

# Nathan Proby: Serious As A Heart Attack

BY JAMES L. POSEY

Nathan Proby's death was much more than the passing of a rowdy community activist. His life and death tells the story of a typical Black man in crisis in a lifespan over the last several decades. Nathan Proby, unlike a lot of us, was unusual in that to the day he died, was determined to make things better for Black folks. His life and death, in general, mirrors the pain, frustration, agony, anger and yes, heartbreak most Blacks feel after a life of struggling to throw off the yoke of racism still cinched tightly around our necks.

Nate, as most of called him, was one of the first to challenge the system in the 60's, organizing Blacks to stand up against overt and covert racism in the Department of Transportation and other government agencies. He led boycotts and demonstrations; he picketed and sought court orders to bring about change in a system that was defiant in its efforts to exclude Blacks and other minorities. One would think that over the years, this dismal picture would have gotten better, and we wouldn't have to struggle so hard. The sad truth is, it has gotten worse. The opposition has gotten far more sophisticated, devising strategies like pitting women against minorities by ensuring that white women get most of the contracts; this and compromising other Blacks to either placate progress or sabotage programs altogether, promising to do much but actually delivering little, and on and on and on. It's just damn discouraging, enough to break the strongest of hearts.

The point is Black people like Nate Proby have fought the good fight at

great sacrifice to themselves. Just like Nate, others before him, and I'm sure others that follow, will jeopardize their health, family, finances, reputations and lots more if they insist on doing more than just talking about racial justice. This will be especially true if their push is for outright economic access and equality. The perpetual assaults come both from the private and public sector, taking a tremendous psychological and physiological toll.

The accumulative stress of all this is just as devastating as a highway collision between a Mack truck and a Volkswagen bug. Blacks daily succumb to the continuous impacts. It seems like the lights never go out at Vancouver Ave. Baptist, Mt Olivet and the rest of the churches, as well as the mortuaries, as they administer to endless funerals. It ain't just gang bangers; there are a fair number of the Nate Proby's of the world being laid to rest. No wonder Black men are dying faster than any segment of the population, and their life span is 10 years shorter than white men.

I'm sure I am not the only one who didn't always agree with Nate Proby's style, his approach and his way of doing things. But we stood together on one thing--the need to push to raise the quality of life for African-Americans through self-reliance, self-help, hard work and by challenging government to do the right thing. Nate was serious and uncompromising in pushing this agenda 100-miles-an hour. The sad irony is that as hard and as long as Nate worked to gain economic prosperity for others, there is little evidence to sug-

gest that he himself prospered from his efforts. In other words, you can add another statistical tidbit to the previous reference--African-Americans over 60 years old are 10 times more likely to die in poverty than whites. One wonders if the figure is more like 20 times more for Black men who have led a life like Nate Proby!

At Nate's funeral, as one saw the sorrow in the faces of his children, another aspect of the story unfolded. It is the story of how Black people are leaving their children only a legacy of poverty. Because of this, Black children are being stopped before they get started. They are less likely to have the opportunity to build on the economic foundation of their parents; and in all probability, they will also not be in the position to leave their children much of an economic base.

What will it take to break this cycle? Will African-Americans ever get the message that no other problem is more important than gaining full economic capacity. By doing so, they establish an economic future not only for themselves but also for their children. Then and only then will Blacks, by virtue of an improved quality of life, begin to live as good as white folks. This means they can afford to go to the doctor, take a vacation, send the kids to college and do the rest of what most Americans take for granted. The question characterizes Nate's life and death. What will it take? It's a serious question, as serious as a heart attack.

James Posey is a local, small business owner with a background in social work and community activism.

## perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

Last week I cited the efforts of community people toward gaining a position on the Portland School Board for a minority person from the northeast sector. There seems to be more structure to the movement this week--and more options offered.

Four of the main options involve "Zone tweaking" as described by the Oregonian newspaper. School Superintendent Jack Bierwirth is quoted in respect to a fifth option, "...provide citizens of color with a greater opportunity to run for board positions" this information was in a letter he sent with maps to interested people. Most people I talk with agree that it is much too early for any critical evaluation of our new school superintendent. Obviously, it will take time to assess his style and his commitment to current (acceptable) interaction with minorities in an urban school setting.

I did have several questions raised concerning a "preselection process" initiated by an "old boys network", as opposed to an "open process" of full community involvement and a review of issues that others might want a candidate to raise. To date we have a "Unity Forum" made up of the Coalition for Black Men, The Urban League of Portland and the Black United Front. Who knows, I might decide to run myself. How about you?

