Twitter Thread by Hasan Kwame Jeffries

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Dear friends, most of you know about my brother Hakeem - (he's the older one, i'm the prettier one). But you don't know about my brother Dave. Dave was born a year after Hakeem and year before me - when my parents brought me home, I met both my brothers at the same time.

Dave's parents owned the home we all grew up in - 185 Rogers avenue in Brooklyn, a three story, multi-family house in the heart of Crown Heights. For the first 7 or so years of my life, Dave lived on the ground floor, Hakeem & I on the third floor. We played together night & day.

Then Dave and his parents moved to Englewood Cliffs, NJ; a world away as far as we were concerned. But we stayed in touch, alternating calling each other on weekends, when it was cheaper to talk, but even then we could only talk for 30 minutes before we had to hangup.

But Dave's mom, Beulah Blaine, Aunt Bea to us, made sure "her boys" still spent time together. We never missed a birthday together. And during school breaks and summers, she'd drive back to Brooklyn to pick Hakeem and I up so we could spend weekends and weeks in Jersey.

Those were glorious days. We'd play video and role playing games inside the house (yep, that's how three Black boys from Brooklyn got down in the early 80s) and run around and ride bikes outside on their expansive, wooded corner lot.

Aunt Bea & Uncle Dave also took us with them on their weekend jaunts to Atlantic City-where the three of us spent hours hanging out on the boardwalk & at arcades. This was pre-cell phone, so Aunt Bea just turned us loose with a only a time to come back. Imagine that.

High school changed nothing. Christmas break, Aunt Bea would drop Dave off to spend a few days at our house, which my parents bought around the corner from Rogers Ave a year or two after Dave moved. Or she'd make the 3 hour round trip to pick us up.

Then college came. Hakeem headed off to Binghamton first. I knew i was going to Morehouse in two years, so i convinced Dave to head there, which he did. I followed him a year later.

Hakeem majored in political science. I majored in history. And Dave, who eventually finished school back home at Rutgers Newark, majored in both. We now spent less time together, but the time we spent was still rich. It was also during this time that i learned more about Aunt Bea

She grew up in rural North Carolina, picking cotton as a child. She liked to tell how Aunt May, who i just assumed was her sister, used to pee in the cotton satchel to make it heavier so she could make weight. Her life was an amazing window into the Black experience.

She also shared how she would stand in the field and stare at the horizon, wondering what was beyond, and if she would ever get to see what was. Well she did. She joined the exodus to New York city, and worked in Harlem before settling in Brooklyn and Jersey w/ Uncle Dave.

Along the way she became a fierce cook. She loved her kitchen, and had a grand one in Jersey, her soaps, and her politics. Many years later, when she cast a ballot for Obama, she would proudly say "hands that picked cotton picked the president."

In recent years, Aunt Bea's health began to fade. But when you grow up in the Jim Crow South you know how to fight and survive. And that she did. But last year, the fight was wearing on her.

Last March, when i spoke at Flagler in St. Aug, Florida, Dave drove up from South Florida just to kick it. He said Aunt Bea, who lived a hour or so North in Orlando with his sister Cynthia and niece Tori wasn't doing well and suggested a visit from me might boost her spirits.

I was down but I had to catch 6am flight the next day out of Orlando. Dave said we could still pop in; Aunt Bea slept irregularly. So we left St. Aug at 3am, Dave in the lead, me following in my rental, and made it to Aunt Bea a little after 4.

Dave woke Aunt Bea, whose tv was tuned to MSNBC or maybe it was CNN, and told her she had a surprise guest. When i walked in, Aunt Bea squinted and stared, and then said "Hakeem!?!" ■ Dave and I cracked up. "No," I said, "it's Hasan, the baby." ■

I sat bedside for about 15 mins, long enough to hold her hand while I answered,"yes, I was still teaching; yes, my girls are all doing great; and yes, Trump is awful." Then left o catch my plane. At the airport, I texted Hakeem, and from DC or NY, he called Aunt Bea.

When I talked to Dave later, he said Aunt Bea's spirits were lifted by my visit and the "Congressman's call."

Aunt Bea carried on, continuing to live life, enjoying visits with Dave and her grands. Until yesterday.

Dave called yesterday in the early evening, much earlier than he ever does. I answered with a bit of hesitation and dread. He was speeding to Orlando. Aunt Bea was in the hospital. She had contracted Covid. "Today is Beulah Blaine's last day," he said.

We stayed on the phone for an hour plus as Dave raced to Orlando to say goodbye, interrupted by calls from the hospital checking on his distance. He shared that he went up a few weeks ago, just to see her, despite being too busy to do so. "The

best decision of my life," he said.

They had talked then (socially distanced), but they wouldn't get to talk now. Aunt Bea was already no responsive.

We reminisced as he drove, talking about all the things Aunt Bea had done for him, and so many others, including Hakeem and I. No tears were shed, just hearty laughs. He shared too how proud she was to have voted for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Hands that picked cotton...

As Dave neared Orlando, the calls were coming more frequently, so we signed off. "Thanks, Hasan." Dave said. "You don't know how much i needed this." "That's what brothers do," I said. We said our "'I love you's" and hung up.

Dave texted about an hour later - "Mom passed." He had made it safely to Orlando, but not in time to see her off.

Last night, December 17, 2020, Beulah "Aunt Bea" Blaine, born February 2 1934, joined the ancestors, where i'm sure she is already preparing one hell of feast for all those who have gone before her.

She is one of the 300,000, but she will always be so much more than that - mother to my brother Dave, aunt to my Hakeem and I, grandmother, wife, friend to so many.

Born during segregation, she beat Jim Crow, creating a pathway for herself to live a rich and rewarding life, and for my brothers and I to do the same. Her life was a blessing, and all that she did to keep the three of us together was too.

Today Aunt Bea dances with the ancestors. And today I say thank you. ■■

Hakeem, Dave, and I in Brooklyn, upstairs. ■ Aunt Bea kept us together ■■

