

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Hey, I'm Alive!



Believe me, it wasn't easy but recently I took a deep breath and returned to an eerie intersection, the scene of a nearby church and my auto accident of four years ago. Like back then, a motor cyclist pulled out in front of me, this time from a nearby gas station and thankfully with an entirely different result. He sped off and I, shaken by the coincidence, pulled into that church parking lot to reflect on what just happened and what happened back then.

First, about that church. Several times I led group tours of the church cemetery where we observed headstones with the names of Confederate soldiers carved into the granite. More astonishing is what's in the back of that cemetery according to church records – that being 27 wooden stakes indicating the gravesites of former slaves, all numbered, all without names engraved on them.

Now about that intersection. Four years ago, I made a left turn into that intersection. And then -Clang- a sickening sound I will never forget; that of metal crashing against metal, the front end of my truck smashing against his motorcycle. That was in January 2018, an afternoon in Georgia.

Immediately there was a sickening sight of shattered glass, twisted metal and a bleeding body all rolling in the same direction across the street before coming to a halt against a handrail across the street.

But on this day in January 2022, I still haven't quite shaken the trauma of what happened. My mind continues to swirl with unnerving thoughts; the one most

horrid of which is how dangerously close that accident came to rendering the bike rider's wife husbandless, his children fatherless.

And aside from those unnerving images, etched also into my memory are those haunting sounds at the scene, except for these from the lips of the cyclist when I rushed with words of apology to his side:

"Hey, I'm alive!" – three words worth repeating, "HEY, I'M ALIVE!"

When I got back in the front seat of my car during my recent return, my thoughts then took me to what's transpired in our world between January 2018 and now.

I thought about the spawning of the Me-Too Movement, horrible school shootings, on natural disasters and the impeachment of a president.

I thought about a surly national mood fueled by COVID fatigue; about how this pandemic has wreaked havoc on the lives of millions.

I thought about recent years of rancor, fear and what will forever be remembered as "January 6," the day of a brazen attack on a nation's Capitol.

I thought about spikes in anti-Asian hate crimes, the cowardly burning of synagogues and how the killing of George Floyd put a nation long handcuffed by matters of race found itself once again in the crosshairs of and handcuffed by race.

I thought about passenger



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anti-mask freak-outs on airlines and how "Critical Race Theory" emerged as the latest dog whistle, cultural boogey man politically deployed to stoke fears and influence the outcome of elections.

On the positive side – okay, I know that you were hoping I'd ultimately get there - I thought about the birth of another granddaughter and the marriage of my youngest son.

I thought about my recovery from a scary bout of COVID two years ago, a positive outcome not accorded to close to a million Americans who have died as I write this; a time of home confinement, isolation, boredom, and aimless TV channel flipping when I had time to think a lot about the fragile nature of health and life.

I thought about the many accomplishments and good things that occurred over the past four years, among them the development of COVID vaccines, the courageous front line health care providers and first responders, the Capitol police who fought so valiantly to keep insurrectionists at

bay and, of course, the first ever woman of color elected Vice President of the United States.

In the end, I thought about the recovery of the guy on the motorbike whose life – and mine to a far lesser extent - I impacted on that unforgettable January afternoon in 2018.

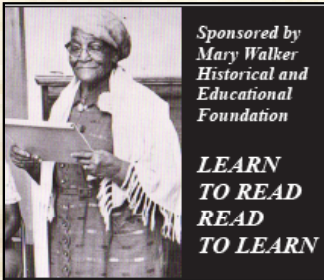
So still I stand in the land of the living, looking back and looking forward in appreciation, gratefulness and, in some small way, connected to the fellow on the bike and to those 27 buried slaves I'll never know.

Yes, I too can say, hey I'm alive.

And if you are reading this, so can you.

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller; a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The Douglas County Sentinel, The BlackMarket.com, co-founder of the "26 Tiny Paint Brushes" writers' guild, recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King Leadership Award.

THIS WEEK IN AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY



CELEBRATING
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

"How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heros and she-roes!"
Maya Angelou

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."