

somewhere that I read – Lisbet found it. I don't know, you can ask Lisbet about that, if she knows where it is.

What I did was I came back, I got oriented, and I started almost immediately just doing whatever I could in the Party office, but also, I was made one of the feature writers for the Black Panther newspaper so I wrote both local and international stories. By the way, for the record, the Black Panther Party was never nationalist, it was never insular, and if you look at the Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, you'll see as many articles about what was going on in Vietnam, in China, all over Africa, because there was quite a movement throughout Africa during the seventies and eighties – sixties, seventies, and eighties – also in Latin America. We wrote stories about people who were wrongfully arrested, wrongfully imprisoned, and the issues that face the African-American and other poor people's communities, like poor housing, inadequate healthcare, and poor education. Those were three big topics that the paper focused on. I wrote and in addition to that I started teaching the children in the Intercommunal Youth Institute.

Thomson: At that time it was just Party children?

5-01:07:07

Huggins: In the early days, yes. And a few kids from whatever local neighborhood we were sitting in.

Then I became the editor of the Intercommunal News Service, the Party newspaper. After that, around the time that Brenda Bay who was the director of the Intercommunal Youth Institute left the Party, Huey asked me if I would direct the Intercommunal Youth Institute. It opened in 1973 in the school building at 61st and East 14th, now International Boulevard in Oakland. I became the director of the Oakland Community School and I remained the director of the Oakland Community School from 1973 to 1981 when I left the Party because there was nothing left for me to be there for.

Thomson: Do you want to talk about the school now? When you became the director in '73, and you said it was in the building on International, how many students would there have been?

5-01:08:29

Huggins: When we opened the doors we had 90 students, five-year-olds through twelve-year-olds, and we had a child development center already for two to four-and-a-half year olds. Then within a couple of months we had 150 students, which was our cap. We always had a huge waiting list and unborn children on that waiting list. People loved this school so much.

The children came from Oakland, they came from Berkeley, they came from San Francisco, they came from Richmond, they came from down the street in the housing projects at Havenscourt and also farther East Oakland like Brookfield Village. A huge portion of them as a matter of fact came from East

Oakland, and the other ones came from other parts of the East Bay with our school vans. Then there was a teacher, Rodney, who lived in San Francisco, and he would go to two houses in San Francisco and pick up two sets of children and bring them to school and then take them all the way back home every day for years. It was like a family.

The seminar I'm taking this quarter at school is called *Family and Intimate Relationships*, and last night in the first class session I was thinking about the family, the kinship formed of the children and the staff and the teachers and the parents through the Oakland Community School. There was nothing like it. It really was like this gigantic family and I've never experienced anything quite like that since in a school setting. The Party had that sense of family too. I would say that the comrades I had in the Party were more like sisters and brothers for me in a certain way than my own biological sisters and brothers. And the children at the Oakland Community School were just as dear to me as Mai and Rasa. There's no end to my love for Mai and Rasa, but I never considered those children someone else's children, they were all mine. When I left there to go home, they went with me in my heart.

It was an amazing, amazing almost ten years, because I taught them before I became director and I've watched them grow and now many of them have their own children. All of them say, the ones I've talked to, that that experience transformed their understanding of family, of community, also of education and its purpose. So it was a phenomenal learning experience for me. It was the most phenomenal teaching experience I've ever had and to be able to facilitate parents from poor communities especially communities of color without blame, shame, or judgment was a wonderful experience also.

It was just entirely unique and I would like to see it happen again because it was a model that could be replicated anywhere, anytime, by anybody. It wasn't that you had to be black or you had to be connected with an organization. The organization made it so that we didn't have to originally raise a lot of money. We didn't charge tuition. We didn't pay ourselves. I was on welfare most of the time that I was the director of the school until later on in time when we started some grant writing.

Thomson: Did you get any income from the Party to live on?

5-01:12:46

Huggins: The Party subsidized our living facilities and our food.

Thomson: The house was actually rented by the Party, that you lived in?

5-01:12:54

Huggins: Yeah, and when we could no longer subsidize those houses, Huey had me sell them all. When I say Huey had me sell them all, I mean it exactly that way because I was one of the last leading members of the Party to stay around and that was because of the children, the school. I just kept thinking, "Something

will change." But of course, when you grow up with an alcoholic father, you always think, "It will be better tomorrow." But it wasn't better tomorrow. When we were selling all the houses I knew it was the end, and the reason we were having to sell all the houses is because Huey was so addicted that the money was now going into his drug needs, rather than the Party's real expenses.

When I say that the Party subsidized, I don't mean the Party paid everything because I was on welfare, so I paid my rent. But whatever I couldn't do the Party would pay for and it was that way for all of us. But most of the women were on welfare. The quality of work that we gave was not a joke at all. I could have been paid a five-digit salary quite easily somewhere else, but that's not why we did what we did. We never thought about money, except do we have enough money to eat, do our children have enough to have some clothes, like that.

Later in time I lived with Elaine Brown in an apartment and everything was subsidized by the Party. I got off of welfare and I believe I received a small salary for being at Oakland Community School but it was never top-heavy.

Thomson: I'm torn because I want to talk about where you were going with Huey but I want to hear a little more about the school. Did the school always have a residential kind of component? Kids did end up spending the night there later on?

5-01:15:18

Huggins: No.

Thomson: No, there was no sleep over?

5-01:15:20

Huggins: Yes, there was, but it's something in between and I want to clarify. The school building was on East 14th Street, now International Boulevard. Early on in the school's incarnation, (when it was Intercommunal Youth Institute and before that it was called the Children's Houses, because that's all it was, two houses in North Oakland where the children were home schooled, then we moved to a big house on 29th Avenue in the Fruitvale area of Oakland, not far from La Clinica de la Raza,) the children were educated there and they slept there. This is when they were still primarily the children of the Black Panther Party members. When we opened as Intercommunal Youth Institute and then renamed it Oakland Community School, the children from the community were the primary enrolled students. The Party members' children still slept at the 29th Avenue facility when they needed to, when their parents were traveling, or like me, when I went out to speak for long periods of time. They lived communally because we thought that was a good thing for them, to have one another, because things were so changeable with us. But the school children themselves, the ones enrolled, they went home to their homes. So it

was the Party members' children that lived at 29th Avenue sometimes, part of the week.

