

King's death brought fear, sorrow

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Martin King was born Jan. 15, 1929 into a world where blacks rode the back of the bus and otherwise stayed in their place to avoid the antagonism of angry whites.

As many whites today say they live in fear of young black males, so many blacks lived in fear of rape, mental and physical assault, even lynching by whites.

King, perhaps by accident, was drawn into the fight to change the state of blacks in the United States and eventually the down-trodden and abused masses of the world.

For this he died on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tenn., of a gunshot wound.

Tom Jacobs, a Charlotte barber, remembers exactly where he was and what he was doing when he learned King had been killed.

"We'd just got back from a track meet against E.E. Smith (High School) in Fayetteville," Jacobs said. "We were walking home when we heard.

The horrible news sparks several fire bombings and riots in Jacobs' hometown of Goldsboro. A warehouse and several stores were burned.

"That was the case in

THE WORDS OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

many small towns in eastern North Carolina," Jacobs said. "We couldn't do anything else. It was our only way of showing emotions."

Jacobs and some friends spent the night watching the towns two fire trucks run back and forth from fire to fire. "It was just pandemonium," he said. "People were throwing rocks and bottles. We just clapped as the guys drove the trucks by."

Maxine Eaves, a nurse, said she was in a patient's room at the then-Charlotte Memorial Hospital when she heard about King's death on the

television news broadcast.

"I was very sad," Eaves said. "I couldn't believe it. It was just a sad moment in my life."

Eaves completed her shift at the hospital and went home. Her husband, James, was in school at N.C. Central University in Durham. He called and told her that night about unrest going on in Durham.

She spent the night worrying about what might happen in Charlotte.

King's life and death had a profound effect on both Jacobs and Eaves.

Jacobs was already

cutting hair for friends and he became determined that he would one day have his own shop. He now has two - LaPorsha's on Harris Boulevard near Albemarle Road and another in the Eastway Crossing shopping center at Central Avenue and Eastway Drive. Jacobs also has a contract with the state to cut hair at the Stonewall Jackson youth detention center in Concord.

"The biggest thing is perseverance," he said of King's influence on him. "Stay on target with your dreams."

"I believe in maintaining self-employment. I went to barber

college and then to A&T to get a degree and worked for while, but I came back to my calling."

Jacobs worked for 13 years as manager of Red Lobster restaurants in Charlotte before returning to the barber shop.

He's a deacon at his church, New St. John Baptist, and scouting representative in the church's Boy Scout program. He also takes his ministry to Stonewall Jackson, dispensing words of hope and encouragement, along with haircuts to the young men incarcerated there.

Jacobs said there's always conversation in

the barbershop about King and what his dream meant.

"We are beginning to see what he was talking about 30 years later," Jacobs said. "His name comes up when we talk about unequal justice, like the O.J. situation, and wonder what would he do if he was here.

"There's still a sense of reverence. He was a good preacher and everybody understood what he was saying.

"I'm more civic minded," Jacobs said. "I try to get involved with our people."

On Monday, he will attend the Martin Luther King prayer