

# Loved ones celebrate 'sisterly love' of 'Yoki' King

By Barbara Reynolds  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
ATLANTA (NNPA) - Earlier this month, Rev. Bernice King drove into her driveway to find that the tallest tree at her home had fallen. Taking a closer look, she agonized over the large hole it had left and wondered how to fill it.

Since that time, a grief-stricken Rev. King drew from that metaphor to share with hundreds gathered at Ebenezer Baptist Church to express how the sudden, unexpected loss of her only sister, Yolanda Denise King, left a hole in her heart — one that no one else could fill.

"Losing Yoki, who called me her one and only, is even harder for me than losing my mother," she said. Her mother, Coretta Scott King, passed on Jan. 30, 2006.

Nevertheless, Rev. King, joined by her brothers Martin Luther King III and Dexter, added, "God never makes mistakes," then he called upon the congregation to rejoice and celebrate the 51 years of life that God had given to her sister.

Yolanda died May 15, collapsing in the arms of her brother, Dexter, at his California home, reportedly as a result of a heart condition. Dexter spoke earnestly of his personal pain of not being able to revive his sister. "My doctor told me my nervous

system is in shock." Hundreds of family, friends and celebrities packed Ebenezer where in the landmark church across the street on Auburn Avenue three generations of Kings had pastored. Yolanda King's grandmother, Alberta King, also had been murdered there while playing the "Lord's Prayer" at the piano.

During the five-hour ceremony May 24, the life of Yolanda Denise King unfolded as a profile of sisterly love.

As a 13-week-old infant in her mother's arms, she was routed from her crib by racists who firebombed her parents' home in Montgomery, Ala., during the movement that launched the modern Civil Rights Era.

As a woman, she pushed the cause of sisterly love through the performing arts and motivational speaking.

As a 12-year-old adolescent, her heart was broken when the father she had grown to love, was brutally ripped from her life by an assassin's bullet. But, despite her pain, her warmth and caring for others was her trademark — her personal sisterhood.

As a child in the South, she watched the White children attend Fun Town Amusement Park and cried when she learned she couldn't ride on the merry-



The Rev. Bernice King, daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., speaks during a memorial service for her sister, Yolanda King, as her brothers Dexter King, left, and Martin Luther King III look on in Atlanta on Thursday.

go-round, which was just one of the punishments she faced growing up Black in America.

As an artist, one of her passions was speaking out across the country on the

bleasing of diversity.

King was eulogized in word, song and dance, by the poetry of Dr. Maya Angelou, actress Cicely Tyson, vocalists Jennifer Holliday, Byron Cage, Dottie Peoples, and

dancer Barbara Sullivan.

It was a fitting scenario for a woman who carried on the cultural legacy of her mother, who started her career as an opera singer, as well as her father, who was a dramatist. In her own unique way, she planted the seeds of her family's legacy of social justice in the hearts of millions through the stage, screen and the performing arts.

The service was sprinkled with upbeat humor, gospel songs and verbal salutes to how Yolanda King shunned roles that would demean women and opted for parts that showed a commitment to equality and social justice.

Videos of some of her appearances in TV films, such as "Strong Medicine," "Jag," and "Any Day Now," were shown. King also portrayed Rosa Parks in the NBC-TV movie "King," Dr. Betty Shabazz in the film "Death of a Prophet," and, most recently, she starred in the short feature, "Odessa," currently being considered for an Academy Award nomination.

In a work she produced called "Tracks," she played 16 parts, including a male, female, an Asian, the highest in society to the lowest, which was typical of her mission of embracing all people.

Throughout the ceremony, Yolanda King was eulogized as a woman, who lived and loved life to the fullest.

She skydived, went on camping trips and had moved into producing plays and films as head of her own corporation, "Higher Ground Productions."

Several speakers, however, pointed out that she was often tired and over-committed. In fact, only days before her death, she spoke of her tiredness to this writer, but she also spoke with the vigor and excitement of someone racing against time to complete her mission and to further the legacy of her mother.

Following the stroke that contributed to her mother's death last year, Yolanda King worked on behalf of the American Heart Association.

Former Atlanta Mayor Ambassador Andrew Young, one of her father's closest aides and known as "Uncle Andy" to the family, put the heart issue in perspective. "Heart disease is part of our tradition. We eat the same way we did when we worked in the field all day."

Young reminded the congregation that Yolanda's uncle, A.D. King, apparently died of heart complications shortly after suffering the loss of his brother Martin. Also, two of Yolanda's cousins died in their twenties as a result of heart disease.

Her body was cremated last Friday.

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## Africa

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flected in Bush's remarks on Wednesday.

"Once again, the generosity of the American people is one of the great untold stories of our time," he said. "Our citizens are offering comfort to millions who suffer, and restoring hope to those who feel forsaken."

AIDS advocacy organizations praised Bush for proposing the additional money, but said the plan — which he said would provide drugs for 2.5 million patients — did not go nearly far enough toward meeting the international community's stated goal of treating the estimated 10 million patients in developing nations.

"It's a modest increase, it's important that he reaffirmed it, but we will need the next president to do more," said Paul Zeitz, executive director of the Global AIDS Alliance, a non-profit advocacy group. "We're not getting ahead of the AIDS crisis. We're tem-

pering it."

Administration officials concede that point and say the White House is hoping Bush's announcement will prod other Group of 8 countries, as well as nations that have growing economies, to make spending commitments of their own.

"The goal of universal access isn't a United States goal, it's a global goal," said Mark R. Dybul, the administration's global AIDS coordinator.

"The rest of the world is going to need to respond if we are going to achieve these goals."

International development and human rights issues will be high on the agenda of next week's summit, but so will climate change — an issue on which Bush finds himself at odds with his fellow G-8 leaders, notably the meeting's host, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. Dan Bartlett, counselor to Bush, said the president intended to address climate

change in a speech this week at the United States Agency for International Development.

But so far this week, Bush has been devoting most of his attention to human rights and poverty, issues that draw him less criticism than his stance on climate change. In an interview Monday night, a senior administration official said Bush planned to spend the week in advance of the G-8 conference spotlighting humanitarian issues and "demonstrating U.S. leadership around the world."

On Tuesday, Bush announced he was imposing stiff economic sanctions on Sudan to press its government into cooperating with a United Nations peacekeeping force that is trying to end the violence in Darfur.

The AIDS initiative, which is likely to generate bipartisan support in Congress, would cover federal spending for the 2009 to 2013 fiscal years, meaning the vast majority of the money would

be spent after Bush left office. To promote it, the White House is sending Laura Bush to Africa next month.

"She and I share a passion," Bush said. "We believe that to whom much is given, much is required."

The United Nations reports that there are nearly 40 million people worldwide living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS; last year three million died from their infections. In his announcement in 2003, Bush said he was committed to offering treatment for two million HIV patients by 2008. But so far, he said, the program, called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, has paid for treatment for just 1.1 million people in 15 nations.

Advocates complain that the new goal, bringing the number of patients treated to 2.5 million, is not that much more ambitious than the old one.

"By 2013 there will be 12 million people that urgently need medicines," Zeitz said.

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