

MARCH 1, 2015

- \* GENERAL TOPIC: LETTING GO OF "RESENTMENTS"
- \* SPECIFIC TOPIC: GOODBYE LETTER TO MY FATHER

HELLO WORLD,

IN CONTINUATION OF MY (JAN. 2, 2015) BLOG REGARDING "RESENTMENTS", TODAY'S TOPIC IS HOW I RELEASED THE FEELINGS WHICH I CARRIED SOME 30 YEARS TOWARDS MY FATHER. THE FOLLOWING IS THE "GOODBYE LETTER" THAT I WROTE TO MY FATHER, ORIGINALLY DRAFTED ON AUG. 14, 2012:

DEAR DAD,

AS MY MEMORIES MAY BE A FORM OF HEAVEN FROM WHICH I CANNOT BE DRIVEN, THEY MAY ALSO BE THE HELL FROM WHICH I CANNOT ESCAPE. OL' MAN, DO YOU REMEMBER ME? I AM YOUR NUMBER THREE SON, THE ONE YOU NAMED EDWIN JAY. TAKE A GOOD LOOK, DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME, NOW? OVER THE PAST, THERE HAS BEEN MANY CHANGES IN MY APPEARANCE, DEVELOPMENT, CONFIDENCE, AND PERSONAL IDENTITY, AS I HAVE GROWN INTO A "REAL MAN" WHO FINALLY HAS COME TO KNOW HIMSELF. THOSE WHO DO KNOW ME TODAY, CALL ME BY MY ISLAMIC NAME OF MR. "ZAKEE ABDUL HAKIM". YES, OL' MAN, IT IS ME! DID YOU JUST ROLL OVER IN YOUR GRAVE? DOES IT SURPRISE YOU THAT I'VE RENOUNCED YOUR RELIGION OF CATHOLICISM WHICH YOU FORCED UPON ALL MY SIBLINGS? MANY OF YOUR "BELIEFS" AND IDEOLOGIES OF WHICH YOU TRIED TO IMPRESS UPON ME, I DID NOT AGREE WITH AS A CHILD, NOR DO I PRACTICE TODAY AS I SIT HERE IN A PRISON CELL IN THE YEAR OF 2012. IT IS WHAT IT IS... "LIFE!"

NEVERTHELESS, DAD, I HAVE BEEN WANTING TO WRITE YOU THIS LETTER FOR A LONG TIME, AND NOW THAT THIS OPPORTUNITY HAS PRESENTED ITSELF, I WISH TO CONVEY THESE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS. DAD, FIRST AND FOREMOST, YOU NEED TO REALIZE I WILL ALWAYS "LOVE YOU" AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, "I FORGIVE YOU" OF YOUR SHORTCOMINGS. I NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO SHARE THIS WITH YOU BECAUSE IN THE YEAR OF 1977, YOU DIED ON ME...

AT THE AGE OF 17, I STILL VIVIDLY HOLD THE MEMORY OF THE VERY LAST DAY THAT I SAW YOU ALIVE. IT WAS A SUNDAY AFTERNOON! THE DAY WAS A BRIGHT AND VERY CLEAR DAY, SURPRISINGLY "SMOG-FREE." MOM, ALONG WITH MY SIBLINGS; JOHN, ANDRE, AND JEANNINE HAD JUST LEFT ST. PAUL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH AFTER ANOTHER DULL AND UNINTERESTING MASS FOR ME. I WAS READY TO GO BACK HOME, CLIMB OUT OF MY "SUNDAY-BEST" SUIT, AND HANG OUT WITH MY FRIENDS AT LIEMERT PARK ON CRENSHAW BOULEVARD. NEEDLESS TO SAY, MOM WASN'T HAVING ANY OF THAT THIS SUNDAY. SHE WAS VERY EMPHATIC THAT WE GO VISIT YOU AT WHITE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, THE PLACE WHERE YOU LANGUISHED OVER THE PAST MONTH. I RECALL HOW TRULY I DIDN'T WANT TO GO THAT DAY TO VISIT YOU, BUT MOM INSISTED THAT I "MUST" GO. I GUESS SHE HAD A FEELING "OUR TIME WITH YOU WAS RUNNING OUT", WAS HOW SHE PUT IT. LOOKING BACK, FOR REASONS UNKNOWN, THAT SUNDAY WAS UNIQUE IN COMPARISON TO ALL OUR OTHER FAMILY VISITS WHICH BECAME A SORT OF A PILGRIMAGE FOR THE HUTCHISON CLAN.

