'I Want You To Know What They Did To My Boy'

(Below is the complete text of the address delivered by Mrs. Mamie Bradley, of Chicago, during the rally of the Baltimore NAACP at Bethel AME Church Sunday, Oct. 23.)

(Mrs. Bradley is the mother of Emmett Louis Till, the 14-year-old boy, who was kidnapped, lynched, and his bruised and weighted body thrown in the Tallahatchie River in LeFlore County, Miss.

Mrs. Bradley, appearing in a crowded church auditorium that spilled over into the adjoining chapel, hall ways and galleries, was interrupted 13 times by applause and instantly won the sympathy of her hearers by her emotion-packed recital of her horrifying experience.)

During the last two months, I have found it very necessary to talk to God quite a few times.

When I first found out that Emmett was kidnapped, it was just so sad and so shocked I didn't know what to do.

So having been dependent on my mother most of my life, the first thing that I did was to call her.

I thought that when I got to mother's house, she had started making numerous telephone calls and she had found out nothing.

We stood there. We sat there. We waited for two or three days trying to find out what had happened to Emmett.

During these two or three days, I looked at my mother and saw that she was failing.

I was sitting at the telephone one night. I saw her walk through the dining room toward the front room.

She weakened as she got there. She said a word and fell to the floor. I noticed as she passed me, I was getting stronger as she was getting weaker. It kind of startled me.

WHEN SHE fell, I jumped up to run in there and put my hand on her and all of a sudden it seemed that something told me second that something told me that if you touch her, you'll take her strength so fast, it'll kill her.

So I stood there. I asked the others to let her alone. She'll be all right, I said and turned around and took my seat at the telephone.

I had been answering the phone night and day, taking messages and trying to send what to do, or helping me to keep myself under control.

And this second person told me you don't have time to cry now — you might not have time to cry tomorrow.

You can't cry at anytime. Don't worry about that because there's something you've got to do. There are a whole lot of people out there that are going to do the crying for you.

WE SHOULD even cry the rest of my life, there wouldn't be enough tears for Emmett Till.

For Emmett Till was just an ordinary boy like your ordinary boys and girls you have here.

He had made his mark in a way because his heart was generous and the people in the neighborhood liked him.

He was well-mannered child. He wasn't on a higher level than anybody else. He was just Mr. John Doe, Emmett Louis Till, an American.

He didn't realize that because he was colored, he was at a disadvantage.

He had been taught that you are what you what you are taught to be and what you make yourself, because that's the way you will be accepted.

WHEN EMMETT TILL'S MOTHER . . . "I have invested a son in freedom"

Now, mother, I didn't say those exact words. I doubt if I did. But I do know that I wanted the world to see what had happened to my boy.

WE WENT to home and we had our funeral Saturday as we had planned.

While that body was at the funeral parlor, they tell me that 50,000 people walked by that night.

They had to close the parlor up at 11:30 a.m. because windows were being broken and the place was just in a shambles.

You couldn't move traffic for blocks around. I asked Rev. Roberts if he would be good enough to let me move the body to the church and have the funeral there.

Rev. Roberts said yes.

Not only that, he said, "I will open the doors of the church so people can continue the wake until the time for the funeral."

We went in there Saturday and had our funeral and there were so many people locked outside of that church, I guess they must have stood for 5 blocks or more.

I TOLD Rev. Roberts the funeral isn't over until the remains have been viewed.

If you will let us have our funeral and go home, you tell those people out there they won't be turned away, they can see, too.

Rev. Roberts was very cooperative. He said, "Yes, Mrs. Bradley, I'll throw these doors open 24 hours a day."

I said if we don't bury him today, which was Saturday, we can't bury him Sunday or Monday, because it's a holiday.

I figured on Tuesday we would proceed to the cemetery.

Those people walked 24 hours a day. They walked for blocks. They were 6 abreast and I'm told that the traffic was tied up on Saturday afternoon until Tuesday at the close of the funeral.

People were interested. They wanted to know what was happening. One would go out and tell another and more than 600,000 people looked at Emmett Louis (Bobo) Till.