Thomson: Who stayed with them? It was just a rotating task?

5-01:17:06

Huggins: A rotating staff of Party members, some of them were teachers, some of the teachers stayed there. Many of them did. It was a beautiful house, you wanted to stay there, it was better than all of the apartments. We didn't spoil the children but we gave them everything they deserved that we could think of, everything that we could think to give them, they had. We did not want them to suffer in any way, but they weren't spoiled. They didn't have gadgets and new things just to have new things and toys just to have toys, but they didn't suffer.

Thomson: Back at the school, you did serve meals though, right?

5-01:17:52

Huggins: We started by serving breakfast. Then we found out that the children, not our biological children, but the children who came from the local community were starving, and so we served lunch. Then we realized that they were so happy with that that they would hang around, hoping that they would get more food, or they would stuff their pockets from lunch with food. Then we thought, "Something is wrong here."

I remember going to Melvin one day, the chief cook in the kitchen, a Party member, and I said, "You know what? The children really need dinner. Can you do dinner?" All he said was, "Yes, we can do that." That's how we ended up with three meals a day.

The Party always functioned on need. What do the people need? That was the consistent question. How can we serve the people? With the children, they were hungry. That wasn't okay. That just wasn't going to serve the purpose of this school.

When Rodney would drive the children in, his day would start at seven in the morning with those children from San Francisco and when he would get them home at night it was sometimes seven or eight, understanding San Francisco traffic in both directions.

The day started with breakfast and then there was community meeting in the morning where we all stood together and kind of did a check-in. We did ten minutes of exercise and then we went to class. We had breakfast, went to class. Breakfast, check-in, class, then lunch was at noon time, and the meals were wonderful. Another thing about the meals is we stopped serving, we really didn't serve pork for too long because there were too many children there whose parents didn't like the idea of it, just as many who did but we just decided, "Okay, no pork."

Audio File 6

Huggins: Because we just knew that physiologically it makes people more sluggish, especially after lunch. It's difficult to digest. I mean, we're not cows. We also took care of special dietary needs if children had dairy allergies and this is very common in black communities, lactose intolerance. We would do something about that. I remember that as we developed, the diet of the children developed. I became vegetarian in early '79, well, late '78, early '79, but I did not impose that at all. I'm not talking about being vegetarian but we just tried to have fresh everything, we were very meticulous in the kitchen, we weren't interested in giving them junk because they'd had too much of that and I think that's why the children loved it so much. The children just felt completely cared for.

I was interviewing one of the students the other day who said, "Ericka, don't you remember we had Project Seed?" And I go, "Yeah! I remember Project Seed and I had forgotten all about it." Project Seed was this innovative math tutorial but the innovative part was they came into the elementary schools that would allow them in and taught algebra, algebraic thinking, problem solving, to third, fourth, and fifth graders. Then one of the young men I interviewed said that he remembered being given calculus problems in fifth grade by Project Seed and it was the most exciting part of his day. He just loved it, that he could think like that. They were just these happy young guys who created this program. They had been Berkeley students or something and one had a long bright red ponytail and the other one was African-American with a big Afro, and they would come in and the kids would cheer when they saw them.

Their whole premise was just like ours. You teach a child how to think, not what. They would come in and they knew that if the children could learn how to think in an abstract way and do these problems, that they would be able to do many other things in their academic lives as well as their own daily lives, and they were right. None of the kids forgot it.

My daughter was remembering to me week before last that the school taught the children how to do this Korean finger-counting called Chisenbop. You learn how to count your tens, hundreds digits, and ones on your fingers, but it's a rhythmic, almost beat way of doing it. I had totally forgotten about Chisenbop and then I taught poetry writing to the children. After I began working with my spiritual teacher, he encouraged me to teach the children meditation. He said, "Just ten minutes a day." So the whole school meditated everyday for ten minutes after lunch. The whole school, from the baby kindergarteners all the way up, and the staff, just a blanket of the silence would fall over the multi-purpose room when we did that and then we would get up and go on with our day. It was so beautiful. So the school culture created itself through our intention to love the children, to teach them how to think, and to have them become global citizens.

We had a really, really bad attitude about Americans thinking that America is the center of the world. It is not. We taught the children Spanish. This was before bilingual education was a big deal. I am glad to say it was before bilingual education became a no-no.

The curriculum was, in a way, a traditional elementary school curriculum except that we were doing the teaching. We wrote the curriculum. We wanted them to learn math, and to read and to write, but about what and for what? What was the math for? Reading what? Some antique old history book that left out the true history of the United States or other things?

Were we Afro-centric? No, but we were primarily African-American people teaching African-American and Latino students. Then, after a while, [unclear] we had Latino staff and Asian staff. But it was amazing. And many of the teachers were men, which was something else you did not see in the public school classrooms, nor did you see a lot of fathers at home. So that was very, very, very important and we intentionally did it.

I had an open door policy: children and even parents and staff could come into my office and talk to me about anything at any time of day provided I was in there when I wasn't teaching or walking around.

The favorite part of my day, if something was not going quite right or if I was through with adults because adults are a problem for me sometimes, is that I would just find my way to whatever classroom and sit there and then I would feel better and then I would come back and be adult. I say that kind of tongue in cheek because when adults are loved as children, they don't behave poorly as adults and that was what we were hoping for for each of these children, that they would believe for the rest of their lives the operating principle of the school, that the world is our classroom.

Thomson: It's so inspiring to hear about it. It's really sweet.

6-00:07:00

Huggins: Yeah, it's beautiful. I'm telling you, I want to do it again.

Thomson: Were there particular theorists or particular schools through history that you were looking towards as models?

