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The philosophy of *Botho*, “*I am because you are*,” echoes throughout my home country, Botswana. It helps remind us of our interconnectedness, and encourages us to live a life filled with respect and empathy for others. *Botho* means striving to better not only one’s self, but the entire community. The Gang of Four, a group of some of Seattle’s most influential activists, admirably exemplified the spirit of *Botho* through their daring and transformational friendship. Bob Santos, Roberto Maestas, Bernie Whitebear, and Larry Gossett were courageous leaders who came from four different communities and solidified a powerful alliance that transcended their differences. Although their individual strengths helped improve their communities, their impact amplified each time they combined forces. During a time when many influential social justice activists were consistently targeted by the government and the media, the Gang of Four fearlessly persisted, despite great personal risk, to fight for the civil rights of all minorities in Seattle, leaving a legacy of hope for their communities.

Born in Seattle to a Filipino-American and an Indipino mother, Bob Santos was one of the valiant Gang of Four who bravely fought for the unification of marginalized minorities and the cultural preservation of the International District. The International District, the neighborhood that he grew up in and later fought to preserve, was a pivotal part of his identity. After his mother passed away at age 23 from tuberculosis and his dad lost his eyesight, young Santos became his father’s “seeing eye dog” (9). He often took his father around the International District. During these trips, he formed strong bonds with others in the community, from business owners to regular visitors.

Once Santos grew older, he began to be increasingly involved with the civil rights movement through his connection to the Catholic Church. Santos was the Executive Director of

CARITAS, a tutoring program at the St. Peter Claver Center for young black students (9). Once Santos assumed leadership over the St. Peter Claver Center, it became the meeting point for other civil rights organisations. This free space, also known as “the Heart of the Struggle,” attracted some of the city’s most radical civil rights groups. Despite the criticism that he received for assisting these groups, Santos continued to provide the meeting space and he began to form relationships with many influential civil rights leaders, eventually leading to the formation of a multiracial alliance (2). He later went on to serve as the Executive Director of the International District Improvement Association (Inter\*Im), in which he played a pivotal role in preserving the International District. Although Santos retired from the position in 2005, his commitment to social justice has inspired a new generation of Asian-American activists throughout Seattle, causing him to be nicknamed “The Unofficial Mayor of the International District.”

Roberto Maestas was another member of the Gang of Four who championed interracial harmony and dauntlessly led one of Seattle’s most successful occupations, enabling Latinos to feel safe, represented, and celebrated in the city. Originally born and raised on a “a little subsistence plot” in New Mexico, Maestas migrated to Colorado to work as a farmer at age 14, and later arrived in Seattle in the 1950’s (7). Maestas’s involvement with activism began to develop when he attended the University of Washington. There, he became involved with Chicano student activism, the black freedom struggle, and farm worker organizing in the Yakima valley through the encouragement of professors and peers (10).

Maestas was a heroic revolutionary during his time. As a regular attendee of many different protests, he never hesitated to speak out against any injustice directed towards not only his own Latino community but towards many other minorities as well. Maestas’s ability to “create links between Latinos and Blacks and also Asians and Indians” led to him being recruited

to run the first English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program at South Seattle Community College (SSCC) in 1971 (7). A year later, funding for the program was abruptly cut off, and in order to protest this, Maestas organized the peaceful occupation of Beacon Hill School to negotiate it being transformed into a community center. Since the building had no water and no heat, Maestas not only risked his own health but also the health of approximately 80 others. However, after three months and assistance from a local restaurant, the occupation involving many teachers, students, and community activists was a success, and El Centro de la Raza, a center for Seattle's Latin community, was formed (10). El Centro remains a pivotal organizational center for the state's Latino community. Although Maestas passed away, his legacy has changed Seattle forever.

Larry Gossett, the third courageous member of the Gang of Four, was one of the most widely known black activists in Seattle during the 1960's due to his unwavering commitment to reform discriminatory institutions and uplift excluded minorities. Originally, Gossett didn't have much of an interest in politics and advocacy, but after he returned from volunteering in Harlem through the Volunteers in Service to America program, Gossett began to understand how politics can directly impact a person's quality of life (4). After returning, he co-founded the University of Washington's Black Student Union in 1968 and became an active member of the Seattle Chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Gossett and UW's newly formed BSU was critical in the creation of UW's Black Studies Program. Gossett also assisted in the creation of multiple Black Student Unions for high schools and middle schools, empowering black youth throughout the city (5).

