans, Louisiana for a three day conference. I met Walter White and his wife, Mary White. Walter White was Executive Secretary of the National Association For The Advancement Of Colored People. Walter White was the guest speaker that night; we sat together during the meeting. Afterward, we discussed the meeting. The next night I met Henry A. Wallace, Vice-President of the United States of America during President Roosevelt's Administration. Henry A. Wallace was the guest speaker. Later, we shook hands and talked. The third night, Mrs. Mary Cloud McThume was guest speaker. We talked about problems that face Black people in the nation. I talked from a Trade Union standpoint: what a great role labor could play in solving problems facing the workingclass in the world. We had to cut our conversation short, because she had to catch a plane and her stay was lengthy.

I was very impressed with Mrs. Mary Cloud McThume. When she was ready to leave, I kissed her as if I had known her all my life. Naturally, no one could help but love her. She was a very pretty person in action and ways. That was the last time I saw the late Mary Cloud McThume.

The Southern Conference Education Fund played an important role in helping workers throughout the South.

New Orleans

In the year 1956, I was working with three hundred or more Black and white workers on Galvez Street Wharf at the Waterway Terminal Corporation.

The question of pallet boards entered into the picture. The company was violating our working agreement. Our working agreement called for 2,000 lbs., which means one pallet board, for the safety of the employees. The company wanted to hook up two pallet boards to swing with the crane over the men's heads. This would mean 4,000 lbs., which was extremely dangerous for the workers.

Our union shop steward on the dock immediately took up this agreement with the foreman and superintendent of the docks. That was step one, following our agreement procedure. We couldn't reach an agreement with the foreman and supervisor. So, we had to take step two. During that time I was dock steward and vice-president of Local 207.

Step two meant calling in the president of the Local and getting the General Manager of the Waterway Terminals. A meeting was set. We discussed these issues, as we had done in the past, which lasted three days. But, even then we couldn't reach an agreement; after this unsuccessful discussion, we came out of the meeting. The following day, we called a meeting with the workers on the docks concerning this matter.

Although the pallet board was loaded up in St. Louis on the barges by other union members, those in St. Louis were in a different union and a different local. In the meantime, our local union members and officials discussed it among ourselves to see what action should be taken.

The union members made a recommendation that I should go to

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2.

The respondent is a labor organization within the meaning of Section 25 and 8(B) of the Act.

3.

The individuals listed below are officers of Local 207-I.L.W.U. within the meaning of Section 213 and 8(B) of the Act.

Andrew Nelson, President
Lee Brown, 1st Vice-President and Committeeman
Peter A. Sheppard, Jr., 2nd Vice-Pres. & Committeeman
Earl Tomas, Committeeman and/or Dock Steward

4.

The respondent union did not through its officers and agents demand the respondent employer to refrain from hiring for working the employee named below. The Shop Committee only brought to the attention of the respondent employer's representative that they should live up to the seniority provisions of the agreement and to my knowledge there was no threat of work stoppage, slow-down or strike action against the respondent employer's employee, the eleven individuals listed below were hired for work at the Terminal, persons in question: (Names withheld)

5.

The statement that the union engaged in the acts described in paragraph 4 above, because of its knowledge and belief of the employees named, refused to engage in a work stoppage and strike against the respondent employer while employed at its Harahan Warehouse in November of 1955 in support of a strike by the respondent union against the respondent employees is untrue, as the efforts of the union were to see to it that the seniority provisions of the contract be lived up to.

6.

The union did not make demands or threats as described in paragraph 4 and 5 or the respondent employer's general foreman, Lawrence Blanchard, and clerk, Joseph Rocco, according to my knowledge.

7.

The respondent employer, to my knowledge, did not receive demands from the union to not employ at the Galvez Street Wharf operation, because of demands of respondent union, because any demand from respondent union to discontinue employment of any employee according to the contract is made in writing.

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8.

The respondent union by its officers and agents did not threaten employees of the respondent employer with loss of employment, discriminatory conditions of work, or other reprisal because they refrained from engaging in work stoppage, strike or other activities in behalf of the respondent union.

9.

