

A TRIBUTE TO MY GRANDMA (AND PERHAPS YOURS, TOO)

Today I am here to celebrate the life and legacy of Mrs. Joanne Taylor Lovelace. She was my "Grandma" and today would have been her 100th birthday. She missed this occasion by less than a week. After 4 months, 2 weeks, and 6 days in hospice care, she met her creator surrounded by her children, grandchildren, and a great grandchild!

How we loved Grandma! She was full of love and light, and she always had a solution to our problems. As a kid, my problems were pretty small. I have been blessed with a loving and successful family that has uplifted me to my highest potential.

But, as an adult, the troubles of the world began to weigh me down. Whenever I was sad or depressed, I knew that I could come to Grandma's house and she would have a story, a saying, or just a good old fashioned "Come to Jesus" lecture that would put me back on the straight and narrow path whenever I would stray.

Last year, I came to Grandma distressed about the events occurring in Ferguson. I couldn't stop seeing the body of Michael Brown lying in the street, the protests that threatened to destroy the city and the callousness of the police state that didn't understand our people's righteous indignation and grief.

Grandma gave me a good talking to with tears in her eyes. She was always so wise! She saw and heard and felt so much. She gave me hope for all the tomorrows that I would live so I want to share some of what she told me with you today.

Grandma told me to remember that all of us, who are descendants of Africa, came from the same Motherland. We shared the same journey, the same pain, the same horror. She told me that she had heard stories from her grandmother, who had heard stories from the elders about the pain of being ripped from their homeland, branded like cattle, and put into the hulls of ships. Grandma reminded me that while lots of folks died en route, the others survived only to bleed, suffer, and die, enslaved like animals. Our people endured a lifetime of terror, in the complete control of White slave masters who, motivated by profit, greed, and hatred, exacted a horrific price from the bodies, minds, and souls of our people, to build this great nation.

I don't know why any of our people chose to survive, but thank God they did.

They chose life when hope unborn had died. They chose to love us knowing that a better time would come. I wonder why so many people lack hope today? If our ancestors who struggled to simply have enough food, water, clothes, and shelter to live could find joy enough not only to survive, but fight for better under the harsh realities of American slavery, why can we not find the same hope today?

Grandma said that our ancestors' legacy to us is the power of love in action. They believed in the power of love to change lives, circumstances, nations, and even our world. They loved us; seed, yet unborn. They chose to live, when it would have been easier to die, in order to give us this future that we are living today. They didn't allow whips or chains to steal their freedom. They didn't allow violence or torture to corrupt their souls. They endured hardship and slaughter, sharing love with God and neighbor, despite the harshest of circumstances—proving that love always triumphs over evil when love acts to.

That's another thing Grandma insisted that I deal with. When I told her that I hated white people for what they had done to Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and countless other Black bodies, you should have seen that disgusted look she got on her face. She asked me, "Who are the white people you hate, chile?" She reminded me that in every ethnicity there are people who make good and bad choices. She told me stories about the brave white folks who personified courage, putting their own families' safety on the line to shelter runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad, speaking out for freedom in the abolitionist movement, giving their lives in the Civil War, and marching with Dr. King to bring about the end of legalized segregation.

She said, "Don't you be as bad as them racist white folks who hate us." She reminded me that we are called to love and not hate and that I have an obligation to be honest about the fact that there are a lot of good white folks out there who have helped our people along the way.

This call to honesty was one of Grandma's best traits. She was a straight shooter, and she didn't put up with any mess. She said that "Denial was of

And here's the truth.

Our people endured the most racist, hostile, violent environment imaginable for over 300 years. That kind of mental, physical, and emotional abuse and torture is not "fixed" overnight. Grandma said that "when you don't know, what you don't know," you act in ways that are destructive to yourself and to your community.

I think that's what's happening in the Black Community today. Let's be honest, we do some wacky stuff that is harmful to nobody but ourselves. My daddy says that these are called, "Negative Mental Legacies" of slavery. Grandma says that we just have some bad habits that developed in order to survive American slavery. Fortunately, we don't need those habits anymore. But, they are ingrained and we are stuck.

