

# Luther King

by Coretta Scott King

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**O**n that occasion, Rev. William Borders said, "thank you, Montgomery! Thank you, Martin Luther King." But all the restaurants and lunch counters in Atlanta were still completely segregated. There was hardly a place outside our own neighborhoods where a Negro could even get a soda except by going to the side door of a drugstore and having it handed out.

It is difficult to describe how inescapably segregation pursued you, even though you instinctively tried to avoid putting your self into flying into Atlanta, well after he had achieved national recognition. He struck up a conversation with the white man sitting beside him on the plane, and they enjoyed their conversation together so much that his fellow passenger invited Martin to have lunch with him at the airport when they landed in Atlanta.

Martin gladly accepted, and the two men went into the restaurant together. They asked for a table for two, and the hostess looked at Martin and said, "I'll have to seat you at a separate table."

She directed Martin to an area behind a curtain and said, "Everything is the same: the food, the table, and the chairs are the same."

My husband answered her kindly but firmly, "Oh, no. It is not the same. When you segregate me, you deprive me of fellowship with my brother here, when I want to continue to talk to him."

He pointed to the decorated walls and said, "When I am behind this curtain, you deprive me of the artistic pleasure of those paintings. It is not at all the same."

Of course, Martin was not willing to be seated behind a curtain, and he left.

It was against just such discrimination that the students began to organize protest demonstrations. Their main target in Atlanta was Rich's Department Store, one of the largest in the South. They invited Martin to sit-in at the lunch counter with them, and of course he accepted with alacrity.

There were about seventy-five students in the group on that particular day and they were all arrested, Martin with them. Among them was Lonnie King, leader of the Atlanta Student Movement; the Reverend Otis Moss, the Reverend John Porter, Ruby Doris Smith, the Reverend A.D. King, and Marian Wright.

The students in Atlanta were extremely well organized and during demonstrations moved with military precision. The Reverend Fred C. Bennette, Jr; the commander who gave the orders, was referred to as "Le Commandant." It had been agreed, in advance, that if they were arrested, they would not put up bail and most of them stayed in Jail. Martin said, "I'll stay in jail one year or ten years if it takes that long to desegregate Rich's."

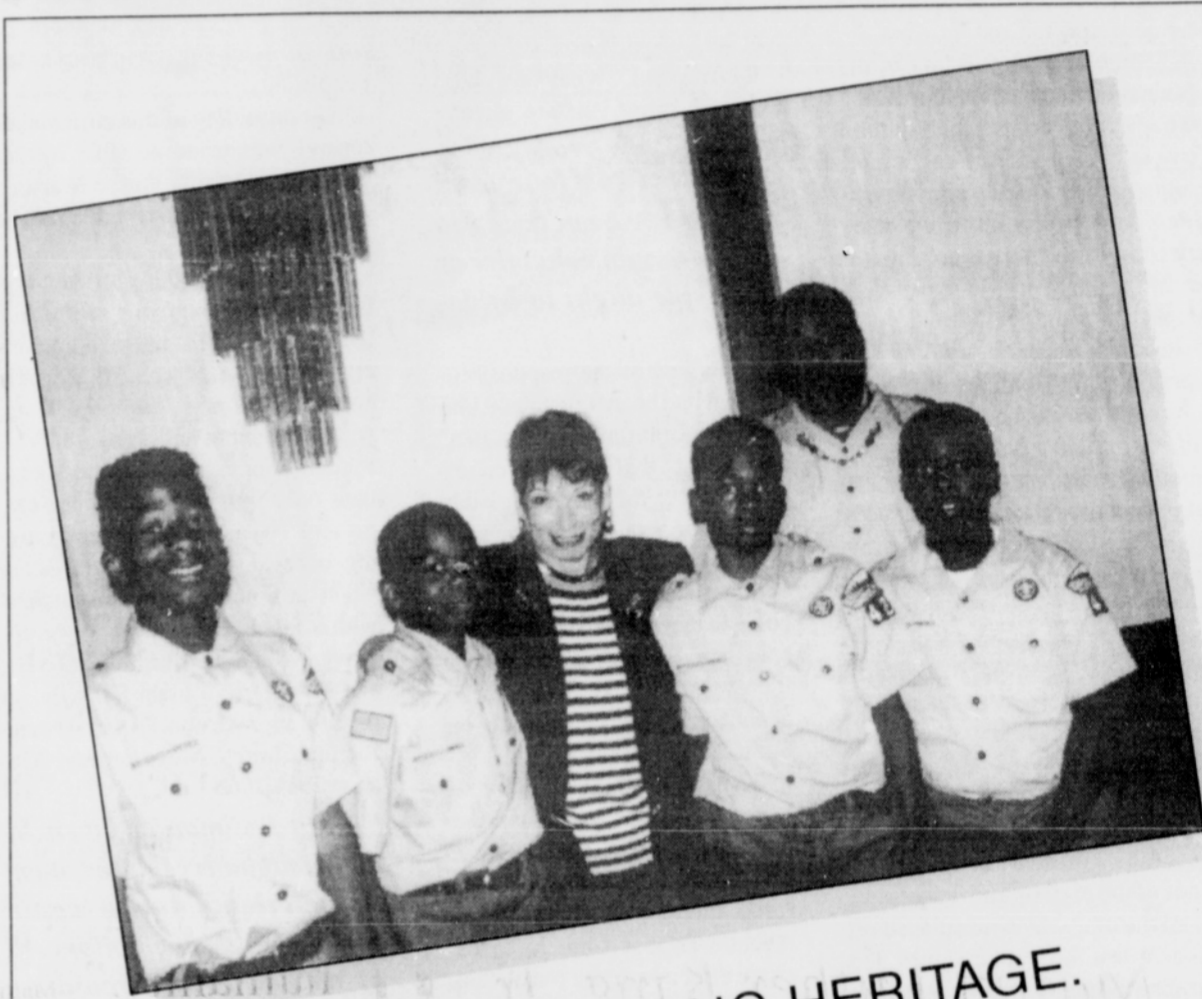
The whole community was aroused when the imprisonments became known. A committee of students and adults was formed to negotiate with the merchants and city officials to try to reach a settlement. Martin stayed in jail for about a week before an agreement was reached. I was pregnant at the time, but I went to see him almost every day. Though the rules of the jail allowed visiting only once a week, Daddy King knew the sheriff, who was a decent man, and he arranged that I could come.

