

= Betty Shabazz =

Betty Shabazz ( May 28 , 1934 ? June 23 , 1997 ) , born Betty Dean Sanders and also known as Betty X , was an American educator and civil rights advocate . She was the wife of Malcolm X.

Shabazz grew up in Detroit , Michigan , where her foster parents largely sheltered her from racism . She attended the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama , where she had her first encounters with racism . Unhappy with the situation in Alabama , she moved to New York City , where she became a nurse . It was in New York that she met Malcolm X and , in 1956 , joined the Nation of Islam . The couple married in 1958 .

Along with her husband , Shabazz left the Nation of Islam in 1964 . She witnessed his assassination the following year . Left with the responsibility of raising six daughters as a single mother , Shabazz pursued a higher education , and went to work at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn , New York .

Following the arrest of her daughter Qubilah for allegedly conspiring to murder Louis Farrakhan , Shabazz took in her young grandson Malcolm . He set a fire in her apartment that caused severe burns to Shabazz . Shabazz died three weeks later as a result of her injuries .

= = Early years = =

Betty Dean Sanders was born on May 28 , 1934 , to Ollie Mae Sanders and Shelman Sandlin . Sandlin was 21 years old and Ollie Mae Sanders was a teenager ; the couple was unmarried . Throughout her life , Betty Sanders maintained that she had been born in Detroit , Michigan , but early records ? such as her high @-@ school and college transcripts ? show Pinehurst , Georgia , as her place of birth . Authorities in Georgia and Michigan have not been able to locate her birth certificate .

By most accounts , Ollie Mae Sanders abused Betty Sanders , whom she was raising in Detroit . When Betty was about 11 years old , she was taken in by Lorenzo and Helen Malloy , a prominent businessman and his wife . Helen Malloy was a founding member of the Housewives League of Detroit , a group of African @-@ American women who organized campaigns to support black @-@ owned businesses and boycott stores that refused to hire black employees . She was also a member of the National Council of Negro Women and the NAACP . The Malloys were both active members of their local Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church .

Despite their lessons on black self @-@ reliance , the Malloys never spoke with Sanders about racism . Looking back in 1995 , Shabazz wrote : " Race relations were not discussed and it was hoped that by denying the existence of race problems , the problems would go away . Anyone who openly discussed race relations was quickly viewed as a ' troublemaker . ' " Still , two race riots during her childhood ? in 1942 when the Sojourner Truth housing project was desegregated , and one the following year on Belle Isle ? made up what Shabazz later called the " psychological background for my formative years " .

= = Young adult years = =

After she graduated from high school , Sanders left her foster parents ' home in Detroit to study at the Tuskegee Institute ( now Tuskegee University ) , a historically black college in Alabama that was Lorenzo Malloy 's alma mater . She intended to earn a degree in education and become a teacher . When she left Detroit to go to Alabama , her foster mother stood at the train station crying . Shabazz later recalled that Malloy was trying to mumble something , but the words would not come out . By the time she arrived in Alabama , she felt she knew what her stepmother was saying . " The minute I got off that train , I knew what she was trying to say . She was trying to tell me in ten words or less about racism . "

Nothing had prepared Sanders for Southern racism . So long as she stayed on campus , she could avoid interacting with white people , but weekend trips into Montgomery , the nearest city , would try her patience . Black students had to wait until every white person in a store had been helped before

the staff would serve them ? if they received any service at all . When she complained to the Malloys , they refused to discuss the issue ; in a 1989 interview , Shabazz summarized their attitude as " if you 're just quiet it will go away . "

Sanders ' studies suffered as a result of her growing frustration . She decided to change her field of study from education to nursing . The dean of nursing , Lillian Harvey , encouraged Sanders to consider studying in a Tuskegee @-@ affiliated program at the Brooklyn State College School of Nursing in New York City . Against her foster parents ' wishes , Sanders left Alabama for New York in 1953 .