6-00:07:17

Huggins: Well I became a part of the National Association of Alternative Schools, so there were lots of schools, there wasn't one in particular. We took our cues from the really progressive schools in the United States when we could find out about them, any of them. I don't remember all of their names so I can't tell you specifically, but this Association of Alternative Schools was just the most amazing community schools and alternative schools and socialist schools and sometimes communist schools for children. I don't mean they taught them communism or taught them socialism. They were run from the other

standpoint. We didn't know about the spiritually-based schools at that time, there are many of those as well that teach compassion and kindness and love of nature, love of the Earth, love of one's self and others, there are many of those schools now. There was no such thing as charter schools then. We were the great-great-grandma of charter schools.

I would say that we got a big cue from China when Elaine returned from the People's Republic. She told us all about the schools she visited. There were huge numbers of children in the schools but there were all these operating principles. One is, "Spoil all the children, not just one." They didn't mean spoil them in an American sense, just give them a bunch of gadgets and walk off and leave them in front of the TV. They meant shower them with love and with all of the expressions of love.

She described to us this daycare center at one of the factories where there was staff in the daycare center, a huge staff, with a large number of babies. What they did was they made this long cradle with a lot of little cribs in it and the cribs were all strung together with one long pole and on either end, there were two people who sat there and rocked the cradles. When she told us that, we were like, "Aww, that is so sweet. What's wrong with us? We don't even have daycares in factories." There weren't any in America but yet we ridicule the Chinese for being communist. Certainly there were horrible, horrific things that went on in the history of the People's Republic, but you never hear about the schools.

She said all of the children were given the opportunity to learn to dance, to learn to sing, to perform instruments, to recite poetry, to do whatever they would do and the whole community would come out and sit there for the little children's shows. We did that at Oakland Community School anyway, but we felt so affirmed. We didn't think it was dumb to show up for a children's performance or just cutesy. We knew that this was how they were learning to be in the world. It was a certain kind of empowerment. You didn't have little Jane taking ballet lessons and little Tanesha not. Jane and Tanesha and everybody else had ballet if that's what they wanted to do, and the boys could have ballet and the girls could build things and the boys could cook things – some dismantling of gender roles too. It was so inspiring because we were trying to do that but we didn't have any reference point for it. We didn't have any precedent set for us.

Thomson: That is part of what is so amazing hearing about it. It just feels like you're creating out of nothing.

6-00:11:17

Huggins: Yeah, we did create it straight up out of nothing. I didn't have a degree to run a school, I hadn't even finished college yet! Some of the teachers who came like Rodney, he was a first year teacher when he came to Oakland Community School. Vivette, another teacher, had many more years experience of teaching

but she was not an administrator. Elaine didn't have any administrative background in schools. We just knew: You love them, you hug them, you share what you know. Don't give them your bullshit and your horrific experiences in life, but tell them the truth, and talk to them, don't have secrets that are unnecessary. Talk to them. These underlying principles expressed through the curriculum. For instance, what happened with the Native Americans in the United States? How many adults know the truth, adult Americans? Not many. Why? Because the history books just wrote it out or decontaminated them as I would call it. We told the children what happened and we did it in groups. We told the story without a lot of bias and blame to individuals. We just said, "There was ignorance and this is what the settlers did."

We talked about slavery. We simulated the slave ships so that children would understand what it felt like to be packed in there, head to groin, arm to arm with people, like in a sardine can. The children would ask, "So how did they pee, Ericka? Where'd they poop?" And they could answer their own questions couldn't they? "Did they get sick? Did they throw up? How did they have babies? Do you think they wanted to live?" We didn't know a public school setting or a private school setting where children were allowed to think in this way, think things through. We didn't have them sit there and agonize over the history of slavery for days on end, but we didn't hide it from them.

There comes a time in every parent's life where the truth of the world they live in needs to be shared, and now we have all of these private schools that shelter children from conditions of poverty, other children who do not have a lot, and from quote "bad neighborhoods". We always told the children, "You're from neighborhoods that are considered bad. We don't agree with that. Your parents love you, don't they?" And they would go, "Yeah." "Your parents love one another, don't they?" "Yeah, for the most part." [laughter] Good things happen in the projects too. So we affirmed where they lived. We never told them, "Get your education and get out." We told them, "Once you become that person, you live the life of your dreams, you make sure to come back to Havenscourt projects and offer—" Do you know that many of them have done that? They always have held their communities in high regard. If they didn't do that, whatever community they became a part of or created for themselves – they support that community.

One of the students I interviewed recently told me a story of a woman friend of his, not an intimate relationship but intimate at the truest level, she is a dear friend of his and she is a single mom and she is putting herself through a doctoral program, and she has a young child. He's a single man, no children, good income. Sometimes she doesn't have enough and he says, "Here, take this money. You need it." She goes, "What's wrong with you? You know I'm not gonna give up nothing." He goes, "I'm not talking about that. I was raised to believe that if somebody's in my community, that I am going to support them and they will support me. That's how I was raised." When he told me

this story, that's where he learned it, at Oakland Community School, I was so touched. Especially for a young man. You could hear in the young woman, his friend, that she had been burnt time and time again.

What is society telling our young men that their responsibility is? We live in this sort of individualistic relationship [pause] comedy. I want to call it the comedy, where we think we can do everything by ourselves, and we cannot. That doesn't mean that we cannot also be independent. I call it interdependent. So when he told me that he learned that kind of relationship to community, it was very strong and he said if somebody's harming someone else, he steps in. If someone's saying something harmful to him, he patiently waits to see where the person is coming from and then if the boundary is crossed, he says, "Okay, you don't want to go there, unless we're going to have another kind of conversation." But he doesn't just react. It was one of the more beautiful interviews I've done regarding former students in the school. [break in interview]

Thomson: What I'd like to ask you about is the early seventies and what was happening in the Party. You were saying that when you got back there were all the community programs. There were chapters all over the country. You talked about the Party houses that Party members lived in. I guess I'll just launch into talking about Huey. What was your relationship with Huey when you first came back? Did you become friends with him?

6-00:18:11

Huggins: Yeah, I became friends with him. He liked me because I meditated in prison. He liked me because I wrote poetry. He liked me because I could think on my own. I wasn't sort of a carbon copy whatever whatever. I didn't know that's what he liked about me until I really reflected on it.

