



Our Hero

by Harris Levon McRae

"Everybody's searching for a hero; people need someone to look up to; I never found anyone to fulfill my needs; a lonely place to be so I learned to depend on me." As George Benson sang those lyrics I quietly uttered "I heard that," to myself. Then I stopped to think about the word "hero" and the stuff heroes are made of, and it is no wonder they are so hard to find.

A hero is a man of distinguished valor and enterprise in danger, a central person in any remarkable action or event taking on tremendous odds. Some folks picture John Wayne with blazing six guns winning the girl and riding off into the sunset or super cops like "Dirty Harry" as hero material. To me the prototype of heroes is the man who fought for truth, justice and the American way—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The main thing that I admired about Dr. King is that, although deeply committed to the struggle of Black Americans against discrimination and racial prejudice, he had a love and concern for all kinds of people. He drew no distinction between the Blacks and the whites, the haves and have-nots.

At the root of his civil rights fight was a tremendous faith in the basic goodness of man and the great potential of American democracy. He felt that the Black man needed the white man to free him from his fears and that the white man needed the Black man to free him from his guilt. Dr. King said, "A doctrine of Black supremacy is as evil as a doctrine of white supremacy."

Another thing that I greatly admired about Martin Luther King Jr. was the fact that though very eloquent, he never relied solely on words. He was a man of action. He once said, "For years now I have heard the word 'wait.' It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. The 'wait' has almost always meant 'never.' It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for the moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration.

"We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights."

Dr. King was thrust into leadership at a crucial moment in the his-

tory of the United States. In September, 1954, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King took up residence in Montgomery, Alabama, where the young Dr. King assumed the pastorate of the Dexter Avenue Baptist church.

About a year later in December of 1955, a tired Black woman, Rosa Parks, refused to get out of her seat when the bus driver asked her to move to the back of the bus. She was arrested and jailed by the police.

Montgomery Blacks numbering in the thousands refused to ride on the Jim Crow buses. Under the leadership of Dr. King, as head of the Montgomery Improvement Association, they staged a bus boycott which lasted more than a year, resulting in victory when the Supreme Court ruled that the kind of racial discrimination practiced on the buses was illegal.

Young Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was world famous.

For a decade Martin Luther King Jr. was a hero in every sense of the word. Among his many accomplishments was his designation by *Time* magazine as "Man of the Year" for 1963 and being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964—the youngest person ever to receive the award.

I was a twelve-year-old boy standing in my mother's kitchen when I heard of Dr. King's assassination on April 4th, 1968. I felt an overwhelming feeling of great loss.

The crime dominated the media, specials on T.V., his speeches on many of the radio stations, front-page stories several days in a row in the newspapers. Detail after detail.

He was ambushed—shot with a high-powered rifle as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. He was in the midst of plans for a "Poor Peoples March On Washington."

So there I was, robbed of a hero, but by no means could anyone steal his memory. I will always remember his love for all humanity, and his courageous assaults on racial prejudice. I will always remember his determination to succeed—whatever the cost.

The next time you think of heroes and sunsets remember these words of Dr. James Bevel: "Dr. King walked with God. He was tired. God took him, and they walked off into the Western sunset."

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