

To a dear friend, QR Hand (1937? 38 – 1/1/21)
By Kathryn Waddell Takara, PhD

Smoky sighs.
I remember QR, , not fully..
Spring 1962. We met at Yale and connected
A NSM conference, civil rights struggle for Northern students
He was dashing handsome
A red scarf tied around his tall neck
A beatnik character, unconventional
Looking like walking art with his trademark hat.
He was openly expressive, fiercely argumentative
Rhythmic and cool
Unfazed and self-confident in a sea of white faces.

1966. We met again in Berkeley, connected again.
QR was a mosaic of a man
Sharing multiple colors and patterns of life
Of ideas, friends, ethnicities, artists expressive
He was intellectual, analytical, complex and mostly unwavering.
Passionately political, stubborn yet warm
Outsider, observer of inequality, gentrification
Exposing the bowels of hypocritical leaders
Calling them out by name
Ever resistant to ignorant hate and to greed.
He always engaged with his friends.

He was a cultural wordsmith
A poet and critic defiant and fearless
Reciting history and politics
A teacher unforgettable, a champion of the dispossessed.
Fiercely independent
Reaching out “To The Poet in Man”
Communicative yet private
His words like jazz and the blues
Exalting, bemoaning
Thumping and bumping his personal unforgettable be-bop style
Cutting new images, atonal, afro-futuristic, inventive,
He challenged white power, our system inequitable and unjust.

QR
Hard as a cowrie shell, rough as a coral reef
Inside soft like a sea urchin with a poisonous sting
He gave of himself freely, questioning authority
He asked, searched for the who, why, and what of conditions.
Who are you he asked, Who are they who lie so freely?

He knew who he was.
Ever a fighter, a rebel, a warrior
His weapon, the spoken and written word
Outlaw poetry he called it
He was a part of Black Fire and the Black Arts Movement
Inspirational to other poets and multitudes
Through decades of time, into the future.

His vision unwavering
Broad and tall like the redwoods
Deep as the Pacific
Delivering metaphors of the sea and shifting sands
Affable, available, he heard ancestral voices
Collaborative and expansive like music, like drumbeats
Courageous to share his singular path and philosophy
Of commitment to justice, community, and growth.

QR, loyal and brilliant as the sunrise
Visible like moonlight
Or invisible like Cassiopeia.
Unconcerned with personal wealth and status
He dedicated himself to opening doors of perception
New world connectedness
Social and environmental justice and balance
To health and diversity.
He often spoke in colors; black and white, brown, red and yellow
Splashes of humanity, citizens of our interconnected world.

His life he lived boldly
Drinking profusely, visiting bars, coffee houses and libraries galore
Intense as the seasons, predictable and not
Stormy as winter, gentle as springtime.
Finally, worn out by his efforts and lifestyle
He left us his smile and his humor in the season of Epiphany
Did he choose it, or just let go?

He left us a legacy of speaking one's truth
Cultural and historical.
He still did not choose to fly in a plane.
He left us a challenging call for racial and economic equality
He left us a wishful message of unity and peace.

QR Hand. What a man! A mighty fine man
Of integrity and strength! Serendipitous memories and smoky sighs.