I REMEMBER HOW MOM SCOLDED ME AND SHAMED ME WHEN SHE SAID, "EDDIE, YOUR UNCLE, AUNT DORA,  
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"BIG FLOYD" AND HIS FAMILY (MY 1<sup>ST</sup> COUSINS) WILL BE THERE, SO BY GOD, WE WILL BE THERE TOO!" I SAID, "BUT, MOM, DO I HAVE TO GO? WE JUST WENT THERE LAST FRIDAY EVENING AND I TOLD DIANA (MY HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART) TO COME OVER AND PICK ME UP!" MOM SIMPLY SAID, "BOY! GET IN THIS CAR, NOW, THAT'S THE END OF THIS CONVERSATION!" IN RETROSPECT, DAD, OUR MOM WAS A DUTIFUL AND FAITHFUL WIFE TO YOU STILL, ALL THE WAY TO THE BITTER END, I MUST ADMIT.

WE RODE IN SILENCE EASTWARD ON THE SANTA MONICA FREEWAY TOWARDS EAST L.A., THE ONLY SOUND I HEARD WAS THE THUMPS AND WIND AS MOM CHANGED LANES AND THE TIRES HIT THE "LANE BUMPS", WIND BLOWING IN HER HAIR. AFTER A 15 MINUTE DRIVE, WE ARRIVED AT THE HOSPITAL. WHEN WE ENTERED THE LOBBY, I RECALL HOW LUMINOUS AND SHINY EVERYTHING WAS AROUND ME, FOR SOME REASON I WAS ACUTELY "AWARE" OF THE THINGS IN THAT LOBBY. STRANGE. I HAD BEEN COMING IN AND OUT OF THIS HOSPITAL LOBBY OVER A MONTH SINCE THE CANCER RAVAGED YOUR ESOPHAGUS AND LUNGS; YET, ON THIS SUNDAY, I FELT PECULIAR, KIND OF LIKE WHEN I WOULD SMOKE A JOINT OF "ACAPULCO GOLD", BUT I WAS STONE-COLD SOBER. IN THE LOBBY, WE SAW THAT AUNT DORA, BIG FLOYD AND OUR OTHER COUSINS WERE ALREADY THERE. I SAW ONE OF MY FAVORITE COUSINS, TONYA, AND WE ALL GREETED AND EXCHANGED PLEASANTRIES WITH ONE ANOTHER. TONYA, WHEN SHE SAW ME, ASKED, "YOU COOL, EDDIE?" I SAID, "I NEED A JOINT" AND SMILED. SHE THEN SMILED BACK. AS A GROUP, MOM LED THIS FAMILY PROCESSION FROM THE LOBBY DOWN THE BRIGHTLY-LIGHTED CORRIDOR, THE SOUND OF THE "CLACK-CLACK-CLACK" OF OUR SHINY "SUNDAY-BEST" DRESS SHOES ECHOING OFF THE WAXED TILED HOSPITAL FLOOR. WALKING IN TOW, I BEGAN

THINKING AS I TOOK IN THIS EPISODE, HOW THIS THING WE CALL "LOVE" IS SO INDESCRIBABLE AND UNCONDITIONAL. IN THAT MOMENT, IF ASKED, I COULD TELL YOU OVER A THOUSAND THINGS THAT LOVE WASN'T, BUT NOT A SINGLE THING IT WAS. CURIOUS, I MUST SAY.

DAD, WE REACHED YOUR PRIVATE SUITE, WHICH WAS WAY TOO SMALL A SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE OUR PARTY, SO WE TOOK TURNS IN A ROTATION AS TO WHO WOULD VISIT FIRST. SO MOM, MY SIBLINGS AND I WENT FIRST. WHEN AS THE LAST OF THIS GROUP TO ENTER YOUR ROOM, UPON CROSSING THE THRESHOLD, I SIMPLY "FROZE". IN MY NOSE, I SMELLED INDUSTRIAL-STRENGTH "PINE-SOL" WITHIN THE ROOM AND WONDERED WHAT THE HOSPITAL STAFF WAS THINKING OF OR WHAT ODOR WERE THEY TRYING TO HIDE? WAS IT THAT THEY WERE TRYING TO MASK THE SCENT OF DEATH THAT LINGERED IN THE AIR? INTERESTING, TO SAY THE LEAST.