My description of the 1974 effort to mount support for a Law Suit against the Portland School Board certainly provoked some interesting comments. Most agreed with me that had there been this type of determined intervention in a failed educational process early on, we could have been saved all the traumatic consequences that have ensued. They spoke to the losses of our youth, mainly--educational disabilities, limited earnings for the entire life span of many, tragic social consequences that make it impossible to develop stable families, misdirection in terms of career guidance and generally the instability we see in the community today, including crime and gangs. Make no mistake about it, the schools were the focal point at that time for developing today's young generation (still are).

In respect to all of the aforesaid, I would like to pass on the following comments from former representative Barbara

Jordan--from an interview in "N.E.A. Today": Several topics are causing a good deal of discussion among educators. Where do you stand, for example, on proposals that would use public tax dollars for private school tuition?

The public schools are owned by the public, and public tax dollars should be used to support public schools. If we use those tax dollars to also support private schools, we have less money available for the public schools.

As a product of the public schools, I want maximum resources available to the public schools.

What about all-Black-male schools?

If you have the kind of resources in an all-Black-male school that will make a difference, I would not denigrate such schools. The big caveat is that we cannot do this at the expense of others who need special attention.

Do you approve of special programs for the gifted and talented?

I believe we should apply as many resources, as much talent, time, and at-

attention to the gifted and talented as we do to those who are highly at risk. The gifted and talented must be encouraged to perform and made to understand that they have additional responsibility to contribute back to those who have not been as fortunate.

How do you view parental involvement in the schools? It is crucial. It isn't fair to expect teachers to do all of the things we expect teachers to do--care, feed, and nurture the body as well as the mind.

What about giving out condoms at school? I'm for it. I absolutely am. With the AIDS epidemic, condom use is at least one little thing that we can do to try to combat this disease.

Do you favor dress codes? I like the idea of removing some of the competition. Kids want to have the latest Reeboks, the designer jeans, the signature piece on the sweaters. If we could remove the competition of being the best-dressed person ever, that would be a good development.



## ON THE SCHOOL FRONT

### Self-Determination For D.C. Makes Progress

BY BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS

The fact that the District of Columbia remains a political colony is an insult to democracy in the United States. There are many who believe that because Washington, D.C. has a majority African American population of actual voting residents, there is an unstated fear by some in the U.S. Congress concerning any further increase in the political representation and empowerment of people of color in the legislative branch of the Government. In other words there are racial overtones on why the struggle for self-determination and full statehood for the District of Columbia has taken so long toward being fulfilled.

There is, however, some good news about this important issue. In direct response to the leadership of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), House Democrats have voted to give Delegate Norton the right to vote on the House floor beginning in January 1993. House Democrats also voted to give the right to vote on the House floor to representatives of Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

We congratulate Congresswoman

Norton for her initiatives and the present victory won on behalf of the thousands of persons who have not been fully represented, that is with voice and vote, in the Congress. As the nation prepares to go into 1993, there is indeed a national atmosphere of "anticipation and yearning for change." The political forces that were in control of the Administration in Washington for the last twelve years are on the way out of office.

Yet, these are times that demand the vigilance of the civil rights community throughout the nation. Full voting rights and statehood for the District of Columbia would be a positive step forward that would help make our democracy more inclusive. Surely one day soon, Sister Norton may become Senator Norton representing New Columbia as the 51st state in the Union.

Norton explained, "This elevates the stature of the office of delegate and the respect it will receive in Congress. We need to get every inch of respect we can for the residents of the District of Columbia." Certainly every inch of progress made toward statehood for D.C. will be a giant step forward for the entire nation. A denial of full democratic rights anywhere in this country is a threat to

democracy everywhere.

To be sure there are still some rigid conservatives in Congress who intend to oppose the granting of the right to vote on the floor of the House to congresswoman Norton and the other representatives. Congressman Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.) complained,

"This further diminishes the rights of our minority, and we consider it unfair. We will fight it in every way we can."

We wonder who is the minority that Congressman Solomon is referring to being treated unfairly? How can the Republican Party that has been in power in the White House for the last twelve years and has stacked the Federal judiciary with conservative Republicans, many of whom with life-time appointments to the bench, now claim to be an "injured minority"?

