

**In Loving Memory**

**of**

**Haywood Braxton**

*A Tribute by Julian K. Braxton*

**Thursday, August 30, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Fort Washington Collegiate Church**

729 West 181st Street,  
New York, New York 10033

**Sunday, September 2, 2012 – 2:00 p.m.**

**Morning Star Baptist Church**

614 East Jackson Street  
Demopolis, Alabama 35632

I am going to share a few words about my father, but I cannot stand before you this evening without mentioning my mother. When she took her vow to love and honor my father almost 40 years ago, she honored this vow until his very last breath. She stuck by him in sickness and in health! As many of you know, my mother visited my father almost every day these last four months and would stay the entire day! And when those midnight calls from the rehabilitation center came, saying Daddy had to go back to the hospital once again, **she was there!** Caring for him became her full time job! Please join me in thanking God for the support and love my mother gave my father throughout his lifetime.

It is interesting that this is the time I am speaking to you about my father. You see, 7:00 – 7:30 each weekday was always OUR time together (as a kid and even as an adult). We always watched Jeopardy together whenever I was home. But it was more than watching the show that connected us, it was about us finding time to connect about politics, my work, or whatever we needed to talk about. He always looked forward to me coming home so we could resume our “Jeopardy time.” The only thing he didn’t like about my visits home is that I use to raid his closet! I would take a tie, shirt, and even the occasional suit. My father had such stylish wardrobe. His very presence was the very definition of dignity and class.

There are so many words I can use to describe my father but somehow these five simple words seem to say it all: *“He was a GOOD man!”*

Given they say, **a good man is hard to find**, that must really mean a lot.

In order to understand my father I must say a little bit about myself. I have never been in trouble with the law, never taken illegal drugs, or never really been drunk(unless you count that time at my mother-in-law’s wedding-but that’s a story for another time). You see, I had no other choice but to **do the right thing** with a father like Haywood Braxton! He demanded the best from me and accepted nothing less. He could be harsh at times, but I never doubted that he did it with love. Washington Heights was a tough neighborhood to grow up in back in the 1980s. He didn’t want me to be another statistic!

Oh yes, there were those few moments when I pushed my father’s authority. Well, actually there was just ONE moment that I really pushed his authority. And I learned never to do it again. It was when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

I was so frustrated about some chore my father wanted me to do that I yelled out, "I'm not doing it!!!" **But wait**, if that was not bad enough, I slammed the door and walked out of the house. I remember thinking, "**what did I just do?**" I started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. I didn't even make to the line, "*through the valley of the shadow of death.*" I think I got as far as "*The Lord is my Shepherd!*" That's when I felt Daddy pull me around the collar as he brought me back into the house. I wish I could tell you what happened next, but I really don't remember! I think I blocked it out of my consciousness. As you can imagine, I learned my lesson! But as I was growing up I wasn't compelled to do the right thing out of fear of my father, I tried to do the right thing because I never, ever wanted to disappoint him. I respected him too much for that. I know how very proud he was of me, and I couldn't let him down!

I have so many happy memories of my father. When I was growing up, once in a while my father would have a bit too much to drink. They say you can see the true nature of a person when this happens. For me, I would look forward to this with great anticipation! He would come home late at night, wake me up and get me out of bed. He would then turn on the stereo to Teddy Pendergrass or Bobby Blue Band as loud as he could get it and we would *dance, dance, dance*. He worked harder than anyone I know, but he also played hard. He lived life to the fullest. His hearty laughter and infectious smile filled up a room!

When I think about him laughing, I recall an incident that happened about seven or eight years ago. I can hear him laughing when I think about this story. We decided to go see Eartha Kitt in concert. She was performing at a Jazz Club in downtown Manhattan. We both loved her and it was an

amazing experience watching the performer Orson Welles once called “the most exciting woman in the world.” But throughout the concert a group of men kept looking at us. They were particularly looking at my father and they were just smiling. I couldn’t figure out what was going on until about halfway through the concert. I realized that Eartha Kitt had a big following of gay men who were attending the concert. The men looked at us and thought we were a couple! I guess they wondered how in the world did this “older man” end up with this young guy! When I whispered to my father was going on, he just *laughed, laughed, and laughed.*

As you know, my father had a 40-year love affair with my mother, but he also had a 77-year love affair with Alabama. Yes, he lived in NY most of his life, but his heart was always in Demopolis. Every nurse and doctor knew one fact about my father and that fact was he grew up in “Good Old ALABAMA.” I think he shared that information before he stated his name. When one of his nurses said to him, “hey, I am from Alabama too!”, though he was very weak at the time, he gave her a firm Army salute and said, “Well that’s ALLLLL RIGHT!!!!” Alabama was always in his heart! Though growing up in this fiercely segregated state and town before the Civil Rights Movement took hold must have been tough, for my father this place represented two works--- FAMILY and LOVE! He was a proud Braxton from Demopolis.

I remember the good times, but I also remember some of the sadness. Though I was very young at the time, I recall how the death of his best friend Kenny completely devastated him. More recently, the death of his brother Robert left a big hole in his heart. He never got over those losses. He didn’t talk about death at all, but I know the way the way he died is what he feared

the most. He lost total control of his fate. This man suffered before he left this world. I can not make sense of the last four months. But I do recall a story in the scriptures about a man name Hezekiah. The Bible says that Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. Then Isaiah said to him "This said the Lord: Set Your house in order." My father certainly did all he could to set his house in order. His life's work is an example of how he did that: providing for his family, leading by example, and defining what it means to have a life of honor. In that same chapter in Isaiah, Hezekiah uses the symbol of camping to describe death. He says, "my dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent." Haywood Braxton's tent has been removed, but to God be the glory, the evidence of his life will remain. The evidence is in me, the evidence is in ALL the family and friends here tonight. **Breaking camp means to take down a campsite in preparation to leave for another campsite or return home.** My father broke camp last Sunday morning. And listen to me, everyone of us in here will have to **break camp** one day. When the day comes that I have to break camp and remove my tent, I want someone to say, he was just like his father, **Haywood Braxton, A GOOD MAN!**