In New York , Sanders encountered a different form of racism . At Montefiore Hospital , where she performed her clinical training , black nurses were given worse assignments than white nurses . White patients sometimes were abusive toward black nurses . While the racial climate in New York was better than the situation in Alabama , Sanders frequently wondered whether she had merely exchanged Jim Crow racism for a more genteel prejudice .

= = = Nation of Islam = = =

During her second year of nursing school , Sanders was invited by an older nurse 's aide to a Friday @-@ night dinner party at the Nation of Islam temple in Harlem . " The food was delicious , " Shabazz recalled in 1992 , " I 'd never tasted food like that . " After dinner , the woman asked Sanders to come to the Muslims ' lecture . Sanders agreed . After the speech , the nurse 's aide invited Sanders to join the Nation of Islam ; Sanders politely declined . When the woman asked her why she chose not to join the Nation of Islam after visiting , Sanders replied that she did not know she had been brought there to join . " Besides , my mother would kill me , and additionally I don 't even understand the philosophy . " The Malloys were Methodists , and when she was 13 , Sanders had decided she would remain a Methodist for the rest of her life .

The nurse 's aide told Sanders about her minister , who was not at the temple that night : " Just wait until you hear my minister talk . He 's very disciplined , he 's good @-@ looking , and all the sisters want him . " Sanders enjoyed the food so much , she agreed to come back and meet the woman 's minister . At the second dinner , the nurse 's aide told her the minister was present and Sanders thought to herself , " Big deal . " In 1992 she recalled how her demeanor changed when she caught a glimpse of Malcolm X :

Then , I looked over and saw this man on the extreme right aisle sort of galloping to the podium . He was tall , he was thin , and the way he was galloping it looked as though he was going someplace much more important than the podium . ... He got to the podium ? and I sat up straight . I was impressed with him .

Sanders met Malcolm X again at a dinner party . The two had a long conversation about Sanders 's life : her childhood in Detroit , the racial hostility she had encountered in Alabama , and her studies in New York . He spoke to her about the condition of African Americans and the causes of racism . Sanders began to see things from a different perspective . " I really had a lot of pent @-@ up anxiety about my experience in the South , " Shabazz recalled in a 1990 interview , " and Malcolm reassured me that it was understandable how I felt . "

Soon Sanders was attending all of Malcolm X 's lectures at Temple Number Seven in Harlem . He always sought her out afterwards , and he would ask her a lot of questions . Sanders was impressed with Malcolm X 's leadership and work ethic . She felt he was selfless when it came to helping others , but he had no one to lean on when he needed help . She thought maybe she could be that person . He also began to pressure her to join the Nation of Islam . In mid 1956 , Sanders converted . Like many members of the Nation of Islam , she changed her surname to " X " , which represented the family name of her African ancestors that she could never know .

= = Marriage and family = =

Betty X and Malcolm X did not have a conventional courtship . One @-@ on @-@ one dates were contrary to the teachings of the Nation of Islam . Instead , the couple shared their " dates " with

dozens , or even hundreds of other members . Malcolm X frequently took groups to visit New York 's museums and libraries , and he always invited Betty X.

Although they had never discussed the subject , Betty X suspected that Malcolm X was interested in marriage . One day he called and asked her to marry him , and they were married on January 14 , 1958 , in Lansing , Michigan . By coincidence , Betty X became a licensed nurse on the same day .

At first , their relationship followed the Nation of Islam 's strictures concerning marriage ; Malcolm X set the rules and Betty X obediently followed them . In 1969 , Shabazz wrote that " his indoctrination was so thorough , even to me , that it has become a pattern for our [ family 's ] lives . " Over time , the family dynamic changed , as Malcolm X made small concessions to Betty X 's demands for more independence . In 1969 , Shabazz recalled :

We would have little family talks . They began at first with Malcolm telling me what he expected of a wife . But the first time I told him what I expected of him as a husband it came as a shock . After dinner one night he said , " Boy , Betty , something you said hit me like a ton of bricks . Here I 've been going along having our little workshops with me doing all the talking and you doing all the listening . " He concluded our marriage should be a mutual exchange .

