



## Chauncey Bailey's Family Shares Their Memories

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Lorelei Waqia, sister of fallen journalist Chauncey Bailey.

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For the family of fallen journalist Chauncey Bailey, this past Thanksgiving would have been a dual celebration of gratitude and life, but it just wasn't the same without him. Even though California State University Northridge and the Los Angeles Press Club recently honored him with a plaque adding his name to the Fallen Journalists Memorial, the holidays will be tainted with sadness.

"I was very proud of him for being recognized in such a way. We were all very surprised," said Lorelei Waqia, Bailey's older sister, who would rather know her brother is alive celebrating Thanksgiving and her birthday, which fell on the same day this year.

"With all of us Chauncey was in the back of our minds," she said. Waqia, who just turned 59 on Thanksgiving Day, said she was happy to have her brother Mark Cooley and other family members come out for Thanksgiving, because their company helped keep their minds off their sadness.

"Thanksgiving for us is our biggest holiday. It's when everybody gets together," she said, "This year it fell on my birthday and I knew if Chauncey was still here he would have called. That was kind of sad, but my daughters and my sons kept me real busy. But, it was still in the back of my mind." Waqia also said she sympathizes for Bailey's 14 year old son who spent the holiday his first holiday without his father, and will do so for the rest of his life.

A masked gunman murdered Chauncey Bailey on the morning of August 2, 2007 while he was walking to his office at The Oakland Post where he had just been promoted to editor. At the time of his death, he was working on a story related to a local business, Your Black Muslim Bakery, which his articles linked to numerous crimes including drug trafficking, sexual abuse, robbery, burglary, and extortion. The gunman, 19-year-old Devaughndre Broussard confessed to the crime, but the murder is still under investigation. Oakland police are investigating the criminal records and business operations of the Bey family, who have owned Your Black Muslim bakery for over 30 years. At this time the motive for Bailey's murder is still undetermined. This past October, Chauncey would have turned 58 years old.

Lorelei, who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, remembers Chauncey as a resourceful handyman who did whatever he could to support his family and friends.

"He just wanted people to be informed and know what was going on in the world around them and in the community. And, I didn't know until he passed that he mentored so many people," she said, "If you showed any interest in anything, he would direct it towards journalism. I met a lady at the funeral service who said she told him that she sold Mary Kay, so he said 'I'm going to give you a column in the newspaper and you're going to be our beauty consultant.' He was always the go-to guy."

Although Bailey's interests were mainly in journalism, he also wrote screenplays. Waqia said that prior to his murder,



her brother was talking to Lion's Gate Films to pick up his screenplay as well as a studio for a possible sitcom pilot.

"He was into screenplays, writing books, and mentoring people but he wasn't the type of person to brag about any of it," she said, "He was very unassuming."

But, Waqia said her brother's dedication to journalism was so strong that his enthusiasm for the profession marked almost every aspect of who he was as a person.

"Chauncey was a man of little words. If he was to call me or if I was to call him, I would have to think exactly what to say because he was always busy and always on the move, so I had to be right to the point and then off the phone," she said, "His whole life was journalism. He lived it, breathed it, talked about it. Even one in casual conversation he was always referring to a story. He was very fact-oriented and liked to have his facts in a row. If you said anything he'd look for the facts, give them to you, and then ask for your opinion before he gave his."

She said that as a child Bailey was a shy, studious boy who wasn't very social and who eventually blossomed in college.

"He didn't say much. Unlike my other brothers and I, who were kind of popular, Chauncey was always into his school work. He was an 'A-B' student whereas we were 'C' students because we were always hanging out with our friends," Waqia said, "He really came into his own when he went to San Jose State University. As far as having a lot of girlfriends or a lot of friends, he really didn't, until he got to college."

Waqia and her four brothers, all of them raised by their mother and step-father (all five children come from five different fathers), grew up in Hayward, California before they separated to go on their own career paths.

"Even though we came from different fathers we all stuck together. They were still my brothers in my eyes because we all came from the same mother," she said.

Waqia said she is proud of her brother's work and believes his legacy will continue to have a positive impact on the community he strove to spotlight in the public eye.

"Professionally, he was an activist for the community who was always out there helping people and sharing knowledge. He was a good friend, a good brother, an uncle and a father," she said, "He was there for everybody, especially the younger generation, because he saw them going in a direction that was so violent and volatile. Everyone was becoming so numb to life. He wanted to change that."