DAD, THIS WAS ALL YOUR FAULT. WITH YOUR PREOCCUPATION WITH YOUR CONSTRUCTION WORK, SMOKING CIGARS AND DRINKING ALCOHOL, CAUSED YOU TO NEGLECT THAT HACKING COUGH YOU HAD FOR SO LONG. THE CANCER HAD ALREADY SPREAD THROUGHOUT YOUR THROAT AND LUNGS, UNDETECTED AND UNTREATED. BY THE TIME MOM CONVINCED YOU TO TAKE OFF A DAY TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE FOR THIS COUGHING; WELL, IT WAS BY THIS TIME FAR TOO LATE. YOU WERE ALWAYS STUBBORN LIKE THAT, DAD, I REMEMBER. YOU DID THINGS "MY OWN WAY", YOU OFTEN SAID. I GUESS YOU DID.

NEVERTHELESS, THIS SUNDAY AFTERNOON AS I SLOWLY APPROACHED YOUR HOSPITAL BED, IT WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME IN ALL THESE VISITS, THAT I TOOK A HARD LOOK

AT YOU, DAD, AND I FINALLY "SAW YOU" CLEARLY. YOU HAD A "BREATHING TUBE" TAPPED OVER YOUR MOUTH, OTHER TUBES AND WIRES WERE ATTACHED TO YOU IN ORDER TO MONITOR YOUR SAD CONDITION. AS I STOOD THERE, THE SURROUNDING MEDICAL DEVICES AND PIECES OF EQUIPMENT GAVE OFF INSINUATING AND PERSISTENT MECHANICAL BEEPS, CLICKS, AND SNAPS, THEN MY ATTENTION WAS DRAWN TO THE VERY UNNATURAL HISSING OF THE VENTILATOR WHICH CAUSED YOUR CHEST TO RISE AND FALL. YOU SEE, DAD, YOU WERE AT THIS STAGE, INCAPABLE OF TAKING BREATH INTO YOUR LUNGS ON YOUR OWN. I RECOLLECT HOW YOU LOOKED SO "SMALL", SO "FRAGILE", A SIGHT I WAS UNACCUSTOMED IN SEEING. A HALF A YEAR PRIOR, YOU WERE AN ACTIVE, STRONG, AND VIGOROUS PERSON. LOOK AT YOU NOW...

MY BIG BROTHER, JOHN, WAS BEHIND ME AS I LOOKED UPON YOU AND HE MUST HAD FELT MY APPREHENSION, SO HE GENTLY NUDGED ME TO MOVE FORWARD. AS I INCHED CLOSER, I CAREFULLY TOOK YOUR WEATHERED RIGHT HAND AND HELD IT IN BOTH OF MINE. I NOTICED HOW COOL TO THE TOUCH YOUR HAND WAS. IT FELT LIKE A PIECE OF OLD, WORN LEATHER TO ME. THEN I GENTLY SQUEEZED YOUR HAND, AND YOU SLOWLY OPENED YOUR CLOSED EYES, LOOKED AT ME, AND SMILED AT ME WITH YOUR EYES. I HELD BACK MY TEARS AS I SMILED BACK AT YOU, DAD. WHEN LOOKING INTO YOUR DRAWN AND HAGGARD FACE, YOUR WARM BROWN EYES WERE STILL "ALIVE." I COULD SENSE A PROFOUND LONGING IN YOUR EYES, DAD, A KIND OF "SADNESS". IT WAS IN THAT MOMENT THAT MY "HEART BROKE" AND I REALIZED HOW WE DID TRULY NEED EACH OTHER. I SAID TO YOU, "DAD, IT'LL BE ALRIGHT," AND NOT KNOWING IF YOU INDEED UNDERSTOOD MY WORDS, AS YOU WERE HEAVILY MEDICATED ON

PAIN-RELIEVING DRUGS. FUNNY THING WAS THAT, IN THAT MOMENT, DAD, WITH ALL OUR FAMILY PRESENT, FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I CANNOT REMEMBER INTERACTING WITH ANY OF THEM. IT WAS JUST YOU AND I, IN THAT ROOM, SHARING A QUIET MOMENT. THE SILENCE WAS LONG AND DEAFENING AT THE SAME TIME. AFTER TWO HOURS, VISITING WAS OVER AND WE ALL HAD TO DEPART, LATER THAT SUNDAY NIGHT; YOU DIED, DAD...