WHEN THEY walked in that church, they had one feeling. But when they looked down in that casket, they got another. Men fainted and women fainted. I was told that one out of every ten went to their knees and had to be carried out.

Those 600,000 people were stirred up so much, until the newspapers in Chicago got stirred too.

And other people became stirred. And that's why you're out here tonight, because they reached you.

We went back to the church on Tuesday and took Emmett to the cemetery.

WE HAVE a little town near Chicago, called Argo, and that's where Emmett was practically born and raised.

The people did there, the school system and everything, is mostly white.

You might find five or six colored children in a class of 150 pupils in high school.

You might find eight or nine children in a class of 40 in the grade school. The children out there don't realize that I'm black and you're white. They don't. They are educated, incidentally.

I never discovered I was colored until I was a pretty big girl. I just didn't know.

It hadn't occurred to me that I was darker than some of the other people that were in the class.

I was graded strictly according to my ability to perform and I was never looked down on.

FOR THAT reason I cherish my white friends and my colored friends; because I have no reason (Applause) to be standoff-ish or to feel inferior to any of them.

They treated me the way I treated them.

These schools in Argo, Illinois turned out an essay.

Every school, public and Catholic, in Argo, Summit and Bedford Park turned out to pay tribute to Emmett Louis (Bill) Till. Most of the people didn't know Emmett. Just a few of them did met. Not only that, but the police and everybody cooperated to the fullest extent.

We had a 100-police escort to the cemetery. They stopped traffic. They stopped everything that they stopped everything to let Emmett Till's body be buried.

WHEN WE got to the cemetery, there were approximately 50 or more cars waiting. I'm sure that there were 200 in the procession that left Chicago.

Not only did they take us there on an uninterrupted journey, but they brought us back to my door the same way.

I had the privilege of hearing Adam Clayton Powell speak several nights ago, and I listened to him tell about the situation existing over in Africa and other places.

HE SAID, those people have decided they're going to have freedom regardless. I'm sort of amount of blood they have to spill.

You can't scare a man whose life expectancy is only 35 years. In some countries that's as long as they expect to live.

Mississippi thought that they're hungry and everything else.

How can you scare them with an atom bomb or a hydrogen bomb?

There comes a time when you get beyond fear—fear doesn't mean anything.

You're going to die one way or the other so you happened to well die fighting (Applause).

So, those poor ignorant people thought we were stood up and asserted themselves.

They were convinced that we are going to die trying to do better. We are not going to be kept down and whole sway or idle away that I have somebody kick us around 'til we die.

Mississippi have to well come to good results.

IF THOSE ignorant unlearned people can stand up and stand, how can we, who have been exposed to education, expect to sit or lie down and think sit down and let somebody just walk us and say I'm not going to give it to you and you're not going to have it.

We can't sit there and wait for somebody to come and hand us a silver platter. That's not going to happen.

I'm told that there are very many people who have ever had somebody. But I don't. I'm here's a Cadillac. I think you should be good to your mother. Here's Cadillac.

BUT ABOUT three hours before plane time, we started making calls to check on the people who wanted to go. Suddenly so many airsickness cropped up. There were ingrown toenails and migraine headaches.

The Chicago police department said it had no jurisdiction. They couldn't and would not. Detective agencies with big, strong detectives weren't authorized to go to Mississippi.

So I looked around 'til said, well, it's just me and my dad and Mr. Moody. I said we'll take that and that will be enough. (Applause).

And that's the way we flew to Memphis, Tennessee. And He was there, because we could feel Him in the plane. He was there.

WE GOT there. We went on down to Mississippi. It was the second day of the trial and it was just about 10 o'clock in the morning, when we got to the courtroom.

I was surprised to see the number of colored people milling around there. I had thought that maybe because of what they told them that they better not go to the trial. But they were there.

When we got out of the car, I noticed that there were several television outfits there. There were the newsmen and they were looking for us, and they were right there on guard to see to it to watch us with the eyes of the camera, to see to it that nothing happened.

