

Show Support For Activist Damu Smith

Written by Robert ID1112

Wednesday, 06 April 2005 02:09 -

One of our community's longtime organizers and activists is in urgent need of our support. We are urging all those who care of the struggle and all of those in the rap and hip-hop community to support Damu Smith, a community organizer and social activist, in his time of need. He has given so much and now we can give a little back.

Damu Smith, founder of Black Voices for Peace and executive director of the National Black Environmental Justice Network, has worked tirelessly on the frontlines of the anti-war and environmental justice movements for decades.

Last week, Damu was diagnosed with colon cancer in its advanced stages. He is the father of a 12-year-old daughter, and he has no health insurance. The costs for his medical care are astronomical.

Damu's situation is dire and he needs our help RIGHT NOW.

The Praxis Project is collecting donations for Damu Smith.

Damu Smith, a community organizer and social activist, has waged some tough fights over the years -- against apartheid in South Africa and against police brutality here at home; for an end to gun violence in the Washington area; and for a freeze on nuclear weapons throughout the world.

But nothing compares with what he's up against now: colon cancer.

Smith, 53, was in Israel and the Palestinian territory last week for a peace march when he got the news. The day before the event, he collapsed and was taken to a hospital in Bethlehem, where doctors discovered polyps in his colon and a tumor in his liver.

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"The c-word was never uttered and, to be honest, I was afraid to ask," Smith said in an interview yesterday. "But all of the information suggested that's what I had."

Upon his return to the District on Thursday, Smith was admitted to Providence Hospital, where he learned just how serious his condition is. "When they told me how much time they thought I had left, it hit me like a ton of bricks," he said.

In the Health section of The Washington Post yesterday, staff writer January W. Payne reported that the American College of Gastroenterology has issued new guidelines urging African Americans to be screened for colorectal cancer beginning at age 45 -- five years earlier than other people.

African Americans have earlier onset of the disease and higher incidence and mortality rates than whites, the report said. Moreover, those with a family history of colon cancer should get tested even before they turn 45 and more frequently than the recommended every 10 years.

Obesity and cigarette smoking increase the risk for the disease. But just eating right, getting exercise and not smoking won't suffice.

"I am religious about what I put in my body," said Smith, who is a vegetarian. "But I have a family history. My father died of it. That's why I needed to get checked more often. Sometimes, I'd feel pain in my abdomen and figure it was just a bellyache. You just can't rely on self-diagnosis."

Smith doesn't dwell on what he should have done as much as what he must do now. So don't expect to find him stuck on a pity pot.

"I'm going to be the poster child for twice-a-year screenings," he told me. "I'm telling you: Please, don't wait. And this is not just for black people; this is for everybody. Ask your doctor about getting a colonoscopy now."

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That is a highly recommended procedure in which you are sedated while the entire length of your colon is examined with a camera-tipped instrument attached to a flexible tube. Doctors are then able to detect and painlessly remove growths on the colon that can become cancerous.

At \$650, the procedure is not cheap -- but neither is dealing with colon cancer.

"I have a 12-year-old daughter, and she's the crown jewel of my life," Smith said. "Every time I look in her beautiful face, I say to myself: "I have to live. I can't leave her alone. My mission isn't over yet." "

Smith came to Washington from St. Louis in 1974, arriving on a Greyhound bus with \$100 in his pocket and a commitment to justice and mercy in his heart. He held parties to raise money for causes that ranged from paying for a local woman's operation to helping finance the Free South Africa Movement.

He is founder and president of Black Voices for Peace, an antiwar movement, and executive director of the National Black Environmental Justice Network, which wages campaigns for lead-free drinking water and the removal of toxic waste dumps.

His many friends are planning a tribute and fundraising gala for him. E-mail spiritofhope2@yahoo.com for more information.

"I've spent much of my life organizing campaigns for all kinds of good causes, but now I have to organize a campaign to stay alive," Smith said. "My prognosis, medically, is pretty typical for someone with advanced colon cancer. But I believe I can overcome this through my Creator and the army of angels that have been assembled through my family and friends all over the world. I am overwhelmed by the love."

Please show support for one who has supported all of us for so long.

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Please visit <http://www.thepraxisproject.org/damu.html> for more information on making a donation.

Contributing Sources to this article are:

[Courtland Milloy – Washington Post Writer](#)

[The Praxis Project](#)

[Black Electorate.com](#)