

We Are Never Turning Back

RELATED ATTORNEYS

Joseph A. Hayden, Jr.

RELATED PRACTICE AREAS

Criminal Defense

News

8.12.19

From: St. Benedicts Preparatory School Magazine, click here to view the full article.

Alumni Spotlight about Joe Hayden, Pashman Stein Walder Hayden

When Joseph Hayden Jr. '62 stopped to grab a coffee at the Boston College student newspaper office in 1965, he had little inkling his life was about to change. Mr. Hayden was in his junior year and was closely following events in Selma, Ala. Days earlier, Alabama state troopers attacked some 600 civil rights demonstrators on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Closer to home, a local minister from Roxbury, Mass., who had traveled to Selma in a demonstration of solidarity, was beaten to death by segregationists.

The editors of the newspaper, *The Heights*, were discussing the civil rights protests. When someone suggested, "Let's go to Selma," Mr. Hayden didn't hesitate. "Count me in," he responded. The Gray Bee didn't consider himself an activist, but was outraged by the news footage and reports coming out of Selma. "It was the closest thing I'd seen in the U.S. to Nazis. That's what St. Benedict's Prep does, it instills the desire to take a risk for something worthwhile," he said.

After a training session on nonviolent protest at the local headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Roxbury, Mr. Hayden and The Heights group packed into a station wagon and drove 31 hours to Selma. They went directly to the Green Street Baptist Church, joining hundreds of demonstrators who'd heeded the call by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to stand with African Americans whose constitutional rights were denied. "People were pouring in," Mr. Hayden recalled. "There was a tremendous amount of camaraderie and sense that this was something monumental."

That's what St. Benedict's Prep does, it instills the desire to take a risk for something worthwhile.

He held no illusions about his role in the historic sequence of events that were about to transpire. "It was their march," Mr. Hayden stressed. "We were there to bear witness and to support the protestors."

On March 19, 1965, Mr. Hayden was among hundreds arrested for picketing the home of Selma's mayor. Detained behind City Hall, he was released the next day. On March 21, he listened as Dr. King addressed some 3,200 marchers before they set off from Selma to Montgomery. Though the route was protected by armed troops ordered by President Lyndon Johnson, "I was unprepared for the hatred," Mr. Hayden recalled.

Bystanders flew Confederate flags and hurled obscenities. Mr. Hayden remembered how white segregationists would try to intimidate black residents by taking their photograph, a warning that their lives would be in jeopardy after supporters left Selma. "There was this sense of determination among the African Americans of 'We are never turning back.'"

They walked seven miles the first day of the march. According to a plan worked out by civil rights leaders, only 300 people could march the entire route, so the Boston College group headed back to school. Mr. Hayden wrote a long reflection, "Of Saints And Sins And Selma Town," which was published in The Heights. The experience clearly changed him.

He decided to pursue a career in law and finished his first year at Rutgers Law School when an incident of police brutality incited the Newark riots in 1967. Mr. Hayden volunteered on a bail project and the helplessness he witnessed among those jailed convinced him to become a criminal attorney.

Today, Mr. Hayden, a Partner in the law firm that bears his name, Pashman, Stein, Walder, Hayden, is one of New Jersey's top trial attorneys. During his illustrious career, he has served as Deputy Attorney General in the Organized Crime and Special Prosecution Section of the Division of Criminal Justice and successfully defended clients in a number of high-profile cases. The St. Benedict's alumnus is also the 2014 recipient of the Justice William J. Brennan Award from the Association of the Federal Bar of New Jersey.

He never talked much about Selma until the 2008 Democratic National Convention that nominated Barack Obama for President. Since then, Mr. Hayden has spoken about the experience to journalists, Boston College Magazine and St. Benedict's students when he visits The Hive. The alumnus was delighted to hear about the civic action projects Gray Bees are leading today.

"That's the message of St. Benedict's," he said. "If you want to see something done, take a risk. Our coaches taught us that, the faculty and monks modeled it. I'm proud that my school is still involved in it."