What is unfair is to continue to deny the hundreds of thousands of residents of the District of Columbia their full voting rights. Statehood for D.C. is not an unfair demand on anybody. The cause of justice is served when all citizens are treated equitably.

Let us keep the pressure on! Statehood and justice for D.C. should be now!

### This Way For Black Empowerment My Life Is Now An Open Book!

As someone who has been leading the building of independent politics for a decade, this has been an exhausting, exhilarating, absolutely incredible year and a half!

Independent politics has "suddenly" come of age in the United States of America. No one - including those of us who have been working night and day for so many years to make it happen - could have predicted that virtually overnight a Texas businessman with not much going for him except two big ears and four billion dollars would be able to tap white America's seething dissatisfaction with business-as-usual politics, nor that this powerful sentiment would come gushing forth on Election Day in the form of the largest independent vote in U.S. history. Nor could it be predicted that a whole slew of, independent parties - Natural Law, The 21st Century Party, and the Independence Party, among others - would come into being and join the 13-year-old New Alliance Party which I lead as part of a movement to build a powerful alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. No wonder the professional politicians of both major parties, and their loyal retainers in the corporate media, were scared to death!

As 1992 draws to a close I have been reflecting on all of this and have written a book about it. In February of this year I began a series of extended conversations about this "whole lot of shaking goin' on", personally and politically speaking, with a good friend of mine who is also a journalist. Over the last ten months we talked several times a week - in person and on the phone, late at night and early in the morning - whenever and wherever I could grab an hour of two. With her help I shaped those conversations into a book which will be published in late January, 1993 by Castillo International. It's called *The Making Of a Fringe Candidate* - 1992 and I am very pleased with how it's turned out and eager to have it read.

Fringe is the inside story of my successful mission to bring independent electoral politics into the mainstream of American political life. It documents the efforts by everyone - from Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson to members of the Communist Party USA and Black "revolutionaries" such as the New York 8, to the Nation magazine and the FBI - to stop me from being heard by the American people. I worked hard to talk about Campaign '92 like it was. This book pulls no punches and is going to shake up a lot of people.

I wanted to tell the personal side of the story, for two reasons. One is that who I am - my history and experiences as an African American working class woman who was groomed to "make it" in white America but chose an independent path so that I could take my people with me - has obviously determined how I see things. I think it is very important for folks to know where I come from (and where I'm coming from). The other is that so many people (both those who support what I am doing, and the ones who would like to convince everyone else that I'm doing the devil's work) take a particular interest in my personal life because I am so very far from everybody's image of a presidential candidate. In writing *The Making of a Fringe Candidate* - 1992 I took the opportunity to make my life an open book!

In my book you can read about growing up in Chester in the '50s. You will learn the truth about my relationships with such controversial figures as the Reverend Al Sharpton, this country's most prominent heir to the tradition of civil disobedience established by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the man I call my "partner in liberation"; Minister Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam and someone I consider to be a man of principle; and Dr. Fred Newman, the Jewish marxist who managed both of my presidential campaigns and who has been accused of being the

mastermind of a cult. (The chapter on Fred is called "He's no guru, he's my brother.")

You will find out what really went on between me and Dennis Serrette, the Black trade unionist who embarked on a second career as a professional NAP-trasher shortly after his 1984 run as the independent party's first presidential candidate, with whom I had a stormy three-year relationship before he dropped me to being "too political." You can learn about my involvement in the struggles for democracy in Haiti and Zaire, and get a bird's eye view of "Perot politics" from my unique vantage point as the independent who blazed the trail that Ross Perot would follow.

In the chapter called "Pro-Gay 365 Days A Year" I have expressed my deep appreciation for the lesbian and gay leaders who have helped to build the New Alliance party and in doing so have taught me - and allowed me to teach them - who we are as makers of history with a mutual interest in transforming a society founded on oppression and exploitation. (The right wingers want us to know each other as enemies, while the liberals want us to know each other as fellow victims, incapable of changing anything.) Finally, in the final chapter, called "Ain't I a woman?" I have written a challenge - and a love letter - to my sisters in the women's movement. In all of this, my intention was not to be hurtful to anyone, but to open up some of the issues that I think are of real concern to the American people in the interests of furthering a real dialogue.

As I put the finishing touches on Fringe last week, I reflected on the fact that coming out of 1992 I - a Black working class independent from Chester, Pennsylvania - is acquainted with Bill Clinton, the next president of the United States - and he hates my guts! It's important that the Black community know that, and it's important that you know why. Read my book to find out.

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