

Sunsets and Dawn Meditations

Our departed heroes never leave us. If we allow them, they live on in us as inspiration to reach out and love one another with whatever time we have left.



Archon Khephra Burns

I am often struck by the dreamlike transience of life. I am inspired by its tenacity, made mindful of its vicissitudes and awed by its beauty in the face of death when the fact of a friend's passing manages to penetrate past the words we use to label, file and effectively set aside those mysteries too deep to fathom and at times too difficult even to think about. As suggested in Genesis, taxonomy is as old as the word itself and central to the act of creation. Until

we begin to name things, like Adam in the Bible, taking inventory of our surroundings, the world remains for us a realm of incomprehensible chaos. Words break it up into bite-size bits and organize it into an orderly universe, with a place for everything, and everything in its place. But there are some things that resist the despotic rule of words and the metaphors and myths they generate to explain the inexplicable – things like love, death and God. And when words fail, the unmediated experience of these mysteries can arrest us in our tracks. How can someone so vitally present be here one moment and gone the next?

Past Grand Sire Archon Calvin Pressley had sounded his usual upbeat self when I spoke with him by phone this summer. No complaints. Iona was fine, Todd and Nomathemba were well, the grandchildren were visiting up on the Vineyard. How was I doing, and how was my Archousa? He spoke in the rasping half whisper he had brought back from the shores of infinity, where he once sojourned during a month-long coma – a voice split between here and the hereafter, and a serene smile that seemed possessed of some secret about both. Through the seven years of his second chance at life, after having been turned back from death's door, Archon Pressley exemplified for me a certain quiet grace that flows from knowing more than can be told.

I had often imagined and even anticipated a conversation I hoped we might one day have about where he'd been while his body lay nearly lifeless. It was a conversation that never took place, except as a simple acknowledgment: "I read your book," he said, referring to *Confirmation*, which Archousa Susan Taylor and I coauthored and edited. "I know you're a spiritual person."

There are some things that are not meant to be talked about but lived – like love, compassion and caring. Beside them, language pales and is often unconvincing and inefficacious. Not by precept but by example, the maxim goes. And by all accounts, as one who practiced what he preached, the Reverend Pressley was no less eloquent in his later years, when the strain on his voice reduced (elevated?) him to practicing without preaching, and his example became his most powerful sermon. The hero, Joseph Campbell reminds us, affects the lives of others, not through what he preaches or writes, but through what he does and, even better, through what he is.

Just days after the memorial service in New York City, Susan and I were stopped at the airport by a woman who fought back tears as she testified to the opportunities Archon Pressley had provided her and how he had mentored her and helped shape her career. She cited others she knew whom he had helped as well to become the men or women they are today.

The next issue of THE BOULÉ JOURNAL will be devoted to the memory of Past Grand Sire Archon Pressley, just as this current issue includes our reminiscences and thoughts on the life of Past Grand Sire Archon Oliver Hill, an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, who passed away in August at the age of 100. As one of those who led the legal effort to desegregate America's public schools, Archon Hill facilitated what psychotherapists might term a major breakthrough in the integration of the national personality for a nation suffering from chronic, recurrent psychotic episodes caused by delusions of white supremacy.

Desegregation was one thing, but "integration," Archon Hill cautioned, "is a social process that is quite different and will take some time." His passionate advocacy for social justice will continue to impact generations to come, but only to the extent that others take up the mantle. The second law of thermodynamics cannot be repealed, entropy cannot be ruled unconstitutional, and in the absence of a countervailing force for good, things *will* fall apart.

Even as Archon Hill's once-resonant voice faded to a whisper and was lost in the struggle to draw breath, incidents at Jena, Louisiana, and Big Creek, West Virginia, reminded us that the tortured soul of America, driven mad with racism, is yet in need of strong voices to take up Archon Hill's cry, healers to seize and build upon Archon Pressley's example.

Our departed heroes never really leave us. The laws of conservation suggest that they are never really gone, just transformed, both matter and spirit, into something else – perhaps into all that they loved and in whom they invested. If we allow them, they live on in us as inspiration and courage to reach out and love one another with whatever time we have left.