When I first came to Oakland, on those first days I was there, Huey came to meet with me—had I told you this story before? Someone in the Party, unknown to me, had written to him and to David that I should be kicked out of the Party because I meditated and because I was a hippie and a lot of things. Of course she says she never did that but I don't know, I was told she did, Huey told me she did and I didn't feel that he had a reason to lie. It's possible that he exaggerated it but it didn't sound that way. He was just sort of making a statement, "I hear that you meditate. I hear you write poetry. Some people think you don't need to be here." "Alright, well what do you think?" And he liked that I asked him that question. He said, "So when you meditate, what do you do?" I told him and he said, "I meditated too when I was in the hole." He said, "That was how I got through it. It's a wise thing to do." Then we talked about some other things and he asked me how I wanted my Party work to be or something like that. I think he just wanted to know, what was I thinking now that I was home and was I going to stay with the Party. He did ask me that eventually, "Are you going to stay with the Party?" And I go, "Yeah." He was quite sane. He wasn't using. He wasn't over-the-top crazy. He was Huey,

which meant that he was operating at 90 decibels at all times, but that was my first meeting with him. Then when he was done talking to me he said, "I like you and I'll see you later." And that was the end of the conversation. I liked him too.

I thought that he was really a different kind of human being and that I could talk to him about just about anything and he wouldn't have a judgment, and I found out that that was true. That remained true until the drugs were speaking and Huey was not there anymore.

It was almost like a possession. I know that there are people who were raised in my mother's Pentecostal church who talk about possession and demons; I'm not talking about it from that standpoint. I just remember at one point at the very end of my life in the Party, in 1980, '81, where I would look into Huey's eyes and there was no Huey there anymore. I didn't know what was in there, but it was not Huey. I assumed it to be partially the drugs but I also believe, energetically, that people can succumb to dark forces, that you open yourself to light or you open yourself to dark. It may sound mystical and in a way it is, but it is very practical for me. I operate on energy. I can tell when somebody is okay for me to be around or probably not okay or definitely run in the other direction. When I met Huey Newton in 1971, it was nothing to make me run in the opposite direction. Eldridge Cleaver? Yes, I stayed out of his way – and he definitely was not addicted to anything, it wasn't about that – it was just energy. Bobby, I just loved him from the first sight. He's an open, fun guy, but I couldn't talk to Bobby in the way that I could talk to Huey. They're just two totally different beings. I could talk to Huey about the most vast expanses of human existence. I could share my poetry with him. With Bobby, I could talk to him about community programs and all kinds of things. So, I found a real friend in Huey.

Thomson: You talk about him in the eighties as just having been overtaken by drugs and so forth...

6-00:23:01

Huggins: Yeah, and also by the pressure of the FBI COINTELPRO. I read a document when we got our... through the Freedom of Information Act you can request your files, and we requested the files of the Party. I told you this story –

Thomson: [negative response]

6-00:23:21

Huggins: We requested the Black Panther Party FBI documents and they came in a UPS truck. There must have been, I don't know, 25 boxes of them and every document I read about Huey, the intent was to drive him crazy. Every document. It made me nauseous. There are also the documents that showed how they set up John's and Bunchy's death, how they set up Samuel Napier when he was running the newspapers across the country, how they would

have somebody pour water on the newspapers before they could be delivered or shipped, to damage them, to make them undistributable. The amount of stuff that the FBI's counter-intelligence program did with tax payers' money is just about the most violent thing I could think of and violence, it pretty much breeds violence. Huey was surrounded by people he couldn't trust, intentionally, through the FBI's counter-intelligence program and just by the sheer numbers of people who once they recognized what the Party faced were afraid and would do whatever they could to protect themselves.

After a while the paranoia, a true paranoia, set in with Huey, complicated by the drugs, so he even began to distrust people like David who would never harm a hair on Huey's arm and body. Eventually he distrusted me because I said, "You know, you really want to think about how you're behaving in public."

I used to be one of the people who covered for him if something happened. "You want to be behaving in public. You're violent and I can't do anything about that but you're impacting the school and the children." That was always my standpoint. Do whatever you're going to do if it blows your dress up, but keep the children out of it and keep other people's lives out of it. He didn't like that. That was just before the shit hit the fan with me and Huey. I want to go back though because that's not the seventies. That's the eighties. So you wanted to ask me about the seventies.

Thomson: I do. [tape ends]

Interview 4: October 5, 2007

Audio File 7

7-00:00:03

Thomson: Okay, you ready?

7-00:00:06

Huggins: Yes.

Thomson:

It is October 4th I think. October 5th?

7-00:00:21

Huggins: 5th.

Thomson:

This is Fiona Thomson here with Ericka Huggins. This is the fourth, final probably interview and we're here in Oakland, California and we're going to go ahead and get started.

7-00:00:44

Huggins: Where did we leave off last time?

Thomson:

Well we talked about the school and maybe we want to come back to that more too, I don't know, but I had a question I was hoping to start with today. When we talked last time you had talked a little about what changes you saw in Huey Newton by the early eighties and I wanted to go back to that because I was curious where you located those changes in time because looking at it from the outside, I start to see a level of violence by the mid-seventies and I'm wondering if that feels true to you.

7-00:01:33

Huggins: I knew—you mean his personal violence?

Thomson:

Yeah, but well—

7-00:01:39

Huggins: I knew that he was a particular kind of person and I knew that, for instance, unlike many other people he had unbelievable control and then in the next moment absolutely none. If I were to describe him, and I'm not a professional psychologist, but it wasn't mood swings, it was like he was really, really up at some points and really, really down at others; there are people that think that he was bipolar. I don't know, that's a clinical term used to describe all kinds of things. I would say that he self-medicated and when he did, he was not the most pleasant or peaceful person to be around and when he was sober, he was absolutely peaceful, quiet, shy. Then I got to see him when he was disturbed by external circumstances affecting the Party, or his own life, or the world, because he used me as a confidant in that regard. I didn't see him until very, very late in the years in that other way, let's say in the way that was more manic.