I heard that Robert Kennedy called Judge Mitchell to learn why Dr. King couldn't be released on bail pending appeal. That story leaked out to the press, and evidently Judge Mitchell had a change of heart. Now, he said Martin would be released on bail.

I received the news about Martin's release around noon the next day, and I was very, happy. SCLC chartered a plane to bring Martin home we all went to the airport to meet him, and so little Marty did get to see his father come home from jail in an airplane.

As we rode back to town together-Martin, Yoki, Marty, Mamma and Daddy King, Christine, and her husband, Isaac-Martin related his experiences and emotional reactions to confinement at Reidsville. Following the usual pattern for these occasions, a mass meeting was held that night at Ebenezer Church. People from all over town came. Martin told about his experiences in jail, but said nothing political. He resolved to continue in the struggle more determined than ever. However, Daddy King, who had been planning to vote for Nixon, had no such inhibitions. He roared out to the crowd, "If I had a suitcase full of votes, I'd take them all and place at Senator Kennedy's feet."

A few days later, John Kennedy was elected President of the United States by only about a hundred thousand votes. It is my belief that historians are right when they say that his intervention in Martin's case won the presidency for him. That seemed significant to me because of what happened later in the civil-rights struggle and the relationship of the Kennedys to what Martin was trying to accomplish.



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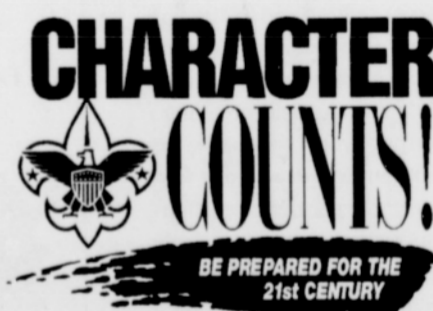
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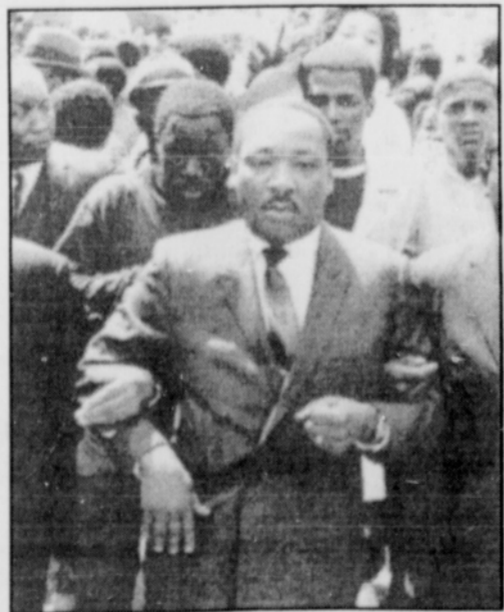
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