Segregationist Senator's Secret Daughter Dies

Woman waited decades to reveal her parentage

(AP) -- Essie Mae Washington-Williams, the mixed-race daughter of one-time segregationist Sen. Strom Thurmond who kept her parentage secret for more than 70 years, has died. She was 87.

Vann Dozier of Leevy's Funeral Home in Columbia said Washington-Williams died Sunday. A cause revealing her secret. of death was not given.

Washington-Williams was the daughter of Thurmond and his family's black maid. The identity of her famous father was rumored for decades in political circles and the black community. She later said she kept his secret because, "He trusted me, and I respected him."

Not until after Thurmond's death in 2003 at age 100 did Washington-Williams come forward and say her father was the white man who ran for president on a segregationist platform and served in the U.S. Senate for more than 47 years.

"I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams, and at last I am com-



Essie Mae Washington-Williams

pletely free," Washington-Williams said at a news conference

Thurmond, then 22, had an affair with a 16-year-old black maid who worked in his family's Edgefield, S.C., home. She spent years as a school teacher in Los Angeles, keeping in touch with her famous father.

While Thurmond never publicly acknowledged his daughter, his family acknowledged her claim after she came forward. She later said Thurmond's widow, Nancy, was "a very wonderful person," and called Strom Thurmond Jr. "very caring, and interested in what's going on with me."

Washington-Williams was 1960s.

raised by Mary and John Washington in Coatesville, Pa. When she was 13, Mary Washington's sister, Carrie Butler, told Essie Mae that she was her mother.

Washington-Williams met Thurmond for the first time a few years later in a law office in Thurmond's hometown Edgefield.

"He never called my mother by her name. He didn't verbally acknowledge that I was his child," Washington-Williams wrote in her autobiography, "Dear Senator: A She was born in 1925 after Memoir by the Daughter of Strom Thurmond."

> "He didn't ask when I was leaving and didn't invite me to come back. It was like an audience with an important man, a job interview, but not a reunion with a father," she said in the book released January 2005.

> It was the first of many visits between Washington-Williams and her father.

> He supported her, paying for her to attend then-South Carolina State College at the same time Thurmond was governor. He also helped her later after she was widowed in the

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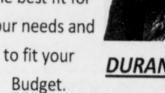
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