DAD, HERE IT IS NOW 35 YEARS LATER, I AM IN THIS PRISON, AND I HAVE A "LIFETIME" OF UNANSWERED QUESTIONS FOR YOU. NAMELY, WHY DID YOU LEAVE ME AT THE TIME OF MY LIFE THAT I NEEDED YOU THE MOST? I WAS ONLY 17 YEARS OLD. I HAD SO MUCH MORE TO TRY AND LEARN FROM YOU. I DIDN'T KNOW "HOW" TO BE A MAN. THERE WAS SO MANY THINGS I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND AT THE AGE OF 17, AND AFTER YOU DIED, I FELT SO LOST AND MISGUIDED. THERE WERE SEVERAL PSYCHO-SOCIAL STAGES THAT I DID NOT SUCCESSFULLY MANEUVRE THROUGH IN MY LATE TEENAGE YEARS AND EARLY TWENTY'S IN ORDER TO ARRIVE AT ADULTHOOD FULLY PREPARED FOR "LIFE." I WAS SO VERY "ANGERED" AT YOU AND AT "GOD" AS WELL. EVEN TODAY, I STILL DO QUESTION ALLAH (swt) AS TO WHY THE PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT THE MOST IN LIFE ARE ALWAYS TAKEN FROM ME TOO SOON. IT JUST ALWAYS HAS BEEN THE CASE THAT IN MY LIFETIME, THE FATE OF "LOVE" IS THAT IT ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE EITHER "TOO LITTLE" OR "TOO MUCH." NEVER JUST "ENOUGH."

SADLY TO SAY, IN OUR 17 YEARS RELATIONSHIP, I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT I REALLY DIDN'T "KNOW YOU" ANY MORE THAN YOU HAVING A CLUE AS TO WHAT WAS EVEN HAPPENING IN MY YOUNG LIFE. DAD, OUR PROBLEM WAS THAT "WE NEVER COMMUNICATED" OR "LISTENED TO ONE

ANOTHER." OUR RELATIONSHIP, THEN, REMINDS ME TODAY OF HOW SOMETIMES YOU REALLY HAVE TO GET TO KNOW SOMEONE ACTUALLY WELL TO FULLY REALIZE THAT YOU ARE INDEED STRANGERS. AS YOUR SON, I REMINISCE HOW YOU'D "TELL ME WHAT TO DO" OR "HOW TO BEHAVE IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS", AND I DID DO MY BEST TO COMPLY. I NEVER CONSIDERED YOU AS "VIOLENT OR ABUSIVE", BUT YOU DID NOT HESITATE TO WHIP MY BUTT WITH A BELT IF AND WHEN I GOT OUT OF LINE. THAT WAS HOW YOU WERE RAISED BY "YOUR FATHER" AND IT ALSO COINCIDED WITH YOUR STERN ROMAN-CATHOLIC BELIEFS OF "SPARE THE ROD --- SPOIL THE CHILD" MENTALITY. IN SPITE OF THAT, YOU DID ATTEMPT TO BOND WITH ME, BUT FOR SOME REASON, IT ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE AN AFTERTHOUGHT TO ME. I ALWAYS HAD THE "IMPRESSION" THAT YOU LOVED MY BROTHERS MORE THAN YOU LOVED ME. WAS IT BECAUSE THEY WERE OLDER AND YOU SPENT MORE TIME WITH THEM? I KNOW MY YOUNGER SISTER GOT YOUR LOVE DUE TO THE FACT SHE WAS YOUR ONLY DAUGHTER. AS FOR ME, WELL, "I FELT" OFTEN SO UNNOTICED AND UNLOVED, AS IF I REALLY WAS "THE BLACK SHEEP" OF OUR FAMILY. STILL IN ALL, I RECALL THE "GOOD TIMES" SPENT WITH YOU, LIKE OUR FAMILY VACATIONS TO NICE PLACES LIKE YOSEMITE AND SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARKS ON CAMPING EXCURSIONS. I DID ENJOY OUR HIKES AT GRIFFITH PARK, FISHING OFF THE SANTA MONICA PIER, AND OUR TRIPS TO VARIOUS AMUSEMENT PARKS WITH YOU AND MY SISTER. IN THOSE MOMENTS, I DID "FEEL" CLOSE TO YOU. OTHER TIMES, I DIDN'T AND ONE SUCH ADVENTURE STILLS LEAVES ME WITH A SENSE OF DISARRAY.

