



2015 – A 10 Year Anniversary Message about Mrs. Emma L. Wilson King

A friend once remarked: “Is it not difficult to look at your mother’s photograph so often with her imagery on the Foundation materials?” There was a momentary pause. Then as I reflected of when Ma’s mother passed, how she initially saw it uneasy to view Big Ma’s portrait. Then with time, she too would teach how with those simple mannerisms and traits that were so emblematic of her mother’s basic yet strong southern roots, she too was a woman of such strength and character that the small, mild woman from Starksville, MS had taught her valuable lessons about holding the family intact and continuity.

Some families have a personal bible to record a birth, baptismal or death. They would also keep records of those events and store them in some special place. Emma L. Wilson King would keep those special items stashed away at the bottom of one or more old wooden lacquered chiffarobes she had over the years. She was also the oral keeper of the family history. Who was married to whom? Related to whom? And a collection of obituary pamphlets of passed friends and family. This was her manner of keeping the family record intact. She would become an oral delivery of that record in what is now known as the oral tradition of passing on our stories in African American culture.

Holding the family together was instinctual for Mrs. King. When she settled in East St. Louis in the late 1940s she was part of an ongoing mass exodus of African Americans seeking a better life away from the fears, degradation and inhumane ways of the southern United States. The meager shotgun style home she would purchase would become a weigh station for all of her siblings and family as resettlement of loved ones looking for a better life unfolded rapidly. This is what you do for family, hands down, no questions asked? Reflecting on this she would note: “You would never expect a payment to assist family.”

That same shotgun frame home Mrs. King would utilize nearly a quarter century later to welcome a long ago separated sibling. This gesture would reunite this sibling with Mrs. King’s mother and all who had come from the south. What a happy occasion for the numerous cousins, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and Mrs. King’s mother to meet a daughter the elder had not seen in nearly fifty years. A special bond would develop with the elder and the reunited daughter till death. Mrs. King would likewise maintain the bond with her reunited sister’s children in turn.

Mrs. King’s simple lessons taught by example of expressions of love for family and friends are not complicated to understand. Her lessons will not be found in an Instagram, Twitter or on Facebook connections. They are genuine from the heart care life lessons.

Mrs. King cherished raising a family in the place she settled in called East St. Louis. Like our 2015 Honorees, she too was proud to call it home. Herein her legacy continues.