The couple had six daughters . Their names were Attallah , born in 1958 and named after Attila the Hun ; Qubilah , born in 1960 and named after Kublai Khan ; Ilyasah , born in 1962 and named after Elijah Muhammad ; Gamilah Lumumba , born in 1964 and named after Patrice Lumumba ; and twins , Malikah and Malaak , born in 1965 after their father 's assassination and named for him .

= = = Leaving the Nation of Islam = = =

On March 8 , 1964 , Malcolm X announced that he was leaving the Nation of Islam . He and Betty X , now known as Betty Shabazz , became Sunni Muslims .

= = = Assassination of Malcolm X = = =

On February 21 , 1965 , in Manhattan 's Audubon Ballroom , Malcolm X began to speak to a meeting of the Organization of Afro @-@ American Unity when a disturbance broke out in the crowd of 400 . As Malcolm X and his bodyguards moved to quiet the disturbance , a man rushed forward and shot Malcolm in the chest with a sawed @-@ off shotgun . Two other men charged the stage and fired handguns , hitting him 16 times .

Shabazz was in the audience near the stage with her daughters . When she heard the gunfire , she grabbed the children and pushed them to the floor beneath the bench , where she shielded them with her body . When the shooting stopped , Shabazz ran toward her husband and tried to perform CPR . Police officers and Malcolm X 's associates carried him to a stretcher , and brought him to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital , where he was pronounced dead .

Angry onlookers caught and beat one of the assassins , who was arrested on the scene . Eyewitnesses identified two more suspects . All three men , who were members of the Nation of Islam , were convicted and sentenced to life in prison .

= = After Malcolm 's assassination = =

= = = Immediately afterward = = =

Shabazz had difficulty sleeping for weeks after Malcolm X 's assassination . She suffered from nightmares in which she relived the death of her husband . She also worried about how she would support herself and her family . The publication of The Autobiography of Malcolm X helped , because Shabazz received half of the royalties . ( Alex Haley , who assisted Malcolm X in writing the book , got the other half . After the publication of his best @-@ seller Roots , Haley signed over his portion of the royalties to Shabazz . )

Actor and activist Ruby Dee and Juanita Poitier ( wife of Sidney Poitier ) established the Committee

of Concerned Mothers , to raise funds to buy a house , and pay educational expenses for the Shabazz family . The Committee held a series of benefit concerts at which they raised \$ 17 @,@ 000 . They bought a large two @-@ family home in Mount Vernon , New York , from Congressmember Bella Abzug .

Looking back , Shabazz said she initially made an " unrealistic decision " to isolate herself because of the injustice of her husband 's assassination . She realized , however , that giving up because of her husband 's death would not help the world . " It is impossible to create an environment for children to grow in and develop in isolation . It is imperative that one mix in society on some level and at some time . "

= = = Pilgrimage to Mecca = = =

In late March 1965 , Shabazz made the pilgrimage to Mecca ( Hajj ) , as her husband had the year before . Recalling the experience in 1992 , Shabazz wrote :

I really don 't know where I 'd be today if I had not gone to Mecca to make Hajj shortly after Malcolm was assassinated . ... That is what helped put me back on track . ... Going to Mecca , making Hajj , was very good for me because it made me think of all the people in the world who loved me and were for me , who prayed that I would get my life back together . I stopped focusing on the people who were trying to tear me and my family apart .

Shabazz returned from Mecca with a new name that a fellow pilgrim had bestowed upon her , Bahiyah ( meaning " beautiful and radiant " ) .

= = = Raising her family = = =

Raising six children by herself exhausted Shabazz . Providing for them was difficult as well . Shabazz 's share of the royalties from The Autobiography of Malcolm X was equivalent to an annual salary . In 1966 , she sold the movie rights to the Autobiography to film @-@ maker Marvin Worth . She began to authorize the publication of Malcolm X 's speeches , which provided another source of income .

