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**A Tribute to My Mother on Mother's Day
Worrill's World**

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BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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On this Mother's Day, I will miss the physical presence of my mother. One of the revelations of which I am now firmly aware, is that although I physically look like my father, the major attributes of my personality, disposition, and attitude reflect the profound personality of my mother, Anna Belle. Therefore, on this Mother's Day, I want to pay tribute to my own mother who reflects the story of many great Black Mothers worldwide. This is my tribute, remembering the life of Anna Belle Gravenberg Worrill

Anna Belle Gravenberg Worrill was born May 9, 1919 to August and Lilly Gravenberg in Jeanerette, Louisiana. Anna Belle, who had eight brothers and one sister, was affectionately called "Annie" by close family members.

In 1920, a pneumonia epidemic took the lives of over two hundred people in Jeanerette. Her parents were among the casualties leaving Anna Belle, at the tender age of seven months, and her siblings orphaned. For a brief time, Anna Belle and her older sister Minola lived at a Catholic Convent. During their stay in the convent, Minola, who was like a mother to Annie, greatly impressed the nuns with her devotion to her younger sister.

In the early 1920s, Anna Belle, Minola, and their older brother, Conrad, moved to New Orleans, Louisiana to live with their Aunt Maggie Matthews. During the early 1930s they relocated to Los Angeles, California to reside with their brother Conrad and his wife. In Los Angeles, Anna Belle attended public school. She later settled with Lillian Piersaul and her husband in Pasadena, California where she attended Washington

Junior High School and Pasadena High School.

During this period, Anna Belle's interests in the arts and music became apparent. She began to study ballet and to receive vocal training. Her participation in the choir at the First A.M.E. Church in Pasadena showcased her gift as a vocalist, and she was often selected to solo. At this time she met Walter Worrill, another member of the church choir. They courted and married in September 1940. Anna Belle attended Pasadena Junior College where she continued to receive vocal training and study music. She was often requested to sing at major events in the Los Angeles County area at churches, weddings, and funerals.

Anna Belle and Walter's first child, born on August 15, 1941, was a son they named Conrad Walter Worrill (Conrad in honor of her older brother and Walter for his father). Her passion for working with children led her to secure a teaching position at the Pacific Oaks Nursery School in Pasadena where she later enrolled Conrad.

Anna Belle was honored to be selected to sing at the wedding of baseball legend, Jackie Robinson in 1946. In the late 1940s, Annie became a member of the renowned Pasadena Civic Chorus that presented major concerts throughout the city and surrounding area. Her love for children, music, and the arts reflected her passion for life and made a great impression on those with whom she came into contact.

During the 1940s, Anna Belle assisted her husband Walter with his work in the YMCA Movement. In 1950, the YMCA transferred Walter to Chicago, Illinois. Big city life was challenging for the Worrill family. Upon their arrival in Chicago, the couple resided at the YMCA Hotel located at 826 South Wabash. The challenges for housing in Chicago at that time were quite severe. Fortunately, on their train trip from California to Chicago they befriended a waiter, Mr. Anthony, who owned a building at 5640 South Maryland. He had a vacancy on the second floor and allowed them to lease the apartment.

On April 29, 1951 a second son, Oscar William Worrill, named in honor of his grandfather, was born to Anna Belle and Walter. Anna Belle quickly became involved in the choir at St. Mark's Methodist Church. She was most influential in organizing the Handel's Messiah concert, which became an annual Christmas season event and is still an annual event at St. Mark's. She was a member of the Chicago Music Association and protégé to the late Theodore Charles Stone. Anna Belle was the family representative to welcome the neighbors, who included the popular disc jockey, Al Benson; the distinguished sociologist and anthropologist, St. Clair Drake; the Minor family who lived across the street; and many others living in the west Hyde Park community. Her dynamic personality and spiritual gift enabled her to easily interact with all people.

She participated in the PTA at Ray, Neil, Dixon, Hyde Park High, and Calumet High Schools where her sons Conrad and Oscar attended. As a result of her volunteerism, she was made a lifetime member of the National PTA. She was an aggressive parent advocate, not only for her sons but for all children. She tirelessly worked to ensure that they received everything to which they were entitled. Anna Belle eventually took a job as an administrative clerk at the University of Chicago where she worked in the Bursar's Office for more than fifteen years. She became known for helping students

negotiate their financial aid payments to the university, and she voluntarily assisted many students to make sure that their financial aid needs were met.

In 1957, the Worrill family purchased a home at 8450 South Prairie in Chicago's Chatham neighborhood. There the family experienced "white flight" first hand. The day they moved into their new home several white families were moving out.

Anna Belle became well known for her neighborliness and concern for members of the community. When Ernest "Stu" Collins, an African American entrepreneur, opened a supermarket at 79th and Calumet, she became the leading advocate for blacks to shop with blacks, especially at Stu Collins' Certified. For years, Anna Belle would walk from her home at 84th and Prairie to 79th and Calumet and back with groceries purchased from the black-owned grocery. She was very proud of her support for black owned businesses and instilled those values in her children.

In 1970, Walter took a new position with the YMCA. Anna Belle and Walter moved from Chicago to Pennlyn, Pennsylvania. It was during this period that Anna Belle returned to her Catholic faith and attended a local Catholic church in Pennlyn on a regular basis. After Walter and Anna Belle divorced in the late 1970s, Anna Belle remained in Pennlyn and secured a position working in a nursing home. In 1989, her son, Oscar assisted her in moving back to Chicago so she could be close to her sons, other family members, and friends. With the support of her sons, Oscar and Conrad, Anna Belle lived a full life in Chicago.

Anna Belle loved her family: her sister, brothers, sons, nieces, nephews, in-laws, grand and great grandchildren. She often spent quality time with them, especially her grandchildren. In the final year of her life, Anna Belle lived in the Renaissance Senior Citizen Residence in the South Shore neighborhood. Though her eyesight began to fail, she was the life of the party among the elders in her new home. And all of the staff loved Anna Belle as well.

Anna Belle was blessed in the last months of her life to receive a visit from her older sister, Minola. Minola, who does not fly, her daughter Gail, and her goddaughter Tracey drove across country from Los Angeles to Chicago in a Winnebago motor home so she could spend time with her baby sister. Annie and Minola were able to visit with their brother Columbus Gravenberg, who lived in the western suburbs of Chicago. This was a well-timed reunion for shortly after their visit Columbus made his transition.

After a brief illness, Anna Belle was hospitalized at South Shore Hospital on Wednesday evening, December 5, 2007. She made her transition in the hospital on Saturday, December 8, 2007. Clearly, Anna Belle Gravenberg Worrill lived a full and productive life that focused on her love and support of her family, friends, and community.

Anna Belle left to cherish her life and legacy her sister, Minola; sons, Conrad (Talibah) and Oscar (Denise); former husband, Walter Worrill; grandchildren, Michelle, Femi, Sobenna, Kimberly Aisha, and Gloria Ann; eight great grandchildren, numerous in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins, and many friends. The Ancestral Realm is fortified with the spirit of Anna Belle Gravenberg Worrill. Those of us she left behind will miss her on this Mother's Day. But we are stronger for having been touched by her and we

too are fortified by her spirit. Happy Mother's Day, Mom!


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