

**A DREAM OF CHANGE, A FUTURE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT...
ONLY ACHIEVED THROUGH A LIFE OF SERVICE**

By Jewel Daniels

THANK YOU TO THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR OBSERVANCE DAY COMMITTEE FOR ALLOWING A ME, A WOMAN WHOSE ROOTS RUN THROUGH THE SOUTH AND ACROSS THE WATERS OF THE CARIBBEAN TO FIND HER WAY IN THE COMPANY OF SUCH PHENOMENAL, GIVING AND COMMITTED PROFESSIONALS.

IT IS A BRISK AND RAINY MORNING, ONE OF WHICH MANY CHOSE TO STAY HOME BUT YOU CHOSE TO BE HERE. AND FOR THAT, THE COMMITTEE, THIS COMMUNITY AND I AM MOST GRATEFUL.

DR. KING ONCE SAID:

“HUMAN PROGRESS IS NEITHER AUTOMATIC NOR INEVITABLE... EVERY STEP TOWARD THE GOAL OF JUSTICE REQUIRES SACRIFICE, SUFFERING, AND STRUGGLE; THE TIRELESS EXERTIONS AND PASSIONATE CONCERN OF DEDICATED INDIVIDUALS.”

I BELIEVE THAT BRITTANY STROBERT HIT IT DEAD-ON WHEN SHE COINED THIS YEAR’S THEME A DREAM OF CHANGE, A FUTURE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.

I ASKED MYSELF WHAT MAKES A MAN CREATE A MAMMOTH OF A DREAM SO LARGE THAT IT EMCOMPASSES HIS ENTIRE LIFE WHILE APPEARING SO INTANGIBLE YET WITH EVERY WORD THAT FELL FROM HIS LIPS AND EVERY PRECISION STEP HE TOOK, HE PURSUED HIS DREAM ENDLESSLY UNTIL THERE WAS NO LONGER BREATH IN HIS BODY?

I FOUND MY ANSWER IN THE LEGACY OF DR. KING’S DNA. THE STORY IS NOT OFTEN TOLD THAT HIS ROOTS IN MINISTRY CAME FROM HIS FATHER KING SR. WHO EARNED A DEGREE IN

THEOLOGY AND TOOK OVER THE REIGNS OF THE INFAMOUS EBENZER BAPTIST CHURCH FROM HIS FATHER-IN-LAW A. D. WILLIAMS AFTER HE DIED OF A HEART ATTACK.

AS A CHILD, DR. KING WATCHED HIS FATHER PARTICIPATE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SEGREGATION WITH HIS EFFORTS HELPING TO PUT AN END TO JIM CROW LAWS IN GEORGIA. HE SAW HIM BE EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN THE BAPTIST MINISTERS' UNION AND RISE TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE NAACP IN ATLANTA. DR. KING OBSERVED AS HIS FATHER STOOD UP FOR THE RIGHTS OF OPPRESSED PEOPLE AND AS HE ASSEMBLED THE COMMUNITY TO PURSUE A BETTER LIFE. WHEN DR. KING WAS JUST A TEENAGER, BACK IN THE EARLY 1940S, HIS FATHER GAVE A SPEECH AND IT WAS TITLED "GOALS TOWARD WHICH WE SHOULD STRIVE TODAY AS A MINORITY GROUP."

WOW, I HAD TO PAUSE AND CHECK THE DATE OF THAT SPEECH BECAUSE TRULY THAT TOPIC COULD STILL BE SEEN AS RELEVANT TODAY. DR. KING – DESPITE KNOWING THE TRIALS HIS FATHER FACED AND HE HIMSELF LIVING THROUGH THE CONFINES OF SEGREGATION AND PREJUDICE THAT RULED THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE, WAS ABLE TO ELEVATE THE LEGACY OF HIS FATHER'S WORK AND TRANSLATE IT INTO A DREAM OF CHANGE THAT WOULD BECKON US TO WORK ON ACHIEVING A FUTURE OF EVEN GREATER ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

DR. KING SAID AN INDIVIDUAL BEGINS TO LIVE WHEN HE RISES ABOVE THE NARROW CONFINES OF HIS INDIVIDUALISTIC CONCERNS TO THE BROADER CONCERNS OF ALL HUMANITY.

IN OTHER WORDS, THERE IS NO WAY FOR US TO RISE IF THE FOCUS IS ON ONLY ONE OF US MOVING FORWARD!

HE ALSO SAID "OUR LIVES BEGIN TO END THE DAY WE BECOME SILENT ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER."

DR. KING WROTE MANY SPEECHES AND SPOKE BEFORE MANY PEOPLE EXPRESSING WHAT THINGS MATTERED TO HIM. THEY WERE:

- LIBERTY
- SPIRITUALITY
- SERVICE
- RESPECT OF PERSON

SO AS WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY, IT MATTERS THAT WE RECOGNIZE MARTIN LUTHER KING, MR. LIVED A LIFE OF SACRIFICE SO YOU AND I COULD LIVE A LIFE OF SURPLUS

IT MATTERS THAT YOU TAKE HOLD TO ALL THAT IS PRECIOUS AND UNIQUE ABOUT HIS DREAM...ALL THAT ALLOWS YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO LIVE BEYOND THE DREAM AND BECOME A PART OF AS HIS REALITY, A REALITY THAT SAYS PEOPLE OF ALL SHAPES, SIZES, HUES, SKILLS AND FAITHS HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE FREELY, AND THAT WE DEMONSTRATE A RESPECT FOR ALL MANKIND.