The union takes exception to paragraph 9 because of the fact that requesting the employer to live up to the terms of the agreement with reference to seniority cannot be termed "unfair labor practice", unless within the meaning of (') B and 1 (a), and Sections (2) (6) (7) of the act seniority is an unlawful labor contract.

Clearly, those workers weren't working at the dock. They were outside gangs who wanted seniority both outside and inside the dock at Galvez Street Wharf. They wanted to work ahead of men who were regular workers at the wharf. With that method men with less seniority would be laid off.

Even so, the union lost the battle. The National Labor Relations Board, the companies, and the government agents wanted the workers fighting against each other. So, the decision was ruled in favor of nine men.

Certainly, the union representative wasn't going to take this decision lying down. Struggling to keep the union in the South active, our lives were in danger at all times. To let nine men split the union, the president of the union refused to settle the case by a decision of the Local Executive Board. This case went on and on as it should have.

Meanwhile those two anti-union workers, one Black man and one white man, refused to join the union.

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We had a union agreement, a contract. The president of the union and I got together and asked the National Labor Relations Board for an election, so we could have a union shop. The union shop was grand; and, the National Labor Board set a date for the election and came down to the dock and handled the election for the union.

Members voted by secret ballot, except the two anti-union workers. The men refused to work with the two. Still, the company didn't want to get rid of the two men. Two hundred men voted by secret ballot on the dock in favor of the union shop, excepting five men.

The National Labor Relations Board gave the union permission to place a bulletin board informing the men that they had thirty days to become union members. The non-union members joined except the two. Even the supervisors asked the two men to join the union. They still refused. According to the union agreement, the company was forced to knock the two anti-union workers off the job. The rank and file finally won this struggle against the company; another victory for the union!

Unquestionably, not only was Brother Andrew Nelson President of my Union Local 207, he was also a very good friend, including his family. Susie, his wife, and five children treated me as one of the family. Every Sunday I went to his home and had dinner. He was a good cook and would prepare different salads for me to eat. I ate dinner with him and his children. Susie never had time to sit down and eat with us, but she would always be present and willing to help. After dinner, over a fifth of whisky, we discussed politics and important issues that confronted Black people here in America and abroad.

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Brother Andrew Nelson had wisdom and knowledge and a reputation for being fair-minded to both Black and white workers. Brother Nelson often said, " We are the most oppressed people than any other people in the world, not because of any sin we have committed, but because of monopoly capitalism."

I sincerely trusted and had confidence in his ability to work in the good and welfare of his fellow workers at all times when it should be done. I learned a great deal about labor from him; he taught me like a teacher, teaching his pupil!

I was with President Andrew Nelson during the time of his trial in New Orleans, Louisiana in the year 1956.

President Andrew Nelson was indicted under the Taft-Hartley law which is the National Labor Relations Act. The Federal Grand Jury indicted Brother Andrew Nelson and charged him with conspiracy. The Federal Grand Jury claimed he was a member of the Communist Party; he was charged on two counts: membership and affiliation, and he was brought to trial the same year. His bail was \$10,000. Members of Local 207 and friends of different unions helped put up his bail money. Brother Andrew Nelson pleaded not guilty as charged. During the trial he was released on bail to face trial.

Brother Andrew Nelson got a union lawyer to represent him in the Federal Court. I was with him every day of his trial.

Brother Andrew Nelson suffered with asthma, and during his trial he had a serious attack. The lawyer asked the judge to give permission, so he could go to see a doctor for medicine and treatment. This judge was, in my opinion, anti-union, anti-communist, and anti-Black; so, he refused.

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Meanwhile, in court I sat close by and watched him suffer and it hurt me to my heart that I wasn't able to do anything to ease his pain. Sometimes I had to take him outside in the hall because he was gasping for air. I laid him on a long bench in the hallway of the court until he felt a little better. I was Brother Nelson's security, seeing him back and forth to court and to his home. During the trial seeing my president, a good friend, being mistreated brought uncontrollable tears to my eyes and they ran down my cheeks.