Every night Grandma would get down on her knees and pray for our family, our neighborhood, and Black people everywhere. She lamented the fact that while police shot and killed over 300 black men last year, Black people killed about 5,000 black people in the same time frame!



the devil," and that God's truth always triumphs over Satan's lies. She said that it was about time that white and black people stop lying about what happened in our country and simply confess the fact that it is wrong that human beings were held in bondage for over two hundred years and then subjected to an apartheid state for another one hundred years.

Can I get an "Amen!" My Grandma was a truth teller, ya'll!!

She asked me, with tears running down her face, if I was as angry and dismayed about the Black slaughter of our own men, as I was at Darren Wilson?

I had never thought about that. Now don't get me wrong, I understand why folks are mad at Officer Wilson. I know why people were marching in the streets and calling for action. I was out there with them peacefully protesting for reform in our criminal justice system and for an end to the institutional racism that so detrimentally and disproportionately affects our people.



Grandma said our ancestors must be rolling in their graves. I know they didn't make such sacrifices so we could slaughter ourselves, waste our potential, and fail our children. When I was in public school, kids called me "Oreo." They said that I was trying to be white because I excelled in school. When I came crying to Grandma, she took my face in her hands and said, "Baby, the devil is a lie and the truth ain't in Him." She said that by doing well in school, I honored the ancestors. From that day forward, I always strived to do my very best! It seems to me that we've believed one humongous lie. We've been sitting around waiting for someone to rescue us, when we are our own salvation! Grandma said it is up to us to save ourselves. We come from a brilliant, strong, and creative

people who endured one the worst holocausts the world has ever known. Just as they saved themselves from certain destruction, we must save ourselves today!

It is up to us to reconstruct our culture in ways that work for our community. We must put away self-destructive behaviors and instead convert that same energy and power into creating a loving, vibrant, and healthy community of love that will save all generations to come.

Grandma used to say, "Trouble don't last always." She also reminded me that, "Weeping may endure for a night, but JOY comes in the morning."

Don't you think it is time for our joy?

Each morning is a new opportunity to recreate ourselves. We get a blank piece of paper every single day, on which to write the story of our lives. Let us make positive choices that empower ourselves and transform our community. Let us release all self-hatred and despair and make for ourselves a better day!

Grandma used to tell me about the work she did with her friends. She called the tight-knit group she worked with a 'Margaret Mead group' and said that Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." She and her friends made a commitment to get their lives together for the sake of the community, and they encouraged and were accountable to each other. Together, they noticed a need for adoption and foster care advocacy and passionately made it their group focus. Over the past several years, Grandma and her Margaret Mead group distributed brochures, gave presentations, and canvased their neighborhoods for the sake of promoting adoption and foster care. As you know, through their service, they doubled the number of new adoptive and foster care families in their community.