IT MATTERS THAT EVERYONE BE ALLOWED TO EXPRESS THEIR SPIRITUALITY BUT WE MUST BE COMMITTED TO A LIFE OF SERVICE...IT MATTERS THAT YOU WORK TIRELESSLY TO BE THE FUTURE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT WILL CONTINUE TO CHALLENGE THIS WORLD TO BE BETTER AND MORE IMPORTANTLY CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO DO MORE.

IN LIFE WE ARE HOSTS TO MANY ROLES ANY RESPONSIBILITIES. FOR ME, I WEAR HATS OF WIFE, ENTREPRENEUR, COMMUNITY CITIZEN, CHURCH MINISTER AND MOTHER. THIS COMMUNITY HAS CONTRIBUTED TOWARD MY ABILITY TO RAISE A WELL-ROUNDED 17-YEAR-OLD YOUNG WOMAN WHO WILL GRADUATE FROM SAVANNAH ARTS ACADEMY. AS SHE PREPARES TO START THE SECOND PHASE OF HER LIFE AS A COLLEGE STUDENT I HAVE TOLD HER TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE. STUDY HARD, LEARN MUCH, ENJOY LIFE BUT MAKE SURE THE

LIFE YOU DESIGN IS ONE THAT MEANS DOING SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF.

DR. KING'S LIFE WAS PATTERNED BY HIS BELIEF THAT "THE QUALITY, NOT THE LONGEVITY, OF ONE'S LIFE IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT."

THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF A MAN IS NOT WHERE HE STANDS IN MOMENTS OF COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE, BUT WHERE HE STANDS IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE AND CONTROVERSY.

YOU SEE, WHILE DR. KING HAD A LEGACY OF STRONG MEN WHO LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PATH THAT HE WOULD FOLLOW, SOME OF US LOOK AT OUR LEGACY TRYING TO FIND THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF WHAT WILL BE THE DESIGN FOR OUR FUTURE SUCCESS. AND WHERE THERE ARE SOME SHORTAGES IT IS EASY TO GRAB HOLD ONTO EXCUSES THAT CAUSE US TO REACH FOR THE LOW HANGING FRUIT. (RATHER THAN DO LIKE DR. KING AND STRETCH BEYOND PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVE THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE)

TODAY, I CHALLENGE YOU TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE GENES OF KINGS AND QUEENS IS ALL FLOWING THROUGH YOUR DNA CONTRIBUTING TO THE MERE FACT THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO OCCUPY THE SEATS IN THIS VERY ROOM. EVERY LIFE IS DESIGNED FOR A PROFOUND PURPOSE THAT REQUIRES US TO ALL BE LEADERS – REGARDLESS OF YOUR AGE, REGARDLESS OF YOUR RACE; DESPITE YOUR POSITION IN LIFE AND YES, EVEN YOUR TITLE. BECAUSE MANY WHO HAVE LEADERSHIP TITLES DON'T ALWAYS DEMONSTRATE THE ATTRIBUTES OF BEING A LEADER.

LEADERS LIKE DR. KING, AND LIKE MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM, RISE TO THE OCCASION THAT SEPARATES THEM FROM THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW CHANGE AND THOSE WHO WILL EFFECT CHANGE. LEADERS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE CALLED OUT, ARE SUBJECT TO MORE ATTENTION, BOTH GOOD AND BAD. THEY ARE MET WITH CHALLENGES AND EXPECTED TO TENACIOUSLY FIGHT TO ACHIEVE WHAT IS RIGHT AND WHAT IS BEST.

DR. KING'S LIFE WAS PLAGUED WITH CONTROVERSY AND CHALLENGES, YET HE PUSHED ON. HE WAS JAILED AND BEATEN, YET HE FOUND THE ENERGY TO KEEP MARCHING. HE WAS LIED ON AND DOUBTED BY MANY, YET HE WROTE ANOTHER SPEECH. HE WAS THREATENED AND CURSED, YET HE TRAVELED TO ANOTHER CITY AND RALLIED EVEN MORE PEOPLE. AND ON THE EVE BEFORE HIS DEATH, HE PREACHED AS IF HE KNEW HIS LIFE WOULD SOON COME TO AN END, YET HE SPOKE SAYING HOW HE WAS "PLEASED WITH JUST BEING ABLE TO DO GOD'S WILL."

SO MY QUESTION IS:

WHEN YOUR TIME COMES TO BE TESTED...TO BE CHALLENGED...PERHAPS TO FACE A LITTLE BIT OF CONTROVERSY....WILL THE FOUNDATION YOU HAVE NURTURED BE STRONG ENOUGH SO THAT YOU CAN STAND? AND WILL THE STAND THAT YOU TAKE BE THE MEASURE OF YOUR FAITH, YOUR PRINCIPLES AND YOUR MORAL BELIEFS?