Then, all of a sudden, I got angry with this whole evil capitalist system that preys on the Black and poor people as a whole. I had seen Jim Crowism, segregation, and discrimination in action as well as hate. Then and there I made a pledge to myself that I would carry on, if President Nelson was defeated in this long and hard struggle and I would become a dedicated trade unionist by further sacrifice and putting my life on the line. During this trial I was being educated. I took a solemn oath: it was my responsibility and duty to help educate the workers in the Trade Union and Labor Movement for complete freedom and a better way of life.

The majority of Local 207 members supported our president around his defense fund. We weren't given too much time to set up a defense fund, because the court speeded up his trial, which lasted about five days. Numbers of unions and friends came to his defense, including the International.

The trial continued until it went to the jurors. Brother Nelson had a good defense attorney, in my opinion, one of the best in the South.

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During the trial numbers of people came and testified for the State; but, the key witness for the State was a Black man, named Arthur Eugene.

Of course, Brother Andrew Nelson continued struggling to survive to tell his side of the story, clinging to life and becoming weaker and weaker with each passing day. He was an extraordinary man, with so much confidence in people. This was another reason I loved and respected him. Finally the case came to an end. The jury went into the jury room, stayed about 45 minutes, then returned with a guilty verdict on all counts. He was still released on bail but had to appear in court two weeks later for sentencing. When he came back for sentencing, he was given ten years running current current, but had to serve five years in the Federal Penitentiary.

Due to his illness, before the time to start serving his time, he was rushed to the hospital in a grave condition. Brother Peter Sheppard, second vice-president, and I vice-president of Local 207, kept close contact with Brother Andrew Nelson's doctors so we could be well-informed about our president's condition.

In the meantime, I went before the Executive Board of our union and asked if his salary could be made continuous, so his family could have money to survive and pay the notes on his home. The Executive Board approved continuing his salary. Brother Nelson's daughter, Elaine, came every Friday and picked up his check.

Therefore, due to my problems, Brother Peter Sheppard stepped up and took over as first vice-president and I became second vice-president of Local 207. With this method we kept the union functioning.

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Brother Andrew Nelson lived about six months after his trial. He came home from the hospital, but he had to go back. Soon he died one Saturday about eight o'clock.

After I got over the shock, I started calling up our key members of the union and rank and file members, also many of his friends, and told them Brother Andrew Nelson had passed on. Everyone I contacted was very sad and shocked to hear of his death...knowing so well how he fought for the rights of his people.

Brother Andrew Nelson was a true Marxist and Communist, informed and dedicated to change this system and transform it to socialism. At Brother Nelson's wake the Packing House Union, lots of friends and workers all came to show their last respect, each and every one of whom were dedicated to the cause, both Black and white, throughout the city of New Orleans, including the Secretary Treasurer and friends. Brother Andrew Nelson's denomination was Methodist. Other different union members were present at his funeral. Brother Andrew Nelson was buried with honor and dignity. Moreover, I spoke the last words over his body; that's the way he would have wanted it to be. "Brother Nelson was a citizen, fighter, husband, and teacher. He fought with his life in his hands."

Finally, his body was laid to rest in a gravesite outside of New Orleans. In addition to all his friends who came for the services, many telegrams were sent from as far as New York, Chicago and San Francisco, California. All the telegrams were given to me to deliver to his wife, Susie.

After the funeral, Susie asked if I would spend the night with her and the children; I agreed. They didn't want to be left alone

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that night.

The next morning the Secretary Treasurer, Miss Sims, came over to the house and also Brother Chester Langer, who was Brother Andrew's Worship Master from his Lodge. We gathered around the family and discussed their economic situation with them and how to work it out for the best. We stayed with our late president's family all the way.

Now I will close on the activities of the late Brother Andrew Nelson. He will live forever in my mind and in my heart as a true brother in the struggle.

New Orleans

Consequently, the authorities didn't reconsider the facts. Brother Nelson withdrew his membership from the Communist Party. So did I and hundreds more who had joined the Party; all this was occasioned by the Taft-Hartley Law. Still, they convicted him on charges which weren't true. The main purpose and driving force of the reactionaries was that they wanted him completely terminated and they wanted to destroy the unions.