DAD, IT WAS THE YEAR OF 1970, I WAS 10 YEARS OLD. I REMEMBER THE EVENTFUL DAY WHEN YOU TOOK MY BROTHERS AND ME TO AUNT DORA'S RURAL HOME NEAR PALM-DALE. YOU WOULD OFTEN TAKE US OUT THERE TO HELP HER

WITH MINOR MAINTENANCE AND LIGHT YARK WORK. ON THIS PARTICULAR VISIT, YOU DECIDED TO TAKE MY BROTHERS AND I "JACKRABBIT HUNTING." WE WENT OUT INTO THE WOODED AREA BEHIND AUNT DORA'S HOUSE, YOU HANDED ME A REMINGTON .22 LONG RIFLE WITH A 10 SHOT CAPACITY CLIP, AND AS I GRASPED IT, I GAZED INTO YOUR STERN FACE. YOU SPOKE TO ME IN YOUR COMMANDING, EX-MILITARY STYLE VOICE, SAYING "BOY, TODAY, I'M GONNA TEACH YOU HOW TO USE THIS HERE GUN, OKAY! LIKE HOW I SHOW'D THEM TWO BOYS OVER THERE." YOU POINTED A GNARLED FINGER AT MY BROTHERS. YOU STATED, "I'M GONNA SHOW YOU HOW TO BE A REAL MAN, JUST LIKE MY DADDY DOWN IN LOUISIANA SHOW'D ME."

OFF WE VENTURERED, THE FOUR OF US, DEEPER INTO THE WOODED AREA BEHIND AUNT DORA'S HOUSE. ON THAT DAY, AT 10 YEARS OLD, I EXPERIENCED A REAL SENSE OF "BELONGING" AND A BOND DEVELOPING BETWEEN YOU, MY BROTHERS AND MYSELF. LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT THIS FEELING WOULD BE SHORT-LIVED. AFTER ABOUT A MILE TREK, WE FOUND A SMALL DALE WITHIN THESE WOODS AND YOU QUICKLY CONSTRUCTED A MAKE-SHIFT TARGET AREA SO WE COULD PRACTICE AND HONE OUR SHOOTING SKILLS. I WAS ALWAYS AMAZED BY HOW EFFICIENT YOU WERE AT BUILDING THINGS, DAD. AS WE ALL TOOK TURNS WITH OUR RIFLES AND SHOOTING AT THE TARGETS, OFTEN YOU WOULD STOP, COME OVER TO WHERE I WAS AT, PLACE YOUR HAND ON MY SHOULDER AND OFFER ME ADVICE, LIKE "LOOK, SON, WHEN YOU SHOOT TIS' HERE GUN, KEEP BOTH THEM EYES OF YOUR'S OPEN, DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH, JUST LET IT OUT, THEN SLOWLY PULL THE TRIGGER, DON'T JERK IT, OKAY!" FROM YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, I BEGAN TO ACCURATELY SHOOT THE TARGET AND MY LITTLE CHEST HAD AN UPSURGE OF "PRIDE." I MADE



YOU HAPPY! DAD, IT WAS NICE TO HAVE YOU ACTUALLY NOTICE ME AND YOU WOULD CONGRATULATE ME EVERY TIME I'D HIT ONE OF THOSE TARGETS. ABOUT 45 MINUTES LATER, YOU GATHERED US TOGETHER AND CALMLY STATED, "NOW, BOYS, WE'RE GONNA GO HUNT US SOME RABBITS." AT FIRST, YOUR WORDS DIDN'T QUITE REGISTER IN MY BRAIN, BUT WHEN I REALIZED THEIR MEANINGS, AT THAT MOMENT I EXPERIENCED MY VERY FIRST REBELLIOUS AND RESENTFUL THOUGHTS ABOUT YOU. AS YOU AND MY BROTHERS STARTED PACKING UP, I SIMPLY STOOD THERE IN THAT CLEARING, THE SPRING SUNLIGHT WAS COMING AROUND THE TREES, DANCING OFF THE SHARP ANGLES OF YOUR BROWN FACE. YOU LOOKED AT ME, BAFFLED, AND SAID "LET'S GO, EDDIE!" IN MY LITTLE VOICE, I SAID "NO!" YOU STARED AT, WITH A CONFUSED GLARE, MY LITTLE STANCE, YOUR EYES GROWING HARDER WITH DISBELIEF. I STARTED TO FEEL SO TINY BEFORE YOUR IMPOSING FIGURE, WITH YOUR SOLID CHEST, STRONG ARMS AND HANDS. DEFIANTLY, I JUST STOOD MY GROUND AND SHOUTED BACK AT YOU, "NO, DAD! I WILL NOT SHOOT AT BUGS BUNNY!" THE LOOK OF DISCERNMENT WAS ETCHED UPON YOUR FACE, YOUR BROWN EYES AS DARK AS THE WOODS SURROUNDING US. IN A VOICE MARKED BY CONTEMPT, YOU STATED, "WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY TO ME, BOY?!" INSTANTLY, I BECAME LIKE AN ANT BEFORE A MOUNTAIN, TRYING TO TELL IT TO MOVE. I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT TO SAY OR DO NEXT. I LOOKED OVER TO WHERE MY BROTHERS WERE STANDING, IN THE HOPE OF GAINING THEIR SUPPORT, BUT SUDDENLY THEY BOTH BECAME VERY INTERESTED IN THE DEAD LEAVES THAT COVERED THE GROUND ABOUT THEIR FEET. IT WAS THEN THAT I KNEW THAT I WAS ON MY OWN. I BEGAN CRYING, YOU REMEMBER? I REALIZED BY THE LOOK OF DISGUST MIXED WITH ANGER, THAT MY SITUATION WAS PERILOUS AND BEYOND ANY ESCAPE, WITH YOU. ONLY 5

