

Dr. King's Mother: Family Stabilizer

By Barbara Bright

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"This was the woman who gave to this nation its greatest spiritual son," said the Rev. Douglas Moore yesterday in mourning the Atlanta slaying of Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr., mother of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mrs. King, 70, was shot and killed yesterday at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta as she sat at the organ of the church and joined the choir in repeating the Lord's Prayer. The black gunman also killed a man in the congregation and wounded another woman.

Other friends and associates of Dr. King, who died from an assassin's bullet in 1968, yesterday recalled Mrs. King as "the family stabilizer, and a quiet leader."

Mayor Walter Washington described the civil rights leader's mother as "the one who nurtured his ideals, gave him the dream of bringing all people together to build a better America and a better world."

Moore, who was a classmate of Dr. King at Boston University and who joined the civil rights leader in founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, recalls meeting Dr. King's mother first in the 1950s when SCLC held organizational meetings at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Dr. King's father was the pastor. Yesterday the elder King, who occasionally still preached there, was just coming into the church when his wife was slain.

"Once we were having a devotional service and there was no one to play the piano," said Moore, who is the Methodist chaplain at Federal City College. "So Mrs. King just got up and went to the piano and played. She was a poised, elegant, aristocratic woman. . . it was from her that Martin got his poise."

Dr. King, according to Moore, probably inherited his sense of social outrage from his mother's side of the family as well. Mrs. King, the former Alberta Christine Williams, was the daughter of Atlanta's leading black pastor, A. D. Williams, who was president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"Her father had led a boycott against one of the Atlanta papers (The Georgian) way back before any of us were born," said Moore. "The fact that her father was that kind of minister meant Martin had something in his history."

Biographers have emphasized Dr. King's father as the patriarch of the family, said the college chaplain, and

"they've not thought much about the woman who rocked the cradle."

Moore said that he believes Mrs. King's influence was great. "She was one of those great black women."

D.C. Del. Walter Fauntroy, who directed the Washington bureau of SCLS before his election to Congress, was stunned by the news of Mrs. King's death. He did not comment on the tragedy, beyond saying that he was "rushing out the door to catch a plane to Atlanta."

The Rev. Joe Gibson, the Methodist chaplain at Howard University who also worked with Dr. King here, described the shooting as a "tragic event."

"You would think a church would be a place where a person could worship and find peace with God," said Gibson. But Mrs. King's murder, he said, like the bombing that killed four girls in a Birmingham church in 1963, "should act as a reminder . . . that we're all just a moment's breath away from death and we need always to live knowing that."

Calvin W. Rolark, newspaper publisher and a Black United Front leader who worked with Dr. King here, said he hoped Mrs. King's assassination by a black man "will create empathy for blacks by blacks."

"Our greatest enemies are ourselves," he said. "I'm just hoping this time of unfathomable death will prick the conscience of the total black community."

Mrs. Willie Hardy, vice chairman of the Washington chapter of the SCLC, said she found the killing "frightening, hurting."

"My children ask, 'How could they do that to his mother?' she said. "It's a new kind of sickness in this country."

Ship Runs Aground On Mercy Mission

Reuter

DEN HELDER, Holland, June 30 — The U.S. Navy frigate Julius A. Furer ran aground five miles off this Dutch navy base during the night while racing to port with a sick crewman, a Dutch Navy spokesman said here today.

He said a Dutch frigate took the sick man on board and carried him to Den Helder. An attempt to refloat the ship was to be made at high tide later today, the spokesman said.