In 1974 I was pregnant with Rasa, my older son, and I got a call that Huey had been out and was arrested for shooting a young prostitute. Never would I think that he would shoot anybody, okay? Beat somebody up? Yes, I'd never seen him do that, but I knew he was capable of it. I know one thing that I asked. I had a strange feeling about it and this all came out later in the trial but he said to one of us, if not directly to me, that it was an accident. I knew him well enough to know when he was covering something up or telling the truth and I really believe he was telling the truth, not because I am Pollyanna but because there was just something about the way he said it, with such remorse. That was the paradox and the dilemma. He didn't want people like that young woman, Kathleen, to be on the street prostituting anyway, yet he was out there with a group of people and she was a part of that group – the lumpen. That's kind of what the term represents, Kathleen and her pimp and all the other people who might have been out there on the streets at that time in 1974.

The next thing I knew, Huey was in exile to Cuba where he was for a number of years and during that time was very focused and clear and so on. People went to visit him, particularly Elaine, and said that she'd never seen him so clear and focused and sober. Not just sober, alcohol and drugs, but sober. Then he came back and found the Party to be in a good place but not a place he took the Party to, and in that more manic phase of his, he was upset with Elaine. When he was not in that manic phase, he had great gratitude for her for everything she had done. This is how we lived. This is the nature of addiction. This is also the nature of the craziness that the external forces and the internal forces in resonance with one another create. I said he fought with his demons and he didn't succeed. That's how I described it, that's how I continue to describe it.

What happened in the late seventies is that I talked to him about this. He would call me to his house late at night and we would talk about any and everything. We were friends, never lovers, although in some stretch of the imagination that could have been possible because Party members were free to have lovers – male, female, multiple lovers anytime they wanted, sometimes with the permission of people who were married to others, and with permission I would say that because we lived on the edge and didn't have great respect for the gendered society we live in or the construct called family, that we created it as we went along to serve us and hopefully not in disservice to anybody. For instance, I was lovers with a man named Al. He was married to Norma, who was one of my best friends. Norma wasn't really in love with Al anymore, she was married to him. So with permission, I was Al's lover and Norma and I are still friends and Al and I are still friends. That was something we created and I'm grateful that we did because it taught me a lot about how people can be with one another. We tried not to be deceitful and devious in our relationships.

Then I noticed that Huey's way of being was continuing to escalate in a very dark way and then he asked me, since I was one of the leaders of the Party

who continued to be around, he trusted me enough to ask me to sell the houses, like the two houses that the school started in, those two houses in North Oakland and some other houses, including the one on 29th Avenue where we had the big dormitory for the school and it became by the way, because I made certain of it, a battered women's shelter, a pretty famous one. So we sold the homes.

Since, we had been confidants not to mention friends, and I was still doing Party work and running the school, at one point I spoke to Huey at the school. He came to the school because he would come to the school to be in the presence of the children. It was like the hub of the Party's activities in a way, and Huey always loved being there because there was a part of him that was like a big kid. I don't mean he never grew up. I mean he was just childlike. He loved it there and the children loved him. But by 1978, '79, he was coming just as a show of power in a certain way. He would come. The men that he traveled with would come and they would kind of hang out and we were like, "What are you doing here?" The staff would say to me, and I think that the children eventually noticed that Huey wasn't as friendly as he used to be, but this was drugs. Straight up, no other reason for it, drugs. Cocaine specifically.

I've done everything you can imagine except heroin but I've never had any strong feeling for drugs, definitely not alcohol, being raised with an alcoholic parent. It just wasn't my thing. I don't have judgments about people for whom it is except when it's affecting me and those around me, and it was definitely affecting all of us, so I spoke up about it one day when he came and sat in my office and was talking to me. The assistant director of the school, Donna Howell, was there.

I said, "Huey, your behavior, which I know is partly caused by the pressures you're experiencing, is having a negative impact on the school and the children, and you're using the money that comes into the school for yourself." You have to understand that he had never done that before. The school was sacred to him. So I knew that the drugs were taking him right over the edge. He looked at me with this fierce look and I know that if I had not been as close to him as a friend, I would have been jumped on when he gave me that look. The men who he traveled with were around too, and I knew them all, they were all my friends, I knew all of them, they were no strangers, but they were all acting like strangers that day, in that moment.

He said, "Say one more thing and I'll knock your teeth down your throat." At which point Donna jumped up out of her seat and she said, "I'm not having this. I'm leaving." And he said, "Sit down or I'll kick your ass." Donna didn't sit but she was totally stunned. I was, I don't even know what the word was, I wasn't shocked but, I don't know how to describe the feeling. It was a mixture of feelings because I believed that he would. He didn't. He didn't touch me but I knew at that moment, I can tell you what I knew: The Huey I knew was

gone. Gone. As a matter of fact, there was a time not too long after that that I looked into his eyes and I don't know who was there, but it wasn't Huey.

I don't remember what year that was but it was after a beautiful event had occurred and that was in January of 1979 I found out— so this had to be late '79, early '80 when that interaction occurred. In January of 1979, which had always been a problematic time for me, it was my birthday and also the anniversary of John's death, so internally it was a melancholy kind of time. My lover at the time, Mark Alexander, who I'd had met through Gwen Newton, Huey's wife at the time, called me and said that there was a man in town, a great being in town and that we should go and see him. When Mark mentioned his name I knew that not only did I want to go to see him but that I wanted to go to see him on my birthday. I said, "That's it, I don't want a party, I want to go and meet him."

A few weeks before that time, mid-December I think because Mark called me very close to New Year's Eve '78, I was in my house by myself. I lived over here in the Lake area and for some reason all of the children were gone and all of my housemates were gone (we still lived collectively). I was vegetarian by this time too. I remember making dinner and then just sort of standing there in the middle of the living room wondering, "Okay, I've got no children. I'm here alone, woo! What am I going to do with this little bit of time?" I really didn't know what to do because it was so extraordinary, you know? I know you know what I mean, as a mom.