FEET SEPARATED US IN THOSE WOODS, YET, IT OCCURRED TO MY 10 YEAR OLD MIND THAT I WAS IN A PLACE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP THAT I HAD NEVER BEEN BEFORE — IN VERY UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY. IN A FLASH, NEXT THING I KNOW, IN TWO QUICK STEPS, YOU GRABBED ME BY BOTH OF MY SMALL ARMS WITH YOUR STRONG HANDS, SHAKING ME AND SAYING, "BOY, STOP ALL THIS WHININ' AND ACTIN' SILLY. BE A MAN!" IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, I HARDLY KNEW WHO YOU HAD BECOME, DAD, YOU JUST "CHANGED" TO ME.

FULLY UNDERSTANDING THAT RESISTANCE WAS FUTILE, I PICKED UP MY RIFLE, SLUNG IT OVER MY TINY SHOULDER, STARTED GATHERING UP OUR GEAR, THEN RELUCTANTLY TRUDGED BEHIND YOU AND MY BROTHERS INTO THOSE FORBIDDING WOODS TO HUNT RABBITS. DAD, LITTLE DID YOU KNOW THAT, AT 10 YEARS OLD, I LOVED RABBITS, SO AS WE WALKED, I REMEMBER HOW I TRIED TO MAKE A LOT OF NOISE. I SNAPPED TWIGS AND BRANCHES, KICKED THE BRAMBLE ALONG THE TRAIL, AND EVEN THROWN A COUPLE OF ROCKS AHEAD OF US, HOPING TO SCARE OFF ANY RABBITS THAT WE MIGHT ENCOUNTER. THEN YOU STOPPED, LOOKED BACK AT ME AND SNARLED, "BOY, STOP MAKIN' ALL THAT DAMN RACKET! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?"

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, WE EMERGED INTO A FIELD, AND TO MY DISMAY, THIS CLEARING WAS CHOCKED-FULL OF JACK RABBITS, BIG ONES AND BABIES, SCURRYING TO AND FRO IN THE SPRING AIR, TOTALLY UNAWARE OF THE IMPENDING DEATH BEFORE THEM. IN UNISON, YOU AND MY BROTHERS RAISED YOUR .22 LONG RIFLES AND OPENED FIRE. THE "POPS" OF THAT GUNFIRE STARTLED ME AND THE SMELL OF CORDITE FILLED THE AIR. THAT BARRAGE OF BULLETS DROPPED ABOUT FIVE RABBITS, INSTANTLY. AS OTHERS WERE HIT, THEY JUMPED UP FROM

THE IMPACT OR FEAR, SOME RAN AWAYS THEN SIMPLY COLLAPSED. STRANGELY, I RECALL HOW I TOO FOUND MYSELF RAISING MY RIFLE TO FIRE, BUT THEN I'D DELIBERATELY MISSED EVERY RABBIT I SHOT AT. I'D SHOOT AT A ROCK NEXT TO ONE OR THE GROUND IN FRONT OF ANOTHER, IN ORDER TO KICK UP THE DIRT AND FRIGHTEN THEM OFF. THIS WHOLE SCENE LASTED ONLY 10-15 SECONDS, BUT IT SEEMED A LIFETIME TO ME. WHEN THE SHOTS ENDED, THERE WAS ABOUT 20 DEAD OR DYING JACKRABBITS LAYING ON THE GROUND, DUST-MOTES FILLED THE AIR, MY EARS STILL RINGING FROM THE GUNFIRE, BLOOD AND RABBIT FUR LITTERED THE AREA. NEXT, I SAT IN THE DIRT, WATCHING YOU AND MY BROTHERS CALMLY AND METHODICALLY PICK UP THOSE REMAINS AND PLACE THEM IN PLASTIC TRASH BAGS.

