

# Blooming:

## *Shine Bright Like A Diamond*

*A tribute to Natalie Scott Williams*

BY AUDRI SCOTT WILLIAMS

Our mother was not simply “many things” — she was a force of nature: intellectual, elegant, politically conscious, artistically alive, and deeply committed to freedom.

*“Before she marched for justice, she played sacred music on a pipe organ that could shake church walls. Perhaps that was symbolic — our mother spent her life moving air into spaces that needed awakening.”*

Women like that often leave behind not only memories, but a charge: *What will you do with what I gave you?*

And perhaps that is where the deepest meaning lives.

When honoring extraordinary mothers, people sometimes flatten them into sainthood and lose the complexity that made them real. In this Tribute I seek to honor her fullness:

- ◆ A mother, but also a woman with her own dreams
- ◆ Fearless, but also human
- ◆ Brilliant, but demanding
- ◆ Elegant, yet revolutionary
- ◆ A professor, but also a freedom fighter
- ◆ Dramatic — that drama was part of her fire

She had “no tolerance for mediocrity.” She expected excellence because she believed people were capable of greatness.

### **That is not a small inheritance.**



### **My Mother Was A Bridge-Builder**

She moved between worlds:

- ◆ Academia
- ◆ Civil Rights activism
- ◆ The American Indian Movement
- ◆ The Arts
- ◆ Motherhood
- ◆ Friendship
- ◆ Beauty and refinement
- ◆ Compassion

That combination is rare. She was likely teaching long before she entered a classroom.

*“A woman who wore grace like silk and carried justice like a sword.”*

*“She could discuss literature in one breath, challenge injustice in the next, and still walk into a room with undeniable elegance.”*



## We Honor What She Gave Us

*“She gave us the confidence to live our truth. To try what calls us whether it is successful or not. She challenged us to have the courage and confidence to try.”*

She was a parent who gave her children permission to become fully themselves. That is sacred.

*“Her fearlessness shaped my global walks for peace.  
Her activism became the roots of our own justice work.  
Her love of beauty shaped our appreciation for art, ceremony, and storytelling.  
Her courage taught us to attempt what others called impossible.  
And her expansive love taught us that everyone deserves dignity.”*

Our life, after all, is part of her living legacy — a loving demonstration of freedom, wisdom, courage, and love.

Our mother taught how she lived. She stood up to injustice by creating safe spaces for people to gather in our home during difficult times. Our home became a sanctuary where people could laugh, breathe, strategize, and simply be. That was her expression of love.

Our parents were jazz fanatics — and they loved life. Before integration, my father’s restaurant, Arthur’s Seafood Grill in Fayetteville, became a gathering place for African Americans traveling from north to south. In a time when travel could be dangerous, that space offered safety, music, joy, and belonging. **That was the power of resilience.**



#### THE POWER OF FAITH

One of the most profound lessons our mother taught us was faith and trust under pressure. My sister Ora suffered severe seizures as a child. One day while we were traveling from Fayetteville to visit family in Hampton, Ora suddenly had a grand mal seizure in the car and stopped breathing.

My mother pulled over at a small country store while someone called an ambulance.

Then came an impossible moment. The ambulance had room for only my mother and Ora. She had to leave my brother and me behind and trust that we would be safe until she returned. This was challenging because it was a white owned country store, before integration, and the owner did not seem very friendly.

A Black man in the store looked at my mother and said, "Don't worry Miss — I will stay with your children until you return." And my mother felt like God sent an angel and trusted him.

**That was the power of faith.**

#### THE POWER OF FREEDOM

And then there was my mother's beautiful sense of play. Our Uncle Fred and my mother were both artists at heart and loved creating magical moments. One April, my Uncle Fred called and said, "Natalie... it's Christmas, darling."

And just like that, my mother dressed my sister and me up and took us to his home where Christmas lights sparkled, a tree stood glowing with lights, and presents waited beneath it. It was completely unexpected. Completely dramatic. Completely joyful.

