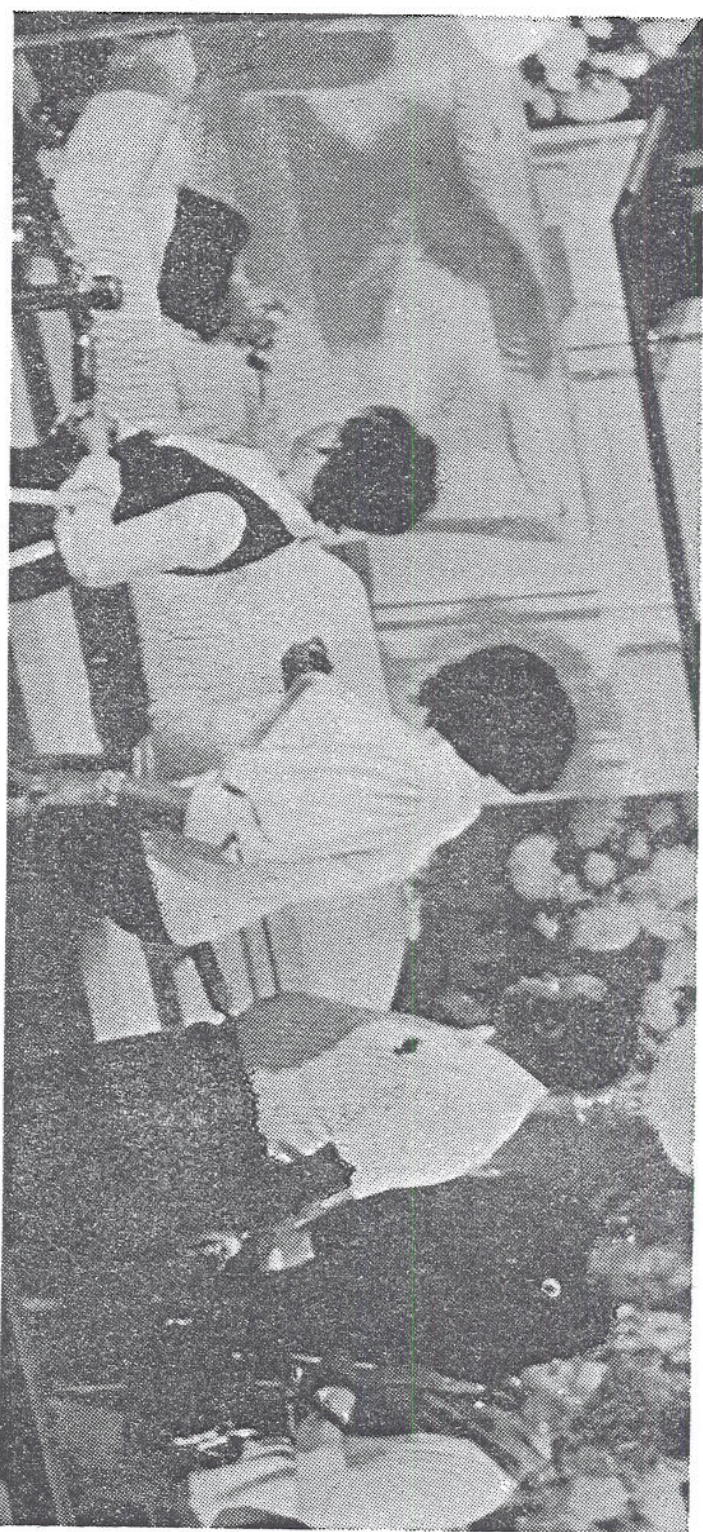


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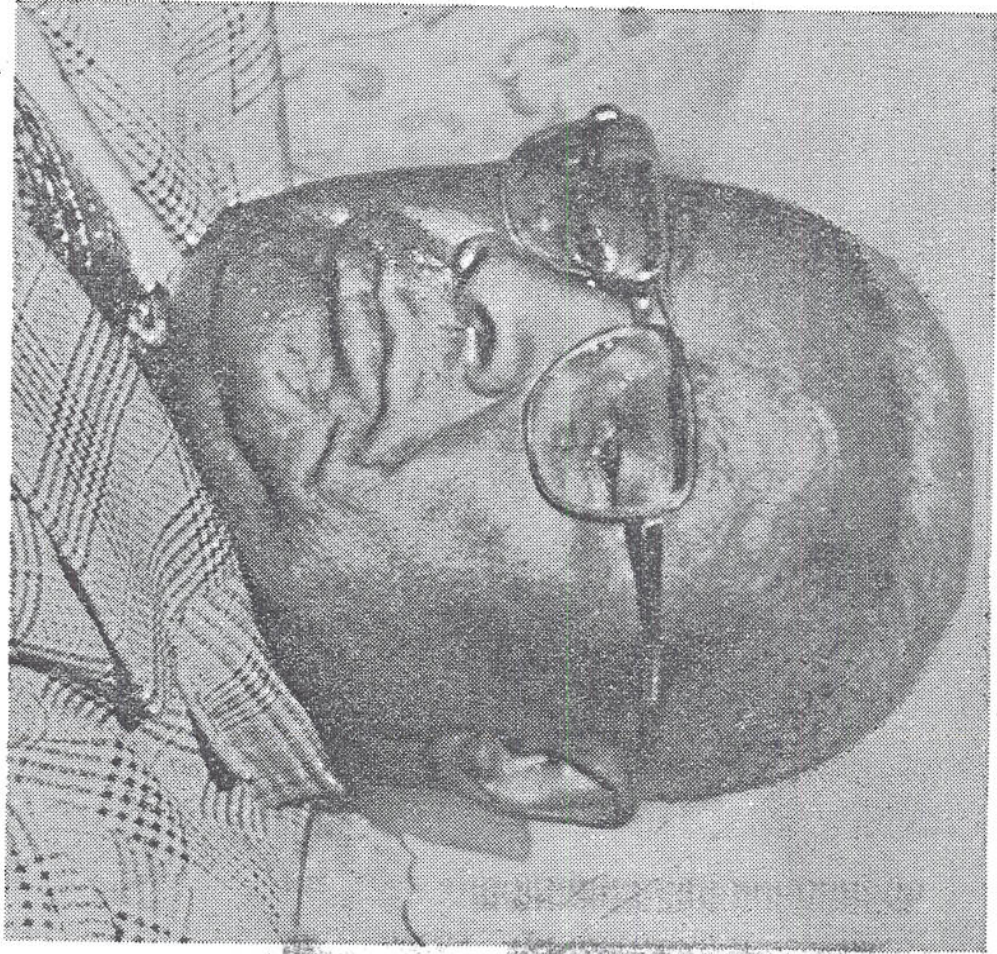
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Daddy King: 'There Will Be a Better Day'



Washington Post photo

The Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. (above) in his Atlanta home; mourners passed by the casket of Mrs. King Sr. (above left) in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta

By Jacqueline Trescott
Washington Post

Atlanta

The Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. sat at one end of his bedroom, surrounded by his ten grandchildren. All were still dressed in their somber funeral outfits. The window shades were drawn against the blistering summer sun.

"I want to tell you how I feel," King began in a shaky voice. "I want to know how you feel about the man who killed my 'Bunch,' my wife, your grandmother." The children's reactions, negative and stunned, tumbled out.

Tears often streamed down King's face. For about two hours he preached about love and hate, elaborating with Biblical references and anecdotes from his own life in an attempt to purge them of their bad feelings.

"You have had so much tragedy in your short lives but good Christians don't hate.

"I'm not wrinkled ugly in the face. When you hate you get ugly. I've met these things and I'm in God's hands." His voice rose to a gentle roar. "You know I'm hurt, to lose my wife, my sons, yeah, you know I'm hurt. But I want you to learn there will be a better day."

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Next to Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, King Sr. is the American

Coretta King, the widow of Martin Luther King Jr. (left) and his mother, Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. at a service in his honor in Memphis four years after his death

public figure most associated with personal tragedy.

In six years two members of his family died violently and a third died accidentally. Martin Luther King Jr., his oldest son, a man who has been called by some the single most important American of this century, was killed by an assassin on April 4, 1968. Sixteen months later, the Rev. Adam Daniel King, his youngest child, drowned in his swimming pool. Then Alberta Williams King, his wife for 48 years, was killed by a crazed youth as she played "The Lord's Prayer" on the church organ on June 30, 1974.

Four months ago King, then 75, stepped down as pastor of this city's 4000-member Ebenezer Baptist Church, where he had been minister for 44 years. But his retirement did not signal a slowdown. His hectic schedule, which includes writing his autobiography and numerous speaking

engagements, reflects the drive of a man who seems to feel that slowing down means failure.