WHEN WE walked in the courtroom, the judge had made provisions for photographers to body took any pictures, they wanted to shoot pictures.

But when we walked in there, those white reporters, and those the press standing behind me, evidently forgot what the judge had said, because they stood on chairs, they stood on tables, they stood on ledges, and they were shooter and took pictures.

So the trial had to be recessed.

He can have another recess down in Mississippi, if we let them know that they are not going to lynch people, they are not going to make slaves of our men and women down there.

We can have another recess, and it can be just as quiet as the one, when I walked in the courtroom.

THEY SETTLED down and they had what they called the trial.

Little venders were going around selling cases of pop. Mr. Milam and Mr. Bryant went to the washroom unescorted without handcuffs.

They had their children with them playfully. They hugged their wives and kissed their mothers. They were just privileged characters.

Then we had this jury that looked like, well I just can't really tell you what they looked like. If you'd look at that jury, looked at us, you'd have thought we came from outer space.

THE BIG question in their mind was what business did we have down there. It was Mississippi's problem and what business it was going to handle it.

But, without the newspapers and the press news agencies, there never would have been a trial in Mississippi.

That was forced on them. It was bitter gall in their mouths. They even released an article to the citizens around them. I wasn't try to quote it.

My insurance is meant that we know that you're being tried. We know that you're being tried under your skin, but for God's sake try to take it.

You have a right to get up and blow somebody's head off if you want to, because they are certainly down here disrupting your life.

But just wait two days; we'll have this over, and you can just go right on back to lynching and doing whatever you want to do.

That was just the feeling of the whole town. We knew that they were only holding off, because they didn't have enough.

AFTER THE summaries were made, it wasn't hard to tell within a few days what the trial was going. In fact when we got there, the prosecutor told me Tuesday that we should have it over with by Wednesday afternoon.

What they hadn't figured on was that Dr. T. R. M. Howard, the NAACP field director, and they were going to get together and stop that from happening.

They hadn't figured on that at all. But those people went around down there and got this information:

On Tuesday evening, they told the District Attorney that they had eye witnesses to this murder and they would like to have the court recess until they could produce them.

THURSDAY AND Friday they went on the stand. Little Willie Reed stood up there and told how he saw Emmett Till in the back of a truck that Mr. Milam was in.

He describes how there were four white men in the cab, and four colored men in the back. One of these four colored people, he said, was my boy. He was sitting on the floor of the truck. He recognized him from a picture that he saw in the newspaper.

He said that he saw this truck because he had gotten up early that Sunday morning to go and picket for a company cigarettes.

Well I don't think God necessarily teaches us to picket. I think it might have been God's will that Willie Reed ran out of cigarettes and he had to get up and get to get up at 6 o'clock Sunday morning and go to the store.

WILLIE REED saw Mr. Bryant when he got out of the truck and walked in the answer store, but, get in the truck and drive away.

It just happened that Willie Reed lived on the farm of Mr. Moses. Mr. Moses was sitting back to his house and when he got to the house, he saw the truck was there.

And he also heard a lot of noise out of the barn. He heard a voice screaming. He heard a voice screaming. He heard begging for mercy and he heard the blows that were being struck on the body.

WILLIE REED asked a lot of questions. He said, "Who is that they're beating up over there,' but he didn't ask Mr. Moses. He also saw Mr. Milam with up to the pump and he was wiping around his waist.

It was the same gun he had had when he went to my uncle's house and he told the boy out of bed. He saw that man and recognized him. He even spoke to him.

Mr. Milam went back to the barn. They had told that this confusion must have lasted about an hour or better. Pretty soon there was no more noise. They moved this tractor out of this barn and backed the truck into the barn.

When the truck came out, there were only four white men in the cab. There were no colored people to be seen.

I know what happened to one of those colored people. There was a tarpaulin over the back of the truck.

WE DON'T know how long they were in there. Maybe, it was one, maybe it was two hours, maybe it was more.

But for the life of me I don't see how Emmett Till could have screamed that long because any one of those blows on his head would have killed him instantly.

But then I imagine the body can take a lot of punishment.

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