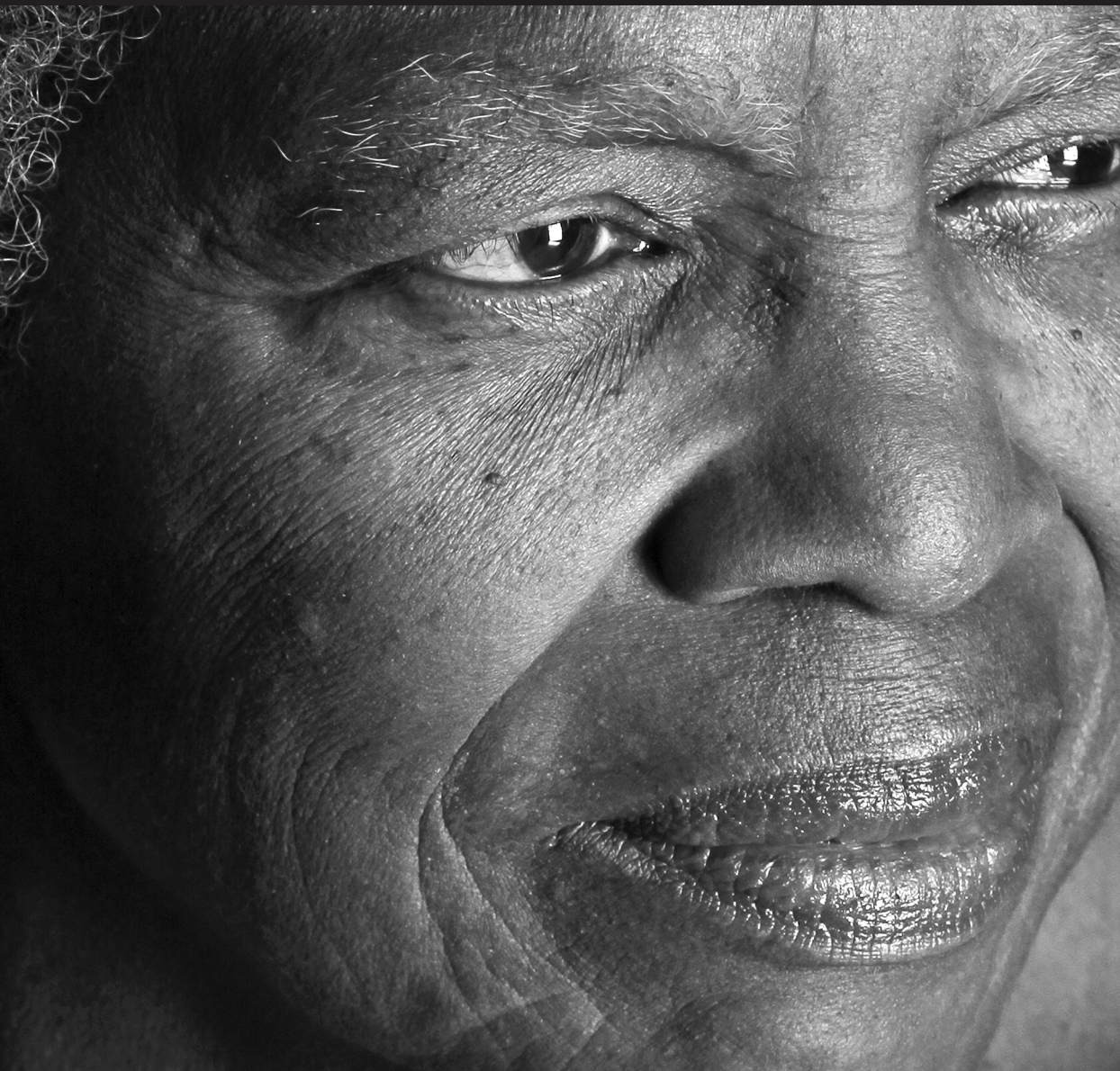
My grandmother's pastor always advised her of how important it was to not only tithe her money, but also her time. It was because of him that she gave at least eight hours a week to organizations like the NAACP, Boys and Girls Club, and The Balm in Gilead which supports and advocates for African Americans living with HIV or AIDS. These were the causes that she passionately supported for as long as her health allowed.



I'm proud of Grandma's service and I'm also proud of her friends who tithe their time for the betterment of our community. I truly believe that it is your love for God and neighbor that has made this church such a healing community of love and I hope that your example will inspire others to do the same.

Today, I am honored to give thanks for Grandma's life. She taught me that I am a strong, capable, proud, creative, energetic, force to be reckoned with. She told me that nothing is impossible for me. She reminded me that "to whom much is given, much is required," and before she died she made me promise that I would do my best to share the lessons that I learned at her knee.

In closing, Grandma told me that she once heard a wise man say that the secret of life is this, "Love begets love, and evil begets evil. And love will always overcome evil, when love acts to. Yet evil always acts while love often waits. Yet a life is but a moment in time without a proper name; while those we enhance or harm, enhance or harm, enhance or harm, for countless generations."



We must heal our community by looking in the mirror and deciding to BE THE CHANGE we want to see! We must let ourselves love enough to be responsible for the progress of our communities. The power of love can only win if it acts, and when we act with love, we can save not only ourselves along with our families, friends, and neighbors, but also our future. Everyday my Grandma's words of wisdom remind me that feeling stuck and powerless never stopped my ancestors from moving beyond circumstance to overcome.

Grandma told me all the time, "Honey, you are my immortality." I think I finally understand what she meant. She enhanced my life and the lives of so many others. She was firmly committed to aiding me to realize my potential as an empowered adult. I am her immortality and I will BE the healing of our community. She knew that we can heal our community and the time for transformation is now.

Thank you for allowing me to reflect on Grandma's life and legacy.