I'm standing there and it's a sunny day and I look out the window and I have this feeling that's difficult to describe. It was a feeling that something good was going to happen, and I just rested with the feeling for a second and then I thought, "Let me turn the news on." Now you have to understand, if there's anybody who hates to watch the news, it's me. I feel like it's, first of all, slanted, untrue mostly, and 99% negative. I kept abreast of what was going on in the world but I didn't feel I also needed the news and the newscasters who were a cast of characters. But I turned on the news. It was around 6 o'clock, it was still light outside in the funny California winter. So I turned the news on and as I did, the first thing I saw was this brown man with a brown ski cap and a brown, it looked to me, cashmere coat that came to his calves and he had on an Indian man's wrap. A lungi is what it's called. I looked at him and I thought, "Who is that?" Then I saw, and it looked like he was walking toward the camera people, toward the microphones, coming from, it looked to me, a parking lot or something, I couldn't quite tell. I was later able to figure out that he was in an airport walking from, I guess from de-boarding his plane. The camera people focused on him and then mics were put under his nose.

I forgot to say that this was all happening in a period of time when I was really, really sad. Why? Because all of these people had been killed in Jonestown. I had friends at the time, educator friends and personal friends who had gone to the People's Temple, who had close friends and relatives,

even grandparents, in Guyana. All those people had died and I couldn't figure it out. My buddy and fellow teacher and friend JoNina Abron and I did some research on Jonestown to figure out what had gone on. Sure, we found out about the CIA's involvement, psychoactive drugs and the escalation of odd behavior in Jim Jones. It reminded me of the escalation of the odd behavior in Huey Newton. I don't know if anybody fed Huey psychoactive drugs. I'm not prone to be naturally paranoid but I did consider it at one point. I knew all of that was true, all of those things were true about Jonestown and I had a question that was touching my heart, deep in my spirit. Why would all of these people do what this man said? Beyond the mass psychology of it, because that's there too, like in Hitler's time, why did those people go along with that horror? Beyond that, why did this occur in this time in history? Such a beautiful concept of building a new order, a new world, a new village, a model village that started out really beautifully actually, and all I could come to was that there was something deficit in the spirit of the people and that man. I didn't know except that. I didn't know what that meant.

Rewinding forward, we have this man standing at an airport, probably San Francisco Airport, with microphones under his nose and the newscasters are pouncing on him. This is a time when spiritual teachers coming in from anywhere to America were sensationalized and the events of Jonestown and Jim Jones brought it into highlight because Americans, we hadn't gotten to the point where we were questioning our Catholic priests. We really let people like Billy Graham slide and we know that we have all kinds of scandalous behavior going on in the Christian Church and in the Vatican. Again, I think I have to look at the intersections of race and class and culture, not just race, culture when Americans look at anything skewed by cultural ignorance.

So they said to him when they held the microphone under his nose, "Why have you come here?" I thought, "What an ignorant question. This is why I don't watch the news." I was thinking to myself. He said, "I've come to teach meditation." The cameras are clicking and the casters are all talking all over each other. Every major news station was there, it seemed. They said to him, "What's your name?" And I didn't catch his name. "Where have you come from?" And he said, "India." They said, "What do you think about Jonestown?" Thank goodness for whatever reason, the man knew what they were talking about and he said, "I don't know about that. If you want to know about that, ask a politician. I'm not a politician. I've come here to start the meditation revolution. I've come here for peoples' hearts," or "to touch peoples' hearts."

I stood there with my mouth dropped open watching this screen thinking, "What a beautiful thing, the meditation revolution!" Since, of course, you know I meditated, I knew what he meant. He meant that he wanted people to go deep into their hearts and work with the darkness that resides there, the war that resides there, the enmity that resides there, the tendency to follow blindly that resides there – to experience the power within themselves. "When you

can do that," I'm thinking to myself, "you're resonant with the power outside you." I stood there watching him and when he said this to the newscasters, "I've come to start a meditation revolution. I've come to touch people's hearts," he nodded at them and as if he had said something, they moved their microphones out of his way and he strode on. I mean, he strode and I've never seen anyone walk like that. It was unbelievable. It wasn't a swagger, it wasn't a posturing. It was just with such ease and such power and such grace. That newscast went off and some other inane something came up and I clicked off the TV and I stood there in front of the TV and I stood there so long that, then TV's had you know, you would watch the little white dot go off as the TV finally ended it's "on" power. I thought to myself, "Whoa!"

When Mark called me a couple of week later, fast forward again, I did not connect that with who he had said except that when he said the man's name, Swami Muktananda, something in me just leapt up in my heart. Like, "I know him!" All I could say to Mark was, "That's where we're going on my birthday." So we went.

I met Swami Muktananda, which is, in itself, the timeframe was a couple of hours long but a whole lifetime transpired in that time, at which time for the first time in my life, when I met him, I experienced myself without titles, without adjectives, without judgment, without all my different identities trailing after it. It was just purely me. It was the most amazing transformative experience in that one moment, to be seen – beyond a poster, and a button, and all that other stuff. That's a really long story. It belongs in the book.

The other really long part of, or prequel to this story is that when I was in prison teaching myself to meditate, I read a book in which the Hindu trilogy was discussed: Shiva, Rama, Vishnu. I focused on Shiva which means the supreme self. When it was time to be handcuffed and ride the hour or so to go to the courthouse, I would repeat the word Shiva. When I was in court, I would repeat the word Shiva. When I meditated before I left to go to court or at the end of the day if the court day had been difficult, like the day I was on the stand, I would repeat that word. When I got in the long line of people on January 5, 1979, ten years after being released from prison, I was standing there waiting to meet Swami Muktananda and have that moment with him because that was what people used to do then. It's an Indian tradition. It's called darshan and it means two things. It means, to see and it also means to be in the company of the truth or in the company of a saint or a great being. As I was standing in the line, I was looking around in the ashram. I met Swami Muktananda at the Siddha Yoga Meditation Center in Oakland. It's nickname is the Oakland Ashram. I was standing there looking at everything and there were beautiful pictures on the walls and a picture of Swami Muktananda's guru, his teacher above his chair, the chair he was sitting in. We called Swami Muktananda, "Baba" which means spiritual father. That's the best way to describe it. He had a beautiful wand of peacock feathers, again a traditional way of blessing. I was just watching it. There was beautiful music

playing and I was standing in the line, then I noticed above his chair, a framed strip of words: "Om Namah Shivaya". And I looked, like, "That's the word Shiva!" I tapped Mark and I said, "That's Shiva!"