**That was the power of freedom — freedom to create joy simply because you can.**

## THE POWER OF PLAY

Living on St. Croix during drought season, our car would often be covered in dirt and dust. One day it finally rained. My mother ran outside in her bathing suit, and Ora and I quickly put on ours. Together we laughed, splashed in the rain, and washed the car with buckets of soap and water — completely soaked and completely happy.

**That was the power of play.**



And perhaps that was my mother's greatest lesson:

*Life is meant to be fought for, when necessary...  
trusted when uncertain...  
celebrated whenever possible...  
and fully lived without apology.*

## That was our mother.

Stories make legacy tangible... gives meaning to our Mother's zeal and daring power...

Power is often misunderstood as dominance. But our mother's power was:

- ◆ The courage to refuse smallness
- ◆ The willingness to confront injustice
- ◆ The audacity to be brilliant and beautiful in spaces that tried to limit her
- ◆ The discipline to expect excellence
- ◆ The freedom to live unapologetically
- ◆ The audacity — under no circumstance — to be less than who she was —

*I Am Natalie Scott Williams... Darling!*

That is a meaningful legacy — especially for Black women at that time, whose fullness was often erased.

Her message to all was:

*“Do not shrink. Do not apologize for your brilliance. Do not betray your calling. In other words, **Shine bright like a diamond!**”*

*“Some women leave behind possessions. Some leave titles. Our mother left us a blueprint for courageous living. She taught us that elegance and activism can coexist. That intellect should serve humanity. That art matters. That truth matters. Freedom is worth fighting for.”*

And perhaps her greatest gift was this — she taught us not to live someone else’s life, but to courageously live our own.

She may have left this earthly realm... but her boldness still walks with us. Her beauty still lingers. Her lessons still rise in us. And for that, I honor her.

**May she rest in peace and power — because she clearly lived it.**



She awed us with her courage and captivated us with her brilliance. I must share something about Mom that demonstrates her amazing determination to embrace the world — life was her stage and her playground.

We moved to St. Croix after the Civil Rights Movement. One great beach day, on the east end of the island, her sisters were visiting from Virginia. She took them to the beach. Her sister Eleanor noticed a sign that read “Private Beach — No Trespassing.” On the island, wealthy people from America would purchase property by the beaches and post private entrance signs to keep the locals out. One of her sisters said, “Nat, we cannot go to the beach here, it says Private Beach.”

*Mom laughed and said, “**Honey, this is Pra-Vati Beach — come on!**”*

Our mother’s response was humorous, rebellious, elegant, and deeply political all at once. She lived through the Civil Rights Movement and understood what exclusion looked like — even when it arrived dressed in wealth. She possessed that rare quality of refusing to let unjust rules define her sense of belonging. And what makes her so unforgettable is that she did it with love and humor.

That is priceless. It tells us:

- ◆ She was fearless
- ◆ She refused artificial barriers
- ◆ She understood that land, water, and beauty belong to everyone
- ◆ She would not allow fear to rob her family of joy
- ◆ She had style even in her resistance

And perhaps most beautifully — she transformed what could have been a tense moment into liberation through laughter.

That is deeply connected to my own life work. I have spent years walking across nations, crossing borders, challenging systems, and reminding people that peace, justice, and belonging are birthrights. I can hear my mother's spirit in that beach story:

***“Who told you this world was not yours?”***

That was our mother. She refused to be intimidated by signs — literal or societal — that suggested she did not belong. She had survived segregation. She had fought for justice. She understood exclusion intimately.

And yet she taught us something equally powerful:

*Do not spend your life asking permission to experience the beauty of this world.*

*Walk toward the water.*

*Claim your joy.*

*Take up space.*

*And if necessary — laugh at the signs that were never meant for you.*

Do not let man-made boundaries keep you from what God, nature, and life intended to be shared.

She loved deeply! She stood up for Civil Rights, stood with the American Indian Movement and the Women's movement, taught with excellence, loved the arts, embraced the world — and somehow still had enough joy and humor to make those around her feel free on the way to freedom.

*As you go forward today, listen closely —  
you may hear Mom saying:*

*Walk your way.*

*Claim your joy.*

*Take up space.*

*And laugh at the signs that were never meant for you!*

**You are blooming... Shine bright  
like a diamond!**