When her daughters were enrolled in day care , Shabazz became an active member of the day care center 's parents organization . In time , she became the parents ' representative on the school board . Several years later , she became president of the Westchester Day Care Council .

Shabazz began to accept speaking engagements at colleges and universities . She often spoke about the black nationalist philosophy of Malcolm X , but she also spoke about her role as a wife and mother . Shabazz felt that some of the images of her husband projected by the media were misrepresentations . " They attempted to promote him as a violent person , a hater of whites , " she explained . " He was a sensitive man , a very understanding person and yes , he disliked the behavior of some whites .... He had a reality @-@ based agenda . "

As her daughters grew older , Shabazz sent them to private schools and summer camps . They joined Jack and Jill , a social club for the children of well @-@ off African Americans .

= = = Advanced education = = =

In late 1969 , Shabazz enrolled at Jersey City State College ( now New Jersey City University ) to complete the degree in education she left behind when she became a nurse . She completed her undergraduate studies in one year , and decided to earn a master 's degree in health administration . In 1972 , Shabazz enrolled at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to pursue an Ed.D. in higher education administration and curriculum development . For the next three years , she drove from Mount Vernon to Amherst , Massachusetts , every Monday morning , and returned home Wednesday night . In July 1975 , she defended her dissertation and earned her doctorate .

Shabazz joined Delta Sigma Theta in April 1974 .

= = = Medgar Evers College = = =

In January 1976 , Shabazz became associate professor of health sciences with a concentration in nursing at New York 's Medgar Evers College . The student body at Medgar Evers was 90 percent black and predominantly working @-@ class , with an average age of 26 . Black women made up most of the faculty , and 75 percent of the students were female , two @-@ thirds of them mothers . These were all qualities that made Medgar Evers College attractive to Shabazz .

By 1980 , Shabazz was overseeing the health sciences department , and the college president decided she could be more effective in a purely administrative position than she was in the classroom . She was promoted to Director of Institutional Advancement . In her new position , she became a booster and fund @-@ raiser for the college . A year later , she was given tenure . In 1984 , Shabazz was given a new title , Director of Institutional Advancement and Public Affairs ; she held that position at the college until her death .

= = = Volunteerism = = =

During the 1970s and 1980s , Shabazz continued her volunteer activities . In 1975 , President Ford invited her to serve on the American Revolution Bicentennial Council . Shabazz served on an advisory committee on family planning for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services . In 1984 , she hosted the New York convention of the National Council of Negro Women . Shabazz became active in the NAACP and the National Urban League . When Nelson and Winnie Mandela visited Harlem during 1990 , Shabazz was asked to introduce Winnie Mandela .

Shabazz befriended Myrlie Evers @-@ Williams , the widow of Medgar Evers , and Coretta Scott King , the widow of Martin Luther King , Jr . They had the common experience of losing their activist husbands at a young age and raising their children as single mothers . The press came to refer to the three , who made numerous joint public appearances , as the " Movement widows " . Evers @-@ Williams and King were frequent guests at Medgar Evers College , and Shabazz occasionally visited the King Center in Atlanta . Writing about Shabazz , Evers @-@ Williams described her as a " free spirit , in the best sense of the word . When she laughed , she had this beauty ; when she smiled , it lit up the whole room . "

= = Louis Farrakhan = =

For many years , Shabazz harbored resentment toward the Nation of Islam ? and Louis Farrakhan in particular ? for what she felt was their role in the assassination of her husband . Farrakhan seemed to boast of the assassination in a 1993 speech :

Was Malcolm your traitor or ours ? And if we dealt with him like a nation deals with a traitor , what the hell business is it of yours ? A nation has to be able to deal with traitors and cutthroats and turncoats .

In a 1994 interview , Gabe Pressman asked Shabazz whether Farrakhan " had anything to do " with Malcolm X 's death . She replied : " Of course , yes . Nobody kept it a secret . It was a badge of honor . Everybody talked about it , yes . " Farrakhan denied the allegations , stating " I never had anything to do with Malcolm 's death " , although he said he had " created an atmosphere that allowed Malcolm to be assassinated . "

In January 1995 , Qubilah Shabazz was charged with trying to hire an assassin to kill Farrakhan in retaliation for the murder of her father . Farrakhan surprised the Shabazz family when he defended Qubilah , saying he did not think she was guilty and that he hoped she would not be convicted . That May , Betty Shabazz and Farrakhan shook hands on the stage of the Apollo Theater during a public event intended to raise money for Qubilah 's legal defense . Some heralded the evening as a reconciliation between the two , but others thought Shabazz was doing whatever she had to in order to protect her daughter . Regardless , nearly \$ 250 @,@ 000 was raised that evening . In the aftermath , Shabazz maintained a cool relationship with Farrakhan , although she agreed to speak at his Million Man March that October .

Qubilah accepted a plea agreement with respect to the charges , in which she maintained her

innocence but accepted responsibility for her actions . Under the terms of the agreement , she was required to undergo psychological counseling and treatment for drug and alcohol abuse for a two @-@ year period in order to avoid a prison sentence . For the duration of her treatment , Qubilah 's ten @-@ year @-@ old son , Malcolm , was sent to live with Shabazz at her apartment in Yonkers , New York .

= = Death = =

On June 1 , 1997 , young grandson Malcolm set a fire in Shabazz 's apartment . Shabazz suffered burns over 80 percent of her body , and remained in intensive care for three weeks , at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx , New York . She underwent five skin @-@ replacement operations as doctors struggled to replace damaged skin and save her life . Shabazz died of her injuries on June 23 , 1997 . Malcolm Shabazz was sentenced to 18 months in juvenile detention for manslaughter and arson .

More than 2 @,@ 000 mourners attended a memorial service for Shabazz , at New York 's Riverside Church . Many prominent leaders were present , including Coretta Scott King and Myrlie Evers @-@ Williams , poet Maya Angelou , actor @-@ activists Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee , New York Governor George Pataki , and four New York City mayors ? Abraham Beame , Ed Koch , David Dinkins , and Rudy Giuliani . U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman delivered a tribute from President Bill Clinton . In a statement released after Shabazz 's death , civil rights leader Jesse Jackson said , " She never stopped giving and she never became cynical . She leaves today the legacy of one who epitomized hope and healing . "

Shabazz 's funeral service was held at the Islamic Cultural Center in New York City . Her public viewing was at the Unity Funeral Home in Harlem , the same place where Malcolm X 's viewing had taken place 32 years earlier . Shabazz was buried next to her husband , El @-@ Hajj Malik El @-@ Shabazz ( Malcolm X ) , at Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale , New York .

= = = Memorials = = =

In late 1997 , the Community Healthcare Network renamed one of its Brooklyn , New York , clinics the Dr. Betty Shabazz Health Center , in honor of Shabazz . The Betty Shabazz International Charter School was founded in Chicago , Illinois , in 1998 and named in her honor . In 2005 , Columbia University announced the opening of the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center . The memorial is located in the Audubon Ballroom , where Malcolm X was assassinated . In March 2012 , New York City co @-@ named Broadway at the corner of West 165th Street , the corner in front of the Audubon Ballroom , Betty Shabazz Way .

= = Portrayals in film = =

Shabazz was the subject of the 2013 television movie Betty and Coretta , in which she was played by Mary J. Blige . She was portrayed by Angela Bassett in the 1992 film Malcolm X. Bassett also played the part of Shabazz in the 1995 film Panther . Yolanda King , the daughter of Martin Luther King , Jr . , and Coretta Scott King , played Shabazz in the 1981 television movie Death of a Prophet , and Shabazz was portrayed by Victoria Dillard in the 2001 film Ali .