WHILE DR. KING'S DREAM OF CHANGE IS OUR LIVING REALITY, WE CAN ONLY ATTAIN A FUTURE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IF WE DECIDE NOW WHICH DIRECTION WE WILL PURSUE. CHOOSING TO DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT LEAVES US VULNERABLE TO A POSITION THAT ALLOWS US TO GET SWEEPED UP BY ANYTHING THE WIND BLOWS OUR WAY AND WE PERMIT TO LAND IN OUR PATH.

IN THE YEAR THAT DR. KING DIED I WAS JUST BEING BORN. IN MY YEARS OF GROWING UP IN BROOKLYN, NY I EXPERIENCED PREJUDICE THAT HAD ME AND MY BEST FRIEND DIANA RODRIGUEZ RUNNING BACK TO OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL BECAUSED WE HAD BEEN CHASED FROM AWAY FROM A NEIGHBORHOOD PIZZERIA BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN.

SOME YEARS LATER I WOULD BE ONE OF TWO YOUNG BLACK GIRLS TO BE THE FIRST ADMITTED INTO ST. JOSEPH HILL ACADEMY, AN ALL GIRLS PRIVATE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN

STATEN ISLAND, NY. HOWEVER, FOUR YEARS LATER, I WOULD FIND THE SOUL OF WHO I WOULD BECOME IN THE CLASSROOMS, HALLWAYS, LIBRARIES AND COURTYARDS OF HAMPTON UNIVERSITY. A PLACE WHERE THE DARKNESS OF MY SKIN, THE SWAGGER OF MY HIPS AND THE STRENGTH OF THE WOMEN WHO HAD RAISED ME WOULD BE MUCH MORE APPRECIATED, VALUED AND TREASURED THAN ANYWHERE ELSE I HAD EVR KNOWN.

BUT MY JOURNEY WOULD NOT END THERE. GOD WOULD SEE ME CARRIED ACROSS THE SEAS INTO THE HANDS OF A HOMOGENOUS NATION OF SOUTH KOREANS WHERE I WOULD BECOME THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN ACCEPTED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL. AND YET WITH ALL THIS, THE EXTENSION OF MY JOURNEY WOULD FIND IT'S MORE CHALLENGES AND MY GREATEST TRIUMPHS BETWEEN THE SWAYING TREES OF THE SOUTH - HERE IN SAVANNAH.

THIS IS WHERE I AM LIVING OUT THIS PHASE OF MY LIFE – A PHASE OF LIFE THAT HAS CALLED ME TO A LIFE OF LIBERTY, SPIRITUALITY, RESPECT OF PERSON AND SERVICE THAT ARE THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF DR. KING'S DREAM OF CHANGE.

WHEN DR. KING ACCEPTED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZED IN OSLO, NORWAY (1964) HE SAID: MOST OF THESE PEOPLE WILL NEVER MAKE THE HEADLINES AND THEIR NAMES WILL NOT APPEAR IN WHO'S WHO. YET WHEN YEARS HAVE ROLLED PAST AND WHEN THE BLAZING LIGHT OF TRUTH IS FOCUSED ON THIS MARVELOUS AGE IN WHICH WE LIVE -- MEN AND WOMEN WILL KNOW AND CHILDREN WILL BE TAUGHT THAT WE HAVE A FINER LAND, A BETTER PEOPLE, A MORE NOBLE CIVILIZATION -- BECAUSE THESE HUMBLE CHILDREN OF GOD WERE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE.

LIFE IS FUNNY, WHEN I WAS LIVING THOSE EXPERIENCES THEY WERE NOT ALL PLEASANT, YET I PERSEVERED. MY LIFE, YOUR LIFE, WILL BE PRESENTED WITH CHALLENGES THAT DEMAND SACRIFICE, SUFFERING AND STRUGGLE ALL IN THE NAME OF SERVICE. IT IS ONLY THROUGH

THIS PROCESS THAT DREAMS OF CHANGE ARE FOSTERED AND THE REALITY OF A FUTURE BRIGHT WITH UNMEASURABLE ACCOMPLISHMENT IS ACHIEVED.

MY MESSAGE TO YOU IS: REMAIN FOCUSED BECAUSE THE SEEDS YOU PLANT TODAY - DESPITE STORMS, TRIALS AND SOME TRIBULATIONS – THOSE SEEDS WILL BARE FRUIT WHOSE NECTAR WILL TASTE **OH SO SWEET**.

MY CHALLENGE: FOR YOU, FOR ME. FOR ALL OF US, IS TO BE ACCOUNTABLE TO LEAD AND I BELIEVE WE DO THIS IN TWO WAYS:

LIVE A LIFE OF **SUCCESS**, WHICH IS MEASURED BY WHAT YOU DO FOR YOURSELF

BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY,

TO PURSUE A LIFE OF **GREATNESS**, THIS IS THE PROOF OF WHAT YOU DO FOR OTHERS - LEAVING THIS WORLD IN A CONDITION BETTER THAN WHICH YOU FOUND IT.

THANK YOU AND MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALWAYS!