

Patricia's Prayer: A Eulogy for Mom
by Josef Sorett

It is indeed no light task for a son to give a eulogy for a parent, so I want to thank the countless friends that have lent me their support and prayers over the past few days. I want to especially thank my wife, Ayanna, who stayed with Mom during her last days when I had to travel back and forth from New York, who sat with me as we watched her take her last breaths, and who has walked alongside me during this time. This evening I truly feel, to borrow from the writer of the book of Hebrews, "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," which helps me and I know helps us all to take consolation during the loss of someone as special as my mother, Patricia Ann Wallace.

And for those of us who knew her, whether for a short or long time, we knew that we had been in the presence of a special lady. She was a woman who was full of life, full of laughter and full of love; and she shared those gifts generously with anyone who gave her the chance. Even in recent days, as mom's friends have called to offer condolences I have been privileged to hear new stories of the way she touched people's lives. And there are too many stories to tell them all. She wore too many hats to paint the full picture. She was known by too many names to recount the entire list. She was born Patricia Ann Wallace and would return to the grave with the same name; but along the way she responded to Patricia, Pat, Tricia, Ayo, Ayodele, Hala, and for a few years she was a Sorett and a Mroue. She would be called Mom or Ma by Tarek and myself, godmother by Jennifer, PT by Ayanna, Abuela or Buela by Daniel. And for a very brief time Daniel gave her the accidental nickname of "Sweet Tea." Her grandson Daniel gave her so much joy in recent years, and one evening Ayanna and I were driving Daniel back from a visit to his Buela's house. After Ayanna had gotten off the phone with my mother, Daniel asked to call his father, so we dialed the number and passed him the telephone. When Tarek picked up the phone Daniel quickly said,

“Baba, guess what Auntie called Buela?” Followed by an “Auntie called Buela “Sweet Tea,” after which Daniel let out the cutest chuckle one could imagine. Daniel is certainly my mother’s grandson, for to know Patricia was to know laughter. You didn’t really get to know her, if you never had the chance to hear her let loose one of her deep belly laughs, those laugh so hard you lose control, shed tears, and fight not to wet yourself laughs. Mom would laugh like a hyena in those moments and it was an irrepressible joy that made you laugh just watching her even if you didn’t know why. Yet beyond the laughter there was so much to this Patricia we remember tonight. She was so many things to so many people. And she loved living this life.

Patricia loved the ocean, loved beaches
Like Carson, Cranes and Wingarsheek,
Loved clams, and lobster, whether
at Legals, Farnham’s, Fresh Pond Seafood
or on the docks at Rockport
(even if she had to write a letter
to the paper because the police
harassed her youngest son).

She loved brown rice and miso soup,
chicharron de pollo, frijoles rojo and plantanos
at Oriental de Cuba and
Oxtails from Irie Jamaican Restaurant.

Patricia loved an ice cold Heineken
with her fish and chips
on a hot Thursday summer night.
Loved Red Zinger, Sleepytime,
Ginger Mint, and African Redbush Teas,
Ginger Ale.
Absolutely loved Starbucks! And Strong!

Mom loved good food and drink!

She loved midwifery, and mothering and babies
She loved her women, mother Belva and sister Brenda,
Her girlfriends, adopted sisters and god-daughters
She was a “Covenant Woman” –
as she and Sandra would preach.

She loved her sons - More than she loved herself!
And their friends. Loved to host, and cook for,

and hug those boys. Even learned to love
their loud steps, dirty handprints and booming voices
down the stairs of 35 Wells Road.

And her sons' friends loved her too, gathering for
Patricia's good food and smile, Anytime after school
or when a three day weekend offered the chance.

Mom loved Lincoln, the green grass, clean pool
clear skies, bike path and long walks.
Bright stars serenaded by crickets, the silence,
and the promise of safe streets for her boys.

Patricia loved music. The fifties and seventies.
Mom loved her some Smokey Robinson. And
Salsa. And the sounds of the Brooklyn Tabernacle
Choir and soaking CDs.
She loved to sing her own new songs to the Lord.

She loved her churches.
Faith Fellowship and New Covenant,
as they were then called. The Vineyard.
Soaking at the Costellos and trips
To Toronto. More importantly -
Mom loved God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Patricia loved prayer.
Patricia's life was prayer.
She prays to and through us all tonight.

Mom absolutely loved to pray, always has and always will. Anytime and anywhere, no
matter what anyone thought. Tongue-talking, foot-stomping, loud-shouting prayer, so much so that
her sons were often embarrassed as friends caught ear of mom praying halfway across the
neighborhood. For young boys, there were also some downsides to the silence that Lincoln
provided. Nonetheless, mom was a praying woman! And tonight there are at least three things that
I believe Patricia prayed for all of her life and that she is praying we might all receive tonight as we
gather to praise God for her life.

The first thing that mom unceasingly prayed for was to know the protecting power of God in
her life. **Patricia prayed for God's protection!** Like all of us, Mom wanted to know that she and

her loved ones would be kept safe amidst the uncertainties. In particular, Patricia prayed that God would protect her two sons, amidst all the obstacles they would face and in spite of all the narratives of the tragic black male, mom prayed that Tarek and I would be kept safe. While mom earnestly believed in God's power to protect, she also knew that too often too many folk are left unprotected in this life. In fact, as a nurse and midwife, Patricia devoted her professional life to securing protection for those society leaves most vulnerable, in particular black and Latina women and their children. Nevertheless, Mom continued to pray for God's protection. She would pray Psalm 18, read earlier tonight; and nearing her death she would recite this Psalm over and over, and friends would read it to her again and again. She held on to the hope that God would "deliver her because God delighted in her." Patricia prayed for God's protection.

Even as she trusted God to protect her along the way, the second thing that Patricia consistently prayed for was that she would fulfill God's purpose in her life. **Patricia prayed for God's purpose!** To not just have God's protection, but to walk in the fullness of God's plans for her life. She made her life ministry. Mom made nursing, midwifery, her friendships, her children and their friends, her church work, most recently with soaking prayer – they were all her ministry. Yet she continued to wrestle with a call, a sense of more that took her to Bible school and led her to consider seminary, propelled her on in her faith journey. Yet, like all human beings, sometimes complete clarity seemed to evade her. Even during the last few weeks of her life, as she believed that God could and would still heal her. Recently, when I questioned one of her moments of silence, she would say that she was just listening to hear what God was saying. I would ask her, "Mom, what did you hear? What did God say?" And she'd respond, "I don't know. I'm not really sure..." She knew she didn't want to go yet, that she had more work to do; but she wasn't totally sure how God's purpose was working in the present. I know I've asked that question myself, but we take courage in the words of John's first epistle, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and

what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Yet even as Mom continued to seek God’s protection and purpose, most of all, I believe, she prayed to experience more of God’s presence each day. **Patricia prayed fervently and unfailingly for God’s presence!** In the absence of guarantees, and when it was not exactly clear how God was at work in her life, Mom sought to bask in the presence of God’s light. This is what her “Soaking” ministry was all about. She knew that one moment in God’s presence brought strength for any thing that life could throw our way, so she invited anyone who would listen. I can hear her calling us now, in the words of the hymn writer, “Walk in light. Beautiful light. Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright. Shine all around us by day and by night. Jesus the light of the world.” She used to play a song around the house when Tarek and I were young, a song that was sung by Janny Grein, a vocalist who used to visit Faith Fellowship. A song that still sticks with me today. Like Janny, mom continues to sing to her friends “Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling, Come away with me. Come away I hear you say. Come away with me...” On a late Friday night, during mom’s last trip to Mass. General Hospital, Mom, Ayanna and I broke out into a late-night rendition of Psalm 42, “As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee. You alone are my heart’s desire and I long to worship thee.” Mom had a print on the wall of her bedroom of that deer by the still water. That deer was Patricia! She longed to know God just as she was fully known, just as she knew that she knew that she knew that God knew and loved her dearly! And she loved us all with all that was within in her (sometimes more than she loved herself), because she embodied that truth spoken by the Apostle Paul, “Now we see but through a mirror dimly... now abide faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love.”

Throughout her life Patricia experienced more than her fair share of glimpses of that loving presence, and passed as much as possible of God’s presence on to everyone she knew. Yet she

knew, and we know today, what our North African Christian ancestor Augustine of Hippo prayed centuries ago in his *Confessions*, “Yet man, this part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee. Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee?” I take joy, we all take joy this evening in knowing that my mother, our friend and sister, Patricia Ann Wallace, has entered into that rest for which she labored all her life. Amen. Amen. Amen!