What is most striking about King is his insistence that he has erased any bitterness about the deaths with a *carte blanche* disposition of love. This philosophy of forgiveness, unbelievable at first even to his closest friends, emerged from his religious beliefs, and the closeness of his family. After Momma King's death the change was most evident.

"He seems to have taken on some of her softness, introspection and serenity," observed Walter Fauntroy, the District of Columbia's delegate to Congress and a close family friend.

"He's been strengthened by each thing," added Coretta King. "He sees what happens not as a personal thing, but as a way of God showing his will."



He's known as a crusty, forceful and hot-tempered man, the epitome of the black preachers who guided his flock on voting and where to bank. Coexisting with this roughness has been a sharp wit, a genuine concern about all young people and a cavalier eye for the ladies.

Before the family name emerged as a national household word, his name as an activist was well-established in city and church circles. His intimates and most Atlantans call him Daddy King.

His own activism was infused with pragmatism, and he once told King Jr., "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion."

Over the years his status as a powerbroker slowly diminished. In the mid-60s, King was part of a committee of old-line blacks who worked out a compromise with city officials that delayed integration of the downtown department stores for a few months. King was booed publicly by the student leaders of the desegregation drive.

"He's not as sophisticated as some of the newer politicians but he's a powerful man in the city," commented Coretta King.

Recently King accepted an invitation from Alabama Governor George Wallace, a meeting that possibly could be exploited for black votes. Yet a friend commented, "King's just too much of a gentleman to refuse."

On December 19, Daddy King was 76. A sharecropper's shack in Stockbridge, Ga., was his birthplace and the time, three years after the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of the Supreme Court legalized "separate and equal" in American society.

It was the darkest of times for blacks but King, one of ten children of James and Delia King,

never hesitated to contest submission.

Once he refused to fetch a bucket of water for a white man and was beaten severely. Delia King retaliated by beating the man with a club.

It was the impenetrable reality of racism that prompted the 16-year-old King to leave home and walk the 20 miles to Atlanta. He worked a series of factory and blue-collar jobs before turning to preaching.

Struggling, with two or three rural churches under his wing, King had his career and fortune substantially pushed when he fell in love with Alberta Williams. She was the soft-spoken, college-educated daughter of the Rev. A. D. Williams, pastor of Ebenezer, which, with Spelman, Morehouse and Clark Colleges, was one of the national black institutions along Auburn street.

"She shaped my life and led me to be," said King of the woman he married on Thanksgiving Day, 1926. He called her "Honeybunch."

The newlyweds for over a dozen years shared the Williams' 13-room frame house on Auburn and quickly expanded their family. Christine was born first and then on Jan. 15, 1929, after a long and difficult birth at home, a male child was born. At first Daddy King thought the baby was stillborn but the doctor slapped his bottom and Martin Luther King Jr. howled. Alfred Daniel King was born later.

King played some part in the giant steps taken for Atlanta blacks: The integration of the courthouse elevators in the '40s, the establishment of equal pay for black teachers, the landmark desegregation of the Atlanta buses in 1959, buses he had long refused to ride, and later the

desegregation of downtown department stores.

At home he was determined his children would have every advantage he could offer. They learned some very valuable lessons of activism firsthand. One afternoon King walked into an empty shoe store with King Jr., who was then in grade school, and asked to be waited on. King refused to sit in the back of the store and stormed out, an action that took unusual strength in the early '30s.

At first King was very ambivalent about the leadership role thrust upon his son after seamstress Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the public bus and her subsequent arrest touched off the Montgomery bus boycott 20 years ago.

"He didn't choose that position when that woman refused to give up her seat. They called him and he was forced to be a leader," King said recently.

Gradually that bitterness broadened into a generosity and today King reflects, "I've lived to see my sons — one of them, at least — give his life for his people."

Today Daddy King remains the durable family patriarch and, to the veterans of the civil rights movement, the Old Testament prophet.

His relationship with Coretta King and his daughter, Christine Farris, is very close. He answers the abusive phone calls he receives about Mrs. King's frequent speaking engagements away from home with a brisk, "Go to Hell."

"At this stage," King admits in private, "I'm burdened. A day rarely passes that I'm not grieved. I'm not up to controversy at this age."

"I don't hate the man who supposed to kill my son and serving time in Tennessee. If I hate I'm as low as he. I've got a job to do and I'm going on loving my brother."