BUT THIS WASN'T THE END OF MY WAKING NIGHTMARE, DAD. AFTER THE RABBIT MASSACRE, YOU MARCHED US ALL BACK TO AUNT DORA'S HOUSE. ARRIVING, I WANTED TO GO INSIDE AND LAY DOWN, HOWEVER, YOU PULLED ME ASIDE, AND IN A CONSPIRATORIAL TONE, YOU INSTRUCTED ME TO FOLLOW YOU. AS YOU LED AND I FOLLOWED, YOU SAID, "BOY, I WANT TO LEARN YOU SOMETIN'." AUNT DORA HAD A SHED WHICH YOU CONVERTED INTO A "SMOKEHOUSE." AS WE ENTERED, YOU SAID, "SIT DOWN OVER THERE AND WATCH ME. YOU SEE, SON, A REAL HUNTER NEEDS HIM THREE TOOLS, A GOOD "BOWIE KNIFE", A CHOPPIN' BLOCK O' WOOD, AND A STRONG STOMACH!" THEN YOU GRINNED AND WINKED AT ME. NEXT, YOU PRODUCED THE PLASTIC TRASH BAGS WHICH HELD THOSE REMAINS, REMOVED A DEAD RABBIT, HELD IT OUT IN FRONT OF ME AND SAID, "SON, I'M A GONNA' SHOW YOU'S HOW TO SKIN A RABBIT!" AS IN A DAZE, I JUST WATCHED AS YOU PUT THE BODY ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK, REMOVE YOUR BOWIE KNIFE FROM ITS SLEEVE, AND WITH

A SINGLE STROKE, YOU SEVERED ITS HEAD, ALLOWING THE REMAINING BLOOD IN ITS LITTLE, BROKEN BODY TO DRAIN. DAD, I WAS IN A STATE OF SHOCK, TRAUMATIZED, AND PARALYZED BY FEAR. I BECAME NAUSEATED, BILE RISING FROM MY GUT, I WAS SPEECHLESS. IMMOBILIZED, I STARED AT YOU, FIXATED BY THE EASE AND NONCHALANT WAY YOU BEHEADED THAT RABBIT. THEN, TO MY HORROR, YOU GUTTED IT AND REMOVED ITS INNARDS AND PROCEEDED TO REMOVE ITS FUR AND SKIN. IN THAT SMALL SHED, THE SMELL OF BLOOD HAD A POTENCY THAT REMINDED ME OF A COPPER PENNY, VERY METALLIC. YOU BEGAN TO SWEAT. DAD, WHEN YOU REMOVED THAT RABBIT'S INTERNAL ORGANS, I FELT THE BILE ABOUT TO EXPLODE OUT MY MOUTH AND I BECAME "DIZZY." THIS CEREMONIAL RITE OF PASSAGE LASTED ONLY A FEW MINUTES, BUT IT SEEMED TO LAST FOR AN ETERNITY. EVEN AS I WRITE THESE WORDS, THE IMAGES, SMELLS, SOUNDS ARE IMPACTING MY MEMORY OF THIS EVENT, 42 YEARS LATER. I CAN STILL SEE THE LARGE PERSPIRATION STAINS UNDER YOUR ARMPITS AS YOU WENT ABOUT THIS "MANLY" CHORE.

AFTERWARDS, YOU WASHED THE BLOOD AND FLESH OFF YOUR HANDS, CLEANED THE CHOPPING BLOCK AND KNIFE, AND PLACED THE "MEAT" IN A CONTAINER. YOU SAID, "MY SISTER, (AUNT DORA) IS GONNA FRY THESE UP FOR US!" WHEN YOU SAID THAT, IT WAS THE "MAGIC WORDS" THAT SNAPPED ME OUT OF MY TRANCE. IT WAS THE THOUGHT OF "EATING" THOSE SWEET, LITTLE "BUGS BUNNY'S" WHICH CAUSED ME TO BOLT PAST YOU, OUT OF THAT SHED, INTO THE SUNLIGHT AND FRESH AIR, AND RACE TO THE BACK DOOR OF AUNT DORA'S HOUSE. OVERWHELMED WITH NAUSEA, I MADE A BEELINE STRAIGHT TO THE BATHROOM, WHERE I PROCEEDED TO VOMIT. WITHIN A MATTER OF SECONDS, AUNT DORA WAS AT THE BATHROOM DOORWAY, ASKING, "LIL' EDDIE, WHAT WRONG? ARE