I was being escorted in the line by this woman who was hosting me and I stopped in the line and I couldn't walk, because if I had repeated Shiva all those many years ago and it had a great impact on me then, what was about to happen to me? I was so startled at the serendipity of it. So I asked the woman who was escorting me in the line, she was just going to introduce me to Swami Muktananda, I asked her what it meant. She said it meant, "I call upon the supreme self within me." In other words, I call upon God within me as God exists for me. That had always been my belief, from a child asking my mother, "Okay, Jesus, alright, got Jesus, well who was his father? Okay, God, okay, well who was God's father?" She could never answer me. I said, "Don't I have God inside me?" when I was little, and she said, "No you don't." "Why not?" Well again, all these reminders of what I had been looking for all my life were right there in that moment, which is what was so, almost funny in a certain way, and remarkably poignant.

So when I met him, I knew I was about to meet myself also, which is exactly what happened. Then the very next day I called Huey and I said, "Huey, I have just met the greatest human being in my life." He goes, "Who?" And I said, "Swami Muktananda." Now you have to know that Huey practiced Zen Buddhism from time to time, so he was familiar with spiritual teachers. He didn't have any aversion to them. We didn't necessarily think like Americans think, and I'm glad we didn't. He said, "I'll go and meet him with you," and I took Huey to meet him. Later Gwen, Huey's wife at the time, came to meet him and then I brought many other people from the school and from the Party to meet him and I brought all of the children from the school to meet him. It was beautiful. Everyone had a beautiful experience of themselves.

As time went on in that year of 1979, Huey got more and more agitated because what he was faced within the presence of a spiritual teacher is what we all face, our own beauty and the things that need some work. I think that his agita was because he was smart enough to know that there were some things he needed to take care of, primarily his addictions, and that it would be a long road to hoe. He was already aware of it. His friends in the entertainment industry, and he had many of them, had given him money to go into rehab. Interventions had been done. All kinds of loving, caring things had been done but he would find a reason not to stay.

We found out later, I don't know if its true or not, but I'll say it because it touched my heart, that Huey had been sexually abused by his father. I have lots of women friends and I have some male friends too who have been addicted, and when they hit that place where it's time to deal with that, they use, because it's so hard. It's so heart-shattering and it takes a lot of courage. That made things make sense to me. In addition, I was told after his death, that

he had been given a bipolar diagnosis and refused to take medication. He just refused and I don't blame him because the medications at that time were horrible.

Then in 1979 his behavior escalated. Going backward and now forward again, Ericka ends up in a room with Donna Howe, Huey Newton, and some of his cohorts and he threatens to knock her teeth down her throat. At the end of 1979 it was at its worst.

By December, 1979 I had invited Baba to come and meet the children at the Children's House on 29th Avenue. He said, "I'm very busy." I had no idea. I was so not used to anybody who was an international teacher like he was. I had no idea then what that meant. Now, when I think of it, I just laugh. When he said he was busy, he wasn't kidding. There were, I would say, thousands of people from all over the world that he was in contact with. But he did send people to help us prepare a meditation center in the basement of that house.

Did I tell you about the basement of that house? This was the dorm where the children lived and it became a meditation center, that basement, and people came from all over the community and that part of the Fruitvale area to learn to meditate, and we taught the children to meditate and so on. When the house got sold and it became the battered women's shelter, I stayed in contact with the director of the shelter for a while to make certain things were okay and everything was as she had hoped and she said, "But I have one question." And I go, "What is that?" And she said, "What went on in that basement?" And I said, "Oh, we meditated there, those of us who lived there, the children, staff but also people from around the neighborhood." She said, "Hmm. Thank you. That makes sense. That is the place that the most traumatized families love to go. They go to the basement to feel peaceful. They go there just to sit." I said, "That's what we did. We went there to sit." Because we had long removed the paintings on the walls – some people painted beautiful Indian pictures on the walls – it was just white walls, but it was deeper than the walls, deeper than the carpet. It was in the cellular makeup of that room, this beautiful energy. So that was very touching.

At the very end of 1979, something happened. I haven't quite figured out how I'm going to say it in my book but I'm going to say it. Bettina Aptheker, in her book *Intimate Politics*, talks about learning from – she's Buddhist now – learning from a spiritual teacher that she respected, that it's important to bear witness. She quotes him by saying, "To shine light all over something so that no one can say it didn't happen." That teacher and Bettina quoting him didn't mean you point your finger, you blame, you judge, you defame the person or the organization or the situation. You just tell your story.

My story that I want to bear witness about is that at the beginning of December of 1979, I was living in a house, another house in the Lake area where I also had people to come and meditate once a week. I was living there

with my children, Rasa and Mai, on Weldon Avenue. I told you earlier that Huey would often call me to his house to sit and chat with him. That was a common thing and continued to be so, but less frequently in 1979 because his addictive behavior had escalated. There were more and more times when he was in that manic state than not. He really wasn't doing any Party work that I could think of, but I was spending 60, 70 hours with the school, not to mention I was raising my children. My daughter was ten and Rasa was five. Maybe, they were, no, maybe they were eleven and six by that time. I'm not sure. At any rate, my daughter, this particular day that I am going to describe, my daughter was spending the night with someone, a friend of hers, and Rasa was asleep. I heard a knock on the door at ten or eleven at night. The state that I was in was really torn between continuing to stay with the Black Panther Party and pursuing my spiritual path. I wasn't torn because I had thought that political action and spiritual action can't go together. That wasn't it. It was Huey's behavior which was setting a new tone and giving a new flavor to what work was being done and also most of the men around him weren't doing any Party work at all anymore. They were just with him. It was as if they just lived for the streets.

I got this knock on the door and I saw a man I know, actually he's my nephew's father, I could see him standing outside. I knew that Huey must be with him because this man and Huey, George and Huey, traveled together at night. So I opened the door. It was Huey, my friend. When Huey came in, he was crazy. I don't mean he was saying words that were crazy. He was crazy. He then, I don't know how much he had been using or for how long, but he was on some kind of binge and George was his normal, peaceful, quiet, stoic self. George stepped to the side to let Huey through. Huey said, "Where's your bedroom?" I think that means, "I want to talk to you privately," because quite often when I would go to visit Huey, I would go into his bedroom. It was like his bedroom was his quiet place, his sanctuary. I said, "It's upstairs. What's up?" He goes, "Follow me." So I went upstairs and then he raped me.

I can give you the details, moment by moment, of how it occurred, but I will say that rape, we all know never has anything to do with sex and this certainly didn't. It was violent. I was violated. I'm saying it matter-of-factly because I know that it's true. I don't care what women writing books, the scholars that talk about rape or the psychologists or psychiatrists or whoever they are, it is the most violent thing, I think, that a person could do to another person, man or woman, and women can do it too. Let's be real.

I have to say that that behavior in Huey shocked me. I had never been shocked by any of his behavior. Kind of like, "Oh! What is going on with you?" but this shocked me. Of course, right before it occurred, Rasa, my son, had this intuition to leap out of his bed and come running into my room as he normally did when he could. Rasa has always had this sixth sense of me, and he jumped in my bed. Maybe he had had a bad dream or maybe he had a nightmare or something, but he jumped in my bed and he, not realizing anybody was

there—Huey just quietly said, "Send him back to his room." Because I was afraid for Rasa, but I felt like his presence was a kind of a protection. I don't know how to describe it. I'm not glad that Rasa was there, but I'm glad that Rasa was there.

I don't know how much time went by, but before he left he said, "If you say anything about this to anybody, I'll hurt your children." That is all a person has to say to me and most any other mom. Moms are hardwired to protect their children. So because he had done what he had done, what would make me think he wouldn't do something to my children?

I remembered sitting in my bedroom after he left. He went downstairs, told George, "We're going." They left. I don't know where they went. I didn't really care. But because he said he'd hurt my children he was able to continue this for a month. Kind of like blackmail, kind of like some kind of odd trap, and no one knew. About two weeks into this month— I was a zombie too. I didn't sleep well. I didn't eat well. I felt, I was about to say this when I said I don't care what people write in books: the woman who has this happen to her feels like dirt. It's just something that goes with the territory. I guess because you wish you could do something so that it hadn't occurred and you wonder, "Isn't there anything that I could have done to prevent it? What did I do wrong?" Women who are physically abused have the same thoughts and the same feelings. So at least twice a week for the month of December, he would call me to his house so that this is what he did. My children intuited something because quite often I would come back to the house and I'll tell you, no one knew, just me, and I would come back to my house because Sumiko, my housemate, still lived with me, it was okay for me to leave them. They were sleeping. He would always call very late at night. I couldn't even tell Sumiko because I was so afraid for the children. One night and then regularly thereafter, I came home and Mai and Rasa were huddled together in the bed. They never slept in the same bed. They were afraid or Rasa was afraid and Mai was comforting him.

[Edited segment explaining the choice to leave the Party]

The first thing on my mind was that that meant that I would also have to sever ties with Mark, not to mention all these friends I had in the Party, and I certainly wasn't going to make some broadcast announcement about why. And I was going to have to leave the school. But my inner life and my outer life depended on it.

I spent the weekend in Santa Monica. I called from Santa Monica, from a phone booth to Huey and he was sober and clear. I said to him, "Huey, I'm leaving. I'm not taking anything that belongs to you and I'm resigning from anything that has to do with the Party." He said, "Turn over your car keys," he had given me a car, "and your ring," he had given each of us in leadership in the Party a beautiful gold ring that had a panther on it. I thought that was kind

of odd – what is he going to do with my ring? But it was symbolic and I said, "Fine." He said, "You can give them to so and so." And I said, "Fine." He said, "Have a great life, dear." And that was the end of it.

I went home and on the plane, every time I would close my eyes I would have this amazing meditation. Every time I'd sit for meditation, it'd be amazingly deep, this velvety, peaceful expanse which the great ones call the void, where there isn't any thought, there isn't any chatter, there's no particular anything. It's totally, totally peaceful. My life became very, very peaceful.

Of course, in the time that it was becoming peaceful, I also had nightmares and I was physically not myself but as time went on, I healed. I think meditation had a great part to play in my healing – thank goodness. My children became happier again. I didn't tell them until they were adults, because of what use would it be? I did let them know during the time that it was all happening and right after that I wasn't feeling well, that I wasn't myself and it had nothing to do with them, so that they were clear that something was happening, but I didn't need to tell them what. Furthermore, Mai was good friends with Jessica, Gwen's daughter, Huey's step-daughter, so I didn't want her to think that she would not be able to be in touch with all of her friends because I told her that if she wanted to be in touch with all of her friends, that was fine. It had nothing to do with me. I didn't distrust anybody in the Party. I just couldn't remain.

Leaving the school and leaving Mark were the two hardest things, the school because of the children. Donna knew why I was leaving, I think she was the only one who knew the real reason, and my friend Adrienne who was the accountant for the school. Both Donna and Adrienne had also met Baba, so I knew I would continue to see them and a few other people because they came to the ashram, but I really had to sever ties, and I finally was able to sever ties with Mark within three weeks after I came home from Santa Monica. It was very difficult because I really loved him a lot, however, it was made less difficult by the fact that he didn't believe me when I told him that Huey raped me. That made it easier, but the sad part was that I felt like I lost a friend. We have on some level reclaimed our friendship. I'll bump into him. Oddly enough, the both times I've seen him other than a funeral have been at the ashram. That's always been nice. He's a good man.

The thing about Huey Newton is this: he was a good man too. So how I remember him is for the good things that he did do. I don't choose to remember him as a horrible person because I feel like we all have demons, and I don't excuse a person for the things that they do, operating from their demons, I don't mean that, but I don't hold anybody in place, because I don't want to be held in place either. We all can transform.

The indication that I had moved through and healed is that one day I was on the freeway, on the 580 freeway, driving to work at a new job, still working