



## **The Honorable Elijah Cummings: *A Quintessential Man Who Did It His Way***

***By Sherman Howell***

Over thirty years ago, I was sitting on the steps of the Maryland State House in Annapolis, wearing a pinstripe suit with a white shirt and tie awaiting the next hearing sessions. I was drawn there for business on behalf of my local N.A.A.C.P. chapter. African-Americans were not being invited into the offices of the Annapolis delegation, so waiting on the steps or in the hallways were our only option to engage with them. Suddenly Elijah Cummings started walking towards me and asked, in an unassuming manner, “Have I met you?” Having previously been approached in this manner, I knew exactly what he was implying. For many people, Howard County, Maryland, was considered a successful community, and he couldn’t understand why I was in Annapolis. Standing up and looking him straight in the eye, I shook his hand, as I usually do, and introduced myself as Sherman Howell, the son of a Tennessee cotton farmer from the rural backwaters of America. I explained to him I was there to seek equality for African-Americans in Howard County. To which Elijah replied, “Welcome I too am the son and grandson of sharecroppers,” leaving me with no doubt that I was looking at the true essence of the man. And of course, we became friends and understood each other ever since.

Elijah had unwavering faith and belief in a democratic government that protects its citizens and promotes equality. With our backgrounds, we both knew democracy

in the U.S. needed significant improvement. We took our cues and used our experiences and successes achieved in the Civil Rights movement to advance democracy for all. Winning battles during the Civil Rights movement required standing your ground in some of the most cruel, evil and hostile places of America. Elijah tirelessly worked to remove barriers and address inequalities for his constituents in Maryland and nationwide.

Elijah was gregarious and revered in Howard County and Maryland. He often spoke about the diversity in Columbia, MD, and visiting the downtown area to enjoy Lake Kittamaquindi. Given Elijah's global position and recognition, Columbia will not be the only community to feel the loss of him.

To honor Elijah, I will borrow from the song *My Way* by Frank Sinatra:

*And now the end is near and so I face the final curtain  
My friend I'll say it clear, I'll state my case of which I'm certain  
I've lived a life that's full; I traveled each and every highway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way*

*Regrets, I've had a few but then again too few to mention  
I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption  
I planned each chartered course each careful step along the byway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way*

Goodbye my friend... You did it your way, and we will forever be grateful!