YOU OKAY?" AS I FLUSHED THE TOILET, WIPED THE SPIT FROM MY LIPS, WITH TEARS ROLLING DOWN MY CHEEKS, I MOANED, "AUNTIE, THEY KILT THEM!" SHE ASKED, PUZZLED, "WHO KILLED WHAT, BOY?" I SHOUTED BACK, "DAD AND MY BROTHERS KILT BUGS BUNNY!" SHE GAVE ME A LOOK OF COMPASSION WITH HER SOFT, GENTLE, KIND EYES, CAME INTO THE BATHROOM, TOOK A FACE TOWEL OFF THE RACK, RAN COLD WATER ON IT, AND TENDERLY WIPED MY FACE. I WAS SEATED ON THE BATHROOM FLOOR AND SHE SAT DOWN NEXT TO ME, AND SHE HELD ME CLOSE TO HER BOBOM. SHE HELD MY FACE IN HER HANDS, LOOKED ME IN THE EYES AND CALMLY SAID, "EDDIE, YOUR DAD, HE MEANS WELL..." SHE SIGHED, CONTINUING, "HE'S JUST OL'-FASHIONED IN HIS WAYS. I GUESS HE'S A LOT LIKE YOUR GRANDPA DOWN IN LOUISIANA." BUT, AS A 10 YEAR OLD CHILD, I WASN'T TRYING TO HEAR THAT ABOUT YOU DAD, SO I TOLD AUNT DORA, "I JUST WANT TO LAY DOWN." SOME TIME LATER, SHE BROUGHT ME A PEANUT-BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH WITH A CUP OF HOT COCOA. I ATE AND DRANK IT ALL, THEN SLEPT.

DAD, DO YOU RECOLLECT THAT EVENTFUL DAY IN THE SPRING OF 1970? I DO... IN TRUTH, I WAS TERRIFIED BY THIS EXPERIENCE. BUT AS I GOT OLDER, I DIDN'T WANT TO FEEL THAT "REJECTION" FROM YOU, SO I DEVELOPED THE THOUGHT-PATTERN THAT "IF I KEEP MY FEELINGS HIDDEN AND UNEXPRESSED, THEN I DON'T HAVE TO RISK JEOPARDIZING THE QUALITY OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU." I DO NOT THINK YOU FULLY REALIZED THE IMPACTS, BOTH GOOD AND BAD, THAT YOU HAD UPON ME, DAD. THAT "RABBIT HUNTING" EXPERIENCE HAD A TRAUMATIC EFFECT ON ME, AS A 10 YEAR OLD CHILD, AND IT FOREVER CHANGED ME PERCEPTIONS OF YOU. I SUFFERED "NIGHTMARES" FROM THAT PARTICIPATION AND FOR A WHILE

I DIDN'T EAT "RED MEAT". I HELD "RESENTMENTS" TOWARDS YOU, DAD, ON SO MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS. BUT, TODAY, IN 2012, I REALIZE YOU DID THE BEST THAT YOU COULD AS A PARENT, SO HOW COULD I EVER HAVE EXPECTED SO MUCH FROM YOU? DAD, I HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH "MY LIFE", AS I DO COMPREHEND THAT OUR HISTORY AND CONDITIONS IN LIFE MAY HAVE IMPACTED WHO WE ARE; BUT, ULTIMATELY, I AM THE ONE WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHO I BECOME. THAT IS "ZAKEE ABDUL HAKIM", THE AUTHENTIC, "REAL" MAN, I AM, TODAY... I WISH THAT I COULD HAVE ACTUALLY MAILED THIS LETTER TO YOU. PERHAPS, IF I'M EVER RELEASED FROM PRISON, I WILL VISIT YOUR GRAVESITE, BRING MY PRAYER RUG, LAY IT DOWN AND HAVE A SEAT ON THE GRASS NEXT TO YOU, AND READ THIS LETTER ALOUD TO YOU. UNTIL THEN, DAD, MAY YOU REST IN PEACE AND KNOW I'M ALRIGHT, TODAY...

LOVE ALWAYS,  
YOUR SON,  
\* ZAKEE \*

\* DEAR READERS: REMEMBER, LETTING GO OF "RESENTMENTS" DOESN'T NECESSARILY LEAD TO "FORGIVENESS", BUT WHEN YOU EMBRACE FORGIVENESS, RESENTMENT CEASES TO EXIST.

IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS, PLEASE SEND THEM TO ME DIRECTLY OR POST THEM HERE. I WILL SEND A "REPLY" ACCORDINGLY. UNTIL NEXT TIME...

PEACE,  
Zakee