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## East Side matriarch, role model celebrates MLK

By Jose Arredondo, Correspondent

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Dorothy Mondine (left) sits on her front porch at her home on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, waving at passersby with her daughter, Barbara Jean Anthony, on Saturday, Jan. 12, 2019.

Photo: Marvin Pfeiffer /Staff photographer

Dorothy “Mother” Mondine was cooking at Luby’s on 719 N. Main Ave. when she heard the news of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination.

She can still remember the pain she felt; all she could do was pray for his family.

Fifty years later, her faith continues to sustain her and fuels an eternal optimism.

“We can’t help what God does, there’s a time and season — Ecclesiastes Chapter 3,” Mondine said, sitting on a lawn chair outside her home on Martin Luther King Drive one recent Saturday afternoon. “There’s a time and season for every purpose of the heaven.

“We all have a season, but we don’t know when our season is coming. A season of hurt, a season of trouble ... we don’t know when our season is coming.”

Nearing 90, Mondine’s blue eyes are still sharp, peering over the glasses that sit at the end of her nose. Her enthusiasm and active lifestyle belie her age.

“How you doing? Hi, baby, sweetie pie,” Mondine said, waving to her neighbor’s daughter. “That is my baby, she remembers Miz Mondine — love ya.”

Mondine has lived at this house since 1974. Greeting neighbors and passers-by from her front porch is her favorite part of the day, she said. And while she didn’t get to watch the MLK Day parade until she retired in 1998 — it started in 1989 — she has made up for it ever since. She decorates her home for the event every year and prepares a meal for family and friends that day. Then she stays outside the entire length of the parade, waving and calling out support to the marchers as they pass by her home.

This year will be no different. Tens of thousands of marchers will set out from Martin Luther King Jr. Academy, 3501 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, at 10 a.m. Monday, Jan. 21, and head west on MLK Drive for the 2.75-mile walk, ending at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa St.

And Mother Mondine will be there, standing by the white fence that surrounds her home, greeting everyone that passes by with a hearty, “God bless ya.”

The 86-year-old Texas native credits God for her long life, and it’s clear her faith and the wisdom acquired over the ages have helped her cope with difficult times.

She has outlived five of her nine children; her oldest son, Carl Craig, died last week at 68. She’s sad, but

she knows there's nothing she can do about it and points out that life must go on. She said she learned to deal with death at an early age and remembers her mother telling her to cry when a child enters the world but celebrate the person's life when he or she passes on.

Mondine was raised on a farm in Lockhart. She walked 5 miles to school and had to ride in the back of the bus on the return trip. After school, she picked cotton, as much as 500 pounds a day, to help support her family. She endured much racism and followed rules that separated blacks from whites.

“We used to have to sit on the toilet outside,” Mondine recalled.

She didn't understand why people shouted racial slurs, but she did know black people had to endure it.

After Mondine's father died in 1947, she moved to San Antonio, which had more diversity than her hometown, but still there was racism. She didn't want to attend school because she was ridiculed for a speech impediment, so her aunt got her a job taking care of children in Alamo Heights and other parts of town.

“I worked for some people that did me bad ... I worked for this woman, and she told me to stay there and take care of her kids,” Mondine said. “When she got back, it was 2 o'clock in the morning.

“She told me she didn't have pocket change and threw me out — I had to call my uncle to pick me up.”

Mondine has spent much of her life working to provide for her children, but she managed to find time to enjoy herself every now and then. She loves music and dancing, and sometimes wears ballerina slippers. Mondine demonstrated her go-to dance move, placing her hands on her hips and moving left and right.

“Oh, Lord, I can't do that anymore,” Mondine said, laughing.

As the years passed, Mondine witnessed highways being built, neighborhoods changing and her adopted city reaching milestones — a list of events that she said is too long to recite.

“I remember back in 1968, they built the tower down there and then they did all these things, the AT&T Center,” Mondine said. “I (saw) the San Antonio Spurs way back when they used to wear them little shorts up to here.”

She watches the news often and praises the younger generation for speaking out on social issues.

“The young generation, they're smart now, they're marching to the White House — thank God for the young generation,” Mondine said, clapping. “And God lets me see all of that, thank you, Lord.

“Every time I see young people I say, ‘Thank God for you.’”

Mondine knows she has more years behind her than ahead, but hopes to leave a blueprint for living right.

“It's the way you live, your reputation, the way you live before young people, the way you live before God,” Mondine said, sharing advice she was given as a young woman. “Young people are watching, even your children are watching, you can't live just any kind of way.”