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Last year this time, I was on my way to celebrate my birthday with a special trip to California. As I was about to board the plane, my 13-year-old son called me on my cell and said that Mrs. Coretta Scott King had passed. My "other mom" had just gone home to be with the Lord. I began to cry and tremble as I boarded the plane and made one



call—to my dear friend, Yolanda, the elder daughter of Martin and Coretta. I reflected on the strength that Mrs. King and Yolanda had been for me when my own mom passed three years earlier.

I was blessed to have had a close relationship with my own mom, the late Dorothy C. Johnson, who died Nov. 1, 2003, All Saints Day. The first consolation call came from Yolanda King and her mother, Coretta, who said, "Sujay, this is your other mother, and I am now here for you."

She had started calling herself my "other mother" in June 2003, when I was installed as the first female president of the 12,000-member Hampton University Ministers' Conference, the largest and oldest interdenominational gathering of clergy in the world. Since my mother had been ill that entire year, I knew she would not be able to be with me for that historic moment. I called my sisterfriend, Yolanda King, "Yoki," as I affectionately call her, to stand with me. She called me back a few days after the invitation and said, "I have great news! Mother is coming with me."

My heart leaped for joy, and I remember the moment Mrs. King came out, exuberant and beautiful in a flowing silk pants ensemble. This woman in history stood and the crowd went wild. My other mother's relationship grew out of the close bond between my girlfriend Yoki and me. Parents always want to know who their children's friends are, and when there's a closeness, they feel that. We had shared so many private moments in my life, with her not as the "famous" Mrs. King, but as my friend's mom. Our mothers knew each other and we had wonderful private moments of sharing that I will always cherish.

Yolanda and I have been sisterfriends for nearly 30 years. We met right after college and traveled to West Africa, backpacking through nine countries. There has always been a spiritual bond that has con-

nected us. She was in my wedding and also is the godmother of my youngest son; and she is very much in his life. We fill in for each other whenever there are conflicts or emergencies, and we know that confidentiality is our strong suit. We love each other. We trust each other. We protect each other.

I thank God for the friendship and sisterhood of Yolanda. We make sure to look out for each other with regularity, and I will always be here for her. She is the sister I never had, and whenever we start a phone call, it's always "Hello, my sister." Elder Bernice is now my other sister as well, and Martin and Dexter will always have me.

I stood in awe and admiration of Mrs. King, the only woman ever to lie in state in the Georgia Statehouse. When the horse-drawn carriage came to a halt, the rain stopped and the sun broke through as they ushered her one last time into the Statehouse. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

And so it was an honor and privilege to co-officiate at Mrs. King's homegoing service, to bring together the many facets of the world and community leaders who just wanted to get one last glimpse and give one tribute to a Queen. Presidents, politicians, celebrities and neighborhood folks sat and stood for hours to pay their respects.

She is reunited with Martin now and able to sing "Free at Last" with new meaning. How I praise God that she touched my life. □