

First Lady of Peace

continued ▲ from Front

King became a symbol, in her own right, of her husband's struggle for peace and brotherhood, presiding with a quiet, steady, stoic presence over seminars and conferences on global issues.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who was with her husband when he was assassinated, said Tuesday that she understood that every time he left home, there was the chance he might not come back. "Like all great champions, she learned to function with pain and keep serving," he said. "So her legacy is secure as a freedom fighter, but her work remains unfinished."

King wrote a book, "My Life With Martin Luther King Jr.," and, in 1969 founded the multimillion-dollar Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She saw to it that the center became deeply involved with the issues she said breed violence - hunger, unemployment, voting rights and racism.

"The center enables us to go out and struggle against the evils in our

day." Eighteen months later - June 18, 1953 - they did, at her parents' home in Marion, Ala. The couple moved to Montgomery, Ala., where he became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and organized the famed Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. With that campaign, King began enacting his philosophy of direct social action.

Over the years, King was with her husband in his finest hours. She was at his side as he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. She marched beside him from Selma, Ala., into Montgomery in 1965 for the triumphal climax to his drive for a voting rights law.

Only days after his death, she flew to Memphis with three of her children to lead thousands marching in honor of her slain husband and to plead for his cause. "I think you rise to the occasion in a crisis," she once said. "I think the Lord gives you strength when you need it. God was using us - and now he's using me, too."

The King family, especially King and her father-in-law, Martin Luther

King said the war in Vietnam which her husband opposed "has been replaced by an undeclared war on our central cities, a war being fought by gangs with guns for drugs." "The value of life in our cities has become as cheap as the price of a gun," she said. King received numerous honors for herself and traveled around the

world in the process. In London, she stood in 1969 in the same carved pulpit in St. Paul's Cathedral where her husband preached five years earlier. "Many despair at all the evil and unrest and disorder in the world today," she preached, "but I see a new social order and I see the dawn of a new day."



Coretta Scott King kissing her beloved husband the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.



Coretta Scott King delivers a speech at the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change on Jan. 13, 2004. An image of her late husband Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is in the background.

society," she often said.

She became increasingly outspoken against businesses such as film and television companies, video arcades, gun manufacturers and toy makers she accused of promoting violence. She called for regulation of their advertising. After her stroke, King missed the annual King holiday celebration in Atlanta two weeks ago, but she did appear with her children at an awards dinner a couple of days earlier, smiling from her wheelchair but not speaking. The crowd gave her a standing ovation.

At the same time, the King Center's board of directors was considering selling the site to the National Park Service to let the family focus less on grounds maintenance and more on King's message. Two of the four children were strongly against such a move. Also in the news recently was a new book, "At Canaan's Edge" by Tay-

King Sr., were highly visible in 1976 when former Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter ran for president. When an integration dispute at Carter's Plains church created a furor, King campaigned at Carter's side the next day.

She later was named by Carter to serve as part of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, where Young was the ambassador. In 1997, she spoke out in favor of a push to grant a trial for James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to killing her husband and then recanted. "Even if no new light is shed on the facts concerning my husband's assassination, at least we and the nation can have the satisfaction of knowing that justice has run its course in this tragedy," she told a judge. The trial never took place; Ray died in 1998.

King was born April 27, 1927, in Perry County, Ala. Her father ran a country store. To help her family



President Jimmy Carter during a public event walking with Coretta Scott King.

lor Branch, that put allegations of her husband's infidelity back in the spotlight. It said her husband confessed a long-standing affair to her not long before he was assassinated.

Coretta Scott was studying voice at the New England Conservatory of Music and planning on a singing career when a friend introduced her to Martin Luther King, a young Baptist minister studying at Boston University. "She said she wanted me to meet a very promising young minister from Atlanta," King once said, adding with a laugh: "I wasn't interested in meeting a young minister at that time." She recalled that on their first date he told her: "You know, you have everything I ever wanted in a woman. We ought to get married some-

during the Depression, young Coretta picked cotton; later, she worked as a waitress to earn her way through Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

In 1994, King stepped down as head of the King Center, passing the job to son Dexter, who in turn passed the job on to her other son, Martin III, in 2004. Dexter continued to serve as the center's chief operating officer. Martin III also has served on the Fulton County (Ga.) commission and as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, co-founded by his father in 1957. Daughter Yolanda became an actress and the youngest child, Bernice, became a Baptist minister.

On the 25th anniversary of her husband's death, April 5, 1993,

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