

Verda Welcome: 'woman of valor'

The Delta Sigma Theta sorority filed past the open casket of former state Sen. Verda Freeman Welcome.

Each member wore black.

Their faces were solemn.

The first in their line carried a single red candle. ~~EVE. SUN~~

The flame from the candle flickered as Welcome's sorority sisters filed past her casket, step by step, in solemn single file. **APR. 27 1990**

Verda Freeman Welcome was legend. She was history. She was a great and noble lady who rose from a truck farm in rural North Carolina to become the first black woman ever elected to a state Senate in the United States.

Welcome died Sunday at 83. Yesterday, the Democrat from West Baltimore was celebrated during a funeral at Grace Presbyterian Church in northwest Baltimore.

A sorority sister quoted from Langston Hughes, the black poet and writer: "Life for me ain't been no crystal stairs. . . but all the time, I've been climbing on. Climbing on."

A soloist sang the hymn, "May the Work That I Have Done Speak For Me."



**Wiley A.
Hall 3rd**

E1

Ushers passed out programs celebrating Welcome's "life and homecoming."

"Verda Welcome sought to be compassionate, loving, and consistent," a Delta told the congregation. "She sought to be tender and open-minded."

Then, Welcome's daughter, Mary Sue Welcome, put an arm around her son and stepped slowly to the side of the casket. She sobbed softly, but her head was high.

Tenderly, as if her mother were only asleep, Mary Welcome straightened a lace coverlet over the body, tucked it in at the corners. She removed a floral bouquet that had been next to the pillow and placed it to one side.

The church organist played, "Somebody

Bigger Than Your Or I", and an usher slowly closed the casket.

Mary Welcome turned away and hugged her son around the neck at the front of the church, hugged him for a long, long time.

"Out of my love for Verda Welcome," said Rabbi Murray A. Saltzman, of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, "I call her Woman of valor." **APR. 27 1990**

Quoted the Rev. Dr. Marion C. Bascom, of Douglas Memorial Community Church, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the children of God." ~~EVE. SUN~~
Said Dr. Clinton Coleman, Bishop of

the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, "What an appropriate passage, 'Let the Work That I Have Done Speak For Me.' If we do that, there needs to be very little speeches here today."

Ah, but there were speeches.

Some of the most powerful politicians in Maryland attended Verda Welcome's funeral service yesterday, and so, there had to be speeches.

But the politicians who spoke, who had known Welcome and fought beside her and

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By Irving H. Phillips Jr. — Evening Sun Staff

Pallbearers carried former Sen. Verda Welcome's casket from Grace Presbyterian Church after her funeral yesterday.

sometimes opposed her, spoke yesterday with great emotion about their love and respect for their former colleague.

On occasion, the sincerity was so evident that the congregation was moved to applaud.

Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes, D-Md., described Welcome as a "great lady and a noble fighter for a just and decent nation."

Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md., said, "She listened to the needs of her people and turned them into political action."

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"She was a foe without hate," said Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-7th, "a friend without treachery, a soldier without cruelty. She was, in all respects, a strong but gentle black woman who didn't mind lying down and making her body a bridge so that we might run across one day and get to the promised land."

Each recounted the ways Welcome had personally touched their lives and inspired their careers.

Welcome, a former city school teacher, was first elected to the House of Delegates in 1958. Shortly after her historic election to the state Senate four years later, she was wounded during an attempted assassination.

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But she recovered and remained in the Senate for 20 years. During that time, she pushed through a public-accommodations law in Maryland. She co-sponsored a bill that provided \$4.8 million for construction of a new facility for the former

Provident Hospital, then one of the oldest black hospitals in the country. She led the fight to raise Morgan State College, one of the nation's most revered historically black colleges, to university status.

Welcome served as a mentor to up and coming politicians throughout her career and was a friend and source of strength to her peers.

"Verda Welcome and I fought the battles of the civil rights movement together," said former Gov. Harry R. Hughes, who once served with her in the Senate.

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"They were not always pleasant battles," said Hughes. "Sometimes they were very bitter. But she brought to public office something

we need more of: a genuineness, a respect and a sensitivity for others."

State Sen. Clarence W. Blount, D-City, remembered Welcome's role as a political trailblazer.

"Because Verda was, I am," he said. "Because Verda was, a lot of us in public office are where they are today. Judge this lady not by her contributions, not by what she did, but by where she started."

And so, Verda Welcome was laid to rest yesterday.

"Rest on, Senator Verda," shouted Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "We'll see you in the morning!"

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