

# Coretta Scott King: A Symbol of Dignity, Strength, and Perseverance

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Since the passing of Coretta Scott King on January 30, 2006, many great things have been said about the character and life of the wife of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The Reverend Joseph Lowery, former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who worked on civil rights with Dr. King in the 1950s once said, "She wore her grief with dignity. She moved quietly but forcefully into the fray. She stood for peace in the midst of turmoil." It seems that in many of the sentiments expressed by some of today's influential leaders, the main characteristics that she exhibited the best were dignity, strength, and perseverance.

Long before she became Coretta Scott King, she was just Coretta Scott from Marion, Alabama. Growing up in the South during the early 1940s, Coretta saw and experienced racism and prejudice first hand. In her town, her father was the only black that owned his own truck. His truck enabled him to enter into the lumber-hauling business and compete with whites, but it also made him a target. As a result, she saw her childhood home burn to

the ground on Thanksgiving weekend in 1942 and witnessed her father being threatened when he refused to sell his sawmill to a white man. Instead of letting the negatives bring her down, Coretta used those negatives to her advantage and allowed them to empower her. While her father went back to work hauling timber and rebuilding their home, she followed her father's example and kept going. She stood tall in front of those who tried to bring her down or make her feel inferior and fought harder for equal rights for African-Americans. From her father, Coretta once wrote, "His example deepened my understanding of the courage it takes to actually live out a commitment to God's love over hatred. Daddy prepared me, without my knowing it, for the risks that my husband and I would face together throughout the Civil Rights Movement."

During the Civil Rights Movement, Scott entered the public eye as the wife of Dr. King, but became much more than that. She became a symbol of strength in the face of adversity. At the height of the movement, she braved numerous death threats against her husband and her family and survived the bombing of her home

by white supremacists. Her strength was admired by many, but the one who admired her strength the most and looked to her for courage was her husband. In his autobiography, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, he wrote:

My devoted wife has been a constant source of consolation to me through all the difficulties. In the midst of the most tragic experiences, she never became panicky or overemotional. I have come to see the real meaning of that rather trite statement: a wife can either make or break a husband. My wife was always stronger than I was through the struggle. While she had certain natural fears and anxieties concerning my welfare, she never allowed them to hamper my active participation in the movement. Corrie proved to be that type of wife with qualities to make a husband when he could have been so easily broken. In the darkest moments, she always brought the light of hope. I am convinced that if I had not had a wife with the fortitude, strength, and calmness of Corrie, I could not have withstood the ordeals and tensions surrounding the movement.

After her husband's death in 1968, instead of isolating



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herself to grieve and face her husband's death, she kept going. She turned her grief into tireless devotion to preserving her husband's legacy and continued to carry his message of non-violence. Four days after his death, she continued his work and led a march of fifty-thousand people through Memphis; in addition, she took his place in the Poor People's March to Washington. The Reverend Al Sharpton told CNN, "She would always admonish us that ... one of the ways you bring about change is, you must change yourself so that you're prepared to lead people in the direction they should go. If your emotions are as bad as those you're fighting, even if your cause is just, you disqualify yourself from being effective."

Much of her courageous work went towards developing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia. She worked endlessly for years raising funds for the center, while still finding time to be involved in the causes that were important to her husband. In addition, she was able to get her husband's birthday honored as a national holiday.

Coretta Scott King was a true vision of dignity, strength and perseverance throughout her life. She devoted her life to the cause and served as an inspirational figure for men and women. Even though she is gone, there is still work to be done. The fight for equality and civil rights is far from over. She helped keep the movement going when times looked bleak and now it's time for everyone to continue this march, not just for her but for all the other civil rights leaders who are no longer here. Mrs. King said it best herself when she wrote, "By reaching into and beyond ourselves and tapping the transcendent ethic of love, one shall overcome these evils. Love, truth, and the courage to do what is right should be our own guideposts on this lifelong journey."

## Upcoming Events in the Career Center

### Non-Profit Career Fair

On Wednesday, March 15 from 1pm-3pm at the Alumni Gym of Guilford College in Greensboro, take the opportunity to gather information from representatives of non-profit agencies. A list of agencies will be available from the Career Center prior to the fair.

### From Handshake to Job Offer

During this information session on Friday, March 17 at 10am in the Career Center Resource Room, learn strategies for success at the Spring Career Fair including how to dress appropriately, approach employers, request an interview, and more.

### Spring Career Fair

Gather information and interview with employers for full-time positions in business, industry, government, and the non-profit sector at the Spring Career Fair on Wednesday, March 22 from 9am-5pm in the NCSU McKimmon Center.

## Teacher Network Fair

Are you interested in the teaching profession? If so, the Teacher Network Fair is your chance to connect with representatives from public, private, charter, and magnet schools for full-time teaching positions. This event will be held on Thursday, March 9 from 9:30am-12:30pm in Belk Dining Hall. If teaching is the career of your choice, make sure to take advantage of this opportunity.