Lorelei said that Bailey's willingness to help others should have been something to keep his murderers from taking his life and improving their own.

"They were the type of people that Chauncey would have helped. They just murdered their future, because he was the type of person who would have taken them under his wing and direct them toward a better life and a different way of looking at things," she said, adding that the justice she wants for her brother is for the truth to come out.

"I want to know the truth. I want to know why and who took him away," she said, "I'll leave it to the justice system to decide what should be done. I'm not a revengeful person but I will let justice take its course. It's just really sad. It's over nothing, over a story. "

Bailey's brother, Mark Cooley, a freelance writer who is currently contributing to The Oakland Post, said he is pleased with CSUN's recent honoring of Chauncey but that he would prefer to see him alive while receiving accolades.

"If I had a choice I would rather have him be alive and talk to him on the telephone, but the memorial is appreciated. It doesn't necessarily help everything that's going on in my mind," he said, "It hasn't been six months yet. Everyone mourns differently. I've had to deal with some of my own personal health issues that have put a lot of different things in perspective."

"Sometimes memorials are in the eye of the beholder. Everybody on the outside can go by the wall and appreciate it, but if you're a family member it puts you on a different tip," Cooley said, adding that his recent bout with his newly diagnosed skin cancer added to the strain of coping with Chauncey's death.

"On one hand you appreciate the acknowledgement. You appreciate the memorial and the honor. On the other hand, you feel like you lost someone to a drowning, and you got to drive by that field and see that fence up when it could've been up prior to what happened." He said it adds up to a reminder of a world that is "unknown and uncontrollable."

Cooley, who lives in Modesto, CA said he admires his brother's dedication to seeking the truth and championing diversity in the media.

"I admire him for being able to talk to someone like Nelson Mandela or go down to the street level and talk to a drug dealer," he said, "I hope that some of his objectives never be forgotten and that his work will be continued."

After his brother's death, the publisher of The Oakland Post took Cooley "under his wing" and hired him to work on stories on freelance basis. He said he reminded his publisher of Chauncey. Now he dedicates part of his time to covering the same community Chauncey worked to address in his news stories, which has also helped Cooley in healing his emotional wounds by following one of his lifelong dreams, writing.

"At the same time I'm pursuing a dream. I always wanted to write, so that helps a lot," he said, adding that he had recently been diagnosed and treated with skin cancer shortly before Bailey was murdered. Cooley said he is proud to be writing and reporting for his brother's newspaper, and said he hopes to contribute to Chauncey's legacy by keeping a pulse on the communities he covered. Although he has done many opinion pieces, he has begun to ease into hard news stories in the vein of his brother's work.

"When I was interviewed on 60 Minutes I was asked if I am trying to fill his shoes and I told them I couldn't. His shoes will never be filled nor will he be replaced, however, I can continue to pave the path that he had carved out," he said.

Cooley also said that his work as a writer keeps him spiritually connected to his brother, and that he keeps in mind the goals he strove to achieve.

"I wake up a lot of mornings and I can feel his presence behind me," Cooley said, "I can feel him on a spiritual level. I can feel him looking over my shoulder as I'm writing. I get a lot of heartfelt points that can hit me at any time, so I get on the keyboard and keep it with me so I won't lose my train of thought."

He also credits his faith and spiritual relationship with Bailey as being instrumental in not only healing himself but others who knew him personally and professionally.

"My faith in God and his spirit has a lot to do with me being able to heal. And the best part of me being able to write at the newspaper that he was writing at, which is a small black newspaper where my brother was doing everything, is that since I've been working there I'm bringing a sense of optimism."

Cooley said he believes Chauncey's legacy will live on with the help of the Chauncey Bailey Project as well as his own contributions to The Oakland Post. He said the truth surrounding his death and the activities of Your Black Muslim Bakery will eventually be exposed.

Cooley said he is proud of the work that the Chauncey Bailey Project has done in continuing to produce the kind of work his brother committed himself to.

"I think it's moving in the right direction. I enjoy the fact that you've got a bunch of competing newspapers that wouldn't normally be sitting at the same table that are now working together. That's an honor in itself to have a bunch of newspaper and TV stations that are now working in unison toward a goal to find out what went on. That's always a good thing in my eyes."

He also said that if he is given the chance to say something to the person or people responsible for his brother's murder he would comment on their failure to keep his message from being heard.

"I would tell them that they were trying to stop his message, but they actually just started it."

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