During a time when police brutality and wrongful policing of black people were rampant, Gossett remained steadfast in his fight for social justice. When two black girls were sent home

because they were wearing their natural afros, Gossett and other leading black activists, Aaron Dixon and Carl Miller, led a sit-in at Franklin High School. They had a list of requests for the principal, one of them being the reinstatement of the two girls. Even though the school acceded to the demands, the three men were arrested four days later for “unlawful assembly” and taken to the King County Jail (4). While awaiting trial, Gossett went on to have another historic sit-in at UW. Despite the risk of facing a more serious sentencing, Gossett marched into the office of Dr. Charles Odegaard, the president of the University of Washington at the time, with over a hundred students to advocate for the diversification of the University. The sit-in turned out to be successful and Odegaard caved to their demands. His positive impact was so influential that he was later hired to recruit other students of color for the University (5).

Gossett was also an influential activist in other movements in Seattle; he was one of the activists who occupied Beacon Hill School with Maestas. He, like the other three members, not only supported the community he knew best, he also consistently crossed lines to work with others and further the rights of all. From 1979 to 1993, Gossett served as Executive Director of the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP), a program that provides aid for at-risk youth (5). Later in his career, Gossett decided he wanted to expand into politics. Gossett is now a part of the the King County Council, as the representative of the 2nd District, where he continues to courageously confront racism and fight for equality.

Bernie Whitebear, the fourth member of the Gang of Four, was a distinguished advocate for the rights of Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Born poverty-stricken on the Colville Reservation to a Filipino father and a Native American mother, Whitebear’s parents struggled to find steady jobs and those in the family subsequently lived impoverished lives (1). After he himself struggled to find employment, Bob Satiacum, a Puyallup Native American and

fisherman, offered Whitebear a job. Whitebear joined during a time when the fishermen were struggling to find various strains of salmon, a Pacific Northwest Native American staple, due to the government's negligent practices. Whitebear saw this issue and he joined the fight for gaining Native Americans more fishing rights. He even negotiated treaty rights to maintain traditional fishing practices, but the government refused to recognize their rights. Although the fishermen were portrayed by the media in a negative light and faced many setbacks, they managed to gain access to 50% of the harvestable catch of salmon and were made co-managers in the state's hatcheries(1).

Whitebear was also one of the first Native Americans to encourage Pan-Indigenism, a philosophy and movement promoting unity among different Indigenous American groups regardless of tribal affiliations. He decided to organize events that would unite rather than divide, and express Indian culture and help remedy some of the social and economic problems they were facing (1). At that time, activist groups were often targeted by the FBI. This was also true for Whitebear because once he gained fame, he began to attract the attention of the FBI. The bureau claimed to investigate whether he was "involved in new Left or other militant activities" (1). With all the informants and secret agents they recruited, it was clear that he was high on their radar. The United States' government's interest in Native American leaders put Whitebear in constant danger. Nonetheless, Whitebear's commitment to fighting for social justice acts as a reminder for all activists to take risks for the benefit of their community.

With each sit-in, occupation, and protest, the Gang of Four created more than an alliance, they established a brotherhood that inspired and empowered the marginalized. Historian Trevor Griffey said, "While working within different communities, they recognized they were part of a broader social movement that connected racial justice and economic justice" (6). Whether it was

Gossett occupying Beacon Hill School with Maestas or Santos providing a free meeting space for the men's organisations, they showed up and championed each other when no one else would. Being an activist can be a very discouraging and soul-crushing trek and support systems like the Gang of Four can be critical in maintaining the morale of an impactful activist (8). The four men even went on to form the Minority Executive Directors Coalition in the 1980s when they were all Executive Directors of their own organisations (11). "The system always pitted one group against the other," Maestas said in 2009 to KCTS 9, "but when we showed up at a protest or negotiation as a multi-racial group, you could see bureaucrats and politicians suddenly change and take us seriously because now they faced four communities united together, and the pressure was too great" (3). The Gang of Four brought four strong social justice activists together to create a sum greater than each of its parts.

In the tense political climate we are in right now, many minority groups often feel endangered. It is easy to rush to defend our own community first when we feel targeted, but now more than ever, it's important that we learn from the Gang of Four. Similar to our current era, the Gang of Four was formed during a very volatile time in American history (during the Vietnam Antiwar movement and the Civil Rights Movement). However, Gosset said it best when he stated that, "If we, as Third World people, are to change our social and economic status in this country, then it is imperative we unite around the position that we are all oppressed by 'the same enemy'" (4). When fighting against long-standing discriminatory institutions, it's imperative to understand that the marginalized are stronger together. Just like the Gang of Four, we should all try our best to exemplify the teachings of *Botho* by courageously standing with each other despite our fears, and to always remember that I am because you are.

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