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The Faith of Tracy Martin and of Sybrina Fulton

Even though I am broken hearted my faith is unshattered. I WILL ALWAYS LOVE MY BABY TRAY.

--Tracy Martin

Lord during my darkest hour I lean on you. You are all that I have.

--Sybrina Fulton

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton relied upon their faith from the moment their son Trayvon Martin was killed. They needed faith to rally support to get George Zimmerman—their son’s killer—arrested and charged with murder. They needed faith to listen to a 911 call that recorded screams that they believe were the last cries of their son. They needed faith to hear the gunshot that took his life. When a jury found Zimmerman not guilty of the murder of their son, their faith kept them standing.

Theirs is a faith that reaches back through time to touch the faith of our ancestors. It is a faith that stood upright in east African when the first homo sapiens became the divine animal gifted with the capacity for rational thought and with the ability to use symbols to symbolize a future hope. Theirs is the same faith that built the pyramids and ruled ancient Egypt with the faith of Akhenaton’s monotheism, the faith of Ptolemy’s great library, with Hatshepsut’s administrative genius, and Cleopatra’s guile.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton’s faith is the faith of the Queen of Sheba who dazzled and was dazzled by King Solomon. It is the faith that sings “I am black and beautiful” in the Song of Songs. It is the faith of Black Jesus, of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus. It is the faith of the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized on the side of the road and became one of the first Christian converts. And biblical wisdom is true which tells us that the first shall be last and the last first. African peoples who laid the foundations for human civilization became enslaved and the faith of African mothers and fathers in a god that was once human, a god who knows in the god’s own being the pain and anger, the terror and tears, and exquisite joy of human existence became and remains their all in all.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton’s faith is the faith of African fathers and mothers who watched their children kidnapped and sold into slavery. Their faith is the survival faith of women, men and children loaded like inhuman cargo onto slave ships, forced to lie in their own filth, often chained to the sick, the insane, the dying and the dead as they endured the unspeakable horror of the Middle Passage. How many prayed Sybrina Fulton’s prayer? “Lord, during my darkest hour, I lean on you. You are all that I have.”

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton’s faith is the faith of African men, women, and children sold at auction like animals, insulted and inspected, sold away from family and friends, listed on a ledger along with other property. Their faith helped them to maintain their human dignity in the face of a

dehumanizing reality. This faith kept enslaved Africans sane and able to dream of the day when freedom would come. It was the faith that sang: "Oh freedom, Oh freedom over me and before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free."

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton's faith is the faith of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott and countless other Quakers and white allies who helped enslaved Africans escape slavery through the Underground Railroad. Theirs is the faith of all the soldiers who fought and died during the Civil War and who understood that the end of slavery was the true moral purpose of the war. Theirs was the faith of Thaddeus Stevens and of Abraham Lincoln.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton's faith is the faith of the Freedman's Bureau and all those who worked to educate freed men, women, and children thus laying the foundation of public education for both blacks and whites in the south. It is the faith that made many newly freed African-Americans take to the road to reunite their families. It is the faith that sustained them through the indentured servitude of the share cropping system. It is the faith that kept black families together on the levee in Greenville, Mississippi during the Great Flood of 1927. It is the faith that took countless African-Americans to cities in the north and in the west during the Great Migration. It is the faith that kept survivors of pogroms—misnamed race riots—in the early twentieth century from falling into a debilitating pit of hatred and of self pity.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton's faith is the faith of Ida B. Wells Barnett and her struggle against lynching. It is the faith of W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey. It is the faith of Mary Church Terrell and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the women's club movement. It is the faith of Mary Mcleod Bethune and her efforts to educate African-Americans. It is the faith that inspired the Johnson brothers to write the anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing." It is the faith of the founders of the NAACP and the Urban League. It is the faith of A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton's faith is the faith that like steel in their souls wrote the literature of the Harlem Renaissance and the music of the jazz age. It is the faith that crafted the politics of the New Deal that created the Works Progress Administration that provided jobs during the Great Depression. It is thanks to workers in this program that we have the slave narratives and monumental works of art and architecture. Theirs is the same faith that is the backbone and bravery of the Tuskegee Airmen and all of the African-American warriors who fought in all of this nation's wars. Theirs is the faith of Mahatma Gandhi who worked through nonviolent means to end British rule in India and inspired Martin Luther King and others to embrace nonviolence as a tactic for social change. Theirs is the faith of all people all over the world who work every day to wage peace. Theirs is the faith of Nelson Mandela who survived 27 years in prison to lead a nation to end apartheid (pronounced apart hate).

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton's faith is the faith of Mamie Till whose son Emmett was also killed for no good reason and whose determination to allow the world to see the truth of her son's death helped to spark the civil rights movement. It is the faith of Rosa Parks and of all of the nameless,

ordinary people who walked and car pooled for 381 days during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It is the faith of the civil rights movement and all the people—black and white—, who went to jail, took a beating, and some who gave their lives for the sake of justice, voting rights, and equal protection under the law. It is the faith of the Chicano movement and of the American Indian Movement. It is the faith of feminism, womanism, and LGBTQIA rights, and of the environmental movement, of organized labor and Solidarity, and of liberation theology. Theirs is the faith of Malcolm X and of Betty Shabazz, of Martin Luther King, Jr. and of Coretta Scott King, of Bayard Rustin, James Baldwin, the Black Arts Movement, Public Enemy, and the political consciousness of the International Hip-Hop nation.

The faith of Tracy Martin and of Sabrina Fulton is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Their faith is the blessed assurance of a more perfect union and of the possibility that human beings working with a will can envision the day and bring into existence that day when every parent's child in every city, town, village, hamlet, and wide space in the road in the United States of America and across the globe will be free to go to the store after dark and return home safely. Theirs is a faith that one day we all will be free.