It happened on a Saturday, the date was August 13th in 1955; just 57 years ago. He was a farmer, a World War II veteran, an organizer of voter registration drives. This man was a civil rights activist who was fiercely committed and dedicated to ensuring that Black voters understood their rights and more importantly, the significance of letting their political voices be heard.

Brookhaven is a sleepy, tiny Mississippi town that most of us have never heard of, unless perhaps a student of the Civil Rights Martyrs' Roll Call List. In 1955, equality was not fully embraced with open arms in this town, and disenfranchisement, particularly when it came to voting was more the order of the day. In the face of this reality and even after being told he was too political and subsequently threatened with death if he persisted in working to mobilize voters, this warrior for righteousness refused to quit.

Ask yourself, have you been so committed to a cause, to doing the right thing that you were willing to die for it? Do you ever reflect on what our forefathers, the elders had to endure for just a taste of justice and respect, a slice of the equal opportunity pie? Ever cross your mind that in this time of technological advancement and increased opportunity, more than our elders ever had mind you, many of us are held hostage by underachievement and an unwillingness to commit the time and effort required to transform our lives.

On August 2, this man cast his vote in the Primary Election and helped countless other residents to vote as well. With no clear victor, a run-off primary was scheduled for August 23rd. So on that August 13th day, this champion for change was at the courthouse seeking to assist Black voters fill out absentee ballots so that they could vote in the upcoming run-off election. As the clock struck 10:00 am, shots from a.38 caliber pistol rang out, and in broad daylight with people watching, in front of the Brookhaven courthouse, within seconds, Lamar "Ditney" Smith, son of Levi Smith and Harriet Humphrey Smith was dead.

When District Attorney (DA) E. C. Barlow reached the scene of the murder, he immediately questioned Sheriff Robert E. Case who told the DA that he saw a man named Noah Smith leave the scene of the murder with blood all over him. Subsequently, Noah Smith and two other men, Charles Falvey and Mack Smith, were arrested, each quickly released on a $20,000 bond. Not a single witness appeared before the grand jury, the case was dropped and the three men went free. District Attorney Barlow lamented that this lack of cooperation was an obvious gross miscarriage of justice.

As a boy, I heard this painful story of such a senseless murder countless times. Not just because my family has roots in Mississippi, but because Lamar "Ditney" Smith was my great, great uncle. Uncle Ditney may not be well known in places beyond Mississippi but he is one of the countless heroes who paved a way for all of us right now and are members of that Civil Rights Martyrs' Roll Call List. This is a list of freedom, equality and quality of life seekers, most whose names we have never heard, but people who understood that if you do not choose to show up and advocate for yourself, for your family, or for your community, you are giving away all of your power and any real possibility of claiming your rights, privileges, and prospects as a citizen.

A Voting Matter

I share this story because in a few days, on November 6th, Election 2012 will unfold; an election that both political and economic analyst suggest will be a defining moment for this nation and its future. In the close election of 2000, Al Gore lost Florida to George Bush by 537 votes, and the presidency by a margin of 5 votes in the Electoral College, 266 to 271. These results, still debated even today, remind us that every vote does count, and the power of one cannot be denied. So I encourage you to analyze the issues, the political stances of the candidates and then let your voice be heard. Refuse to let the deaths of so many justice seekers be in vain because of growing feelings that you and I no longer matter.

Do not allow your personal situation, challenging job and financial circumstances, unfair treatment or feelings of hopelessness keep you from occupying your polling place on Election Day. There are many who would like you to not occupy the vote and voter suppression tactics such as the Voter ID amendment should be defeated. Your vote is a personal opportunity to express a preference, a choice; your statement that you are not going to allow others to make decisions that impact the quality of your life in absence of your full participation.

When we neglect to show up to vote, when we begin to believe that it does not matter, we will slowly find ourselves no longer answering the call of opportunity when it shows up at the door. When we embrace this limited mindset, we have allowed the victim mentality to overtake us. We no longer remember that success, no matter how we choose to define it, is always within our reach, until we choose to give up.

The Power of One!

Author, historian and clergyman, Edward Everett Hale remarked, "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. What I can do, I should do."

Martin Luther King wrote, "Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.... You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

The tenacity of one man's efforts gave us the light bulb. As an inventor, Thomas Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. When a reporter asked, "How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?" Edison replied, "I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps."

You see our potential to recognize and harness possibility is linked to quality of our thoughts. What are you thinking as Election Day 2012 approaches, powerful of powerless?

My Uncle Ditney and countless others did not sacrifice their lives for you and me to give up or give in wasting our potential as individuals and as a community. The Uncle Ditney's of the world did not work tirelessly to build community and collaborative effort for us to provide ego, ill will

and divisiveness fertile ground keeping our communities from visibly progressing. My Uncle Ditney did not die for the vote, for us to so easily discount it.

Harriett Tubman said, "I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves." What do you know? Do you understand and respect your life, your power as one, the strength of your vote? I believe you do, so I will see you at the polls and let that be your renewed commitment not only to occupy the vote, but to reignite your life and our communities.