Mildred Collins is proof of what courage and faith can do

Once in prison for life on a murder charge, she got out on her own, doing good for others

By Elizabeth M. Oliver
City Editor

Now and then you come across a story which proves what faith can do.

Some 15 years ago things looked bad for Mrs. Mildred Collins.

She had been found guilty of killing her bridegroom - to - be on their wedding day. The sentence the court handed down was life plus 10 years.

In other words, Millie, as she was fondly known, was to spend her lifetime in jail and then serve 10 years more — or forever — in a maximum prison.

At least that is what was intended.

However, the one - time exotic dancer who performed in a bird cage, was not overcome with bitterness nor discouraged.

In fact, as Millie herself states, she had courage and faith in herself, enough to know deep down inside that kind of future could not ossibly be hers.

After trying appeals from one court to another, Millie struck out to make the best of it at Jessup Women's Prison.

Alone, without relatives, she reveals she said to herself, "Ive got to make it by myself and I don't care how long it takes."

At first Millie knitted and crocheted sweaters, Afghans, spreads, and other handmade items "to get myself a good lawyer."

Later as the years went by, she decided on another plan, "one of working hard to make others happy."

From this thought came her now famed "Love - A - Child Program" designed for retarded, and handicapped children confined to Rosewood State Hospital.

Soon her project received the attention needed and she and other volunteers worked with youngsters who so badly needed attention and devotion.

A HOME OF HER OWN

Millie worked there seven years and was soon practically on her own. She received many commendations and citations. Eventually, contact with persons of influence brought complete freedom.

Now, Mrs. Collins has the longed - for home of her own in Baltimore. She receives Social Security and food stamps and enough to "barely make it" as she says, but she is free, absolutely free.

Bursting with the enthusiasm she has always had for life and living, Mrs.. Collins makes a modest living by sewing, knitting and crocheting many items of her own original design.

Now that personal bills of over $200 are facing her and due within a few days) she is selling chances on a huge Afghan she estimtes is worth $1,000.

The money from the chances will help with expenses . The winner will get the priceless spread which measures 82 by 105, large enough for a queen - sized bed. Fashioned in a ranbow of colors, Millie notes, "You'd really have to pay more in a store."

BY CANDLE LIGHT

The Afghan which is washable and will last a lifetime, was knitted by candlelight when Millie's gas and electric were turned off for months.

She says when she finished the Afghan, she had only one candle left and but four pennies in her pocket.

Now she has the lights back on, she needs to pay another sum of $100 and the balance of $200 on insurance and other notes.

FAITH EACH DAY

MILLIE AND HER MASTERPIECE — Mrs. Collins is shown in her home May 15, Thursday, holding the 82 by 105 Afghan of many colors which she knitted by candle light over a period of a month. The washable wool cover which is worth $1,000, is of her own design and will last forever. Behind the vivacious former night club dancer are sweaters and vests she also has on hand for sale, all fashioned in brilliant colors and styles of today. Afghan raffle tickets are $1 each or $10 for a book.

AFRO Photo by Mark Gail

Courage and faith pull Millie though each day.

She states," There isn't anything you can't do if you set your mind to it."

Before she came to Baltimore, Millie says she danced in Chicago at the Club Delilah which is now torn down. When she and her Johnnie, the late bridegroom to be, were engaged, she was one of the most popular entertainers in the nightlife circle in Baltimore. They had a romantic courtship and planned a big event to tie the knot.

They had the rehearsal the night before that July 15 church wedding was marred by gunfire.

Millie testified in court that she received a phone call on her wedding day asking her to pick up Johnnie across town.

They were due to walk down the aisle in three hours so she rushed to the location taking her purse with her. Inside was the gun she always carried when comipg home from her night-club.

Mrs. Collins still states a woman came to the door with a knife when she asked for Johnnie. The woman told her, "You won't marry Johnnie today," Mrs. Collins recalls.

Millie testified she was shooting wildly when Johnnie came down the stairs and he caught the bullet which caused his death and brought Millie the life sentence.

Another shot which brought the additional 10 years hi someone else in the housse.

Juge Meyer Cardin who imposed the "forever" sentence, later in 1974, set Millie free unconditionally. Letters of praise for her work with the Rosewood children poured in.

The Maryland Senate through Senator Verda F. Welcome had drafted a special resolution.

In freeing Millie, Judge Cardin stated, "Mrs. Collins has done a great deal of work helping others. It is refreshing to learn that she has rehabilitated herself. It is encouraging to me that this court can give her an opportunity to continue her work."

MILLIE IN 1965 when she was a bride-to-be and a dancer in a bird cage at a local night club. In this photo taken shortly before that ill-fated day of July 25, 1965, her wedding day, Mrs. Collins was radiant, looking forward to the event. The wedding gown she had made herself was ready and arrangements had been made at the church. She and her bridegroom to be were due to walk down the aisle at 1 p.m.

MILLIE AND HER HUMANITARIAN AWARD from the Pennsylvania Avenue Merchants Association was received on behalf of the citizens from Mrs. Kitty Broady and Herman Katkow both officials of the organization in 1974. Highlighting her career at that time was her kindness and consideration of the children at Rosewood State Hospital. Her 'Love-A-Child Program" at Rosewood also received commendation of the Maryland General Assembly, a Senatorial Resolution and citations from the Department of Correction and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 1973.

Lena Horne smashing at Kennedy Center

There just aren't enough words to justifiably describe the electrifying performance of lovely, ageless, Lena. Monday night's appearance at the Kennedy Center found a cross section of citizens giving Lena an enthusiastic welcome with several standing ovations as she made her way across the stage to pick up the microphone and begin with "I Got A Name."

Followed by a stream of songs showing her versatility Lena showed that she could yet handle the new songs as well as the good, old oldies. The included "But Not For Me," "The Lady Must Live," "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," and "Yesterday When I Was Young." She brought the house down with songs from the "Wiz."

On one occasion she became emotionally involved and demonstrated to the packed house that she could do routines which required quite a bit of dancing .. and not be out of breath when time came to take the microphone.

She rocked, bounced did the old fashioned shuffle and danced the soft shoe. To catch the perspiration, which she said was salty and therefore bad for the coloring on dresses, she tied a handkerchief around her neck and continued on with the magnificent performance.

She made no apologies to the audience for her spirited actions except at one point she remarked that one thing about being a lady is that a lady has a right to be trashy and yet be a lady. She was referring to that part of her act in which she did some spirited dancing.

It was her audience and she commanded it, much to their enjoyment. Standing ovations are not easily come by but Lena had the audience on their feet often and the pleasure of the evening will live in their memories for a long, long time.

The concert starring LaHorne with Willie Tyler and Lester and the Duke Ellington School Stage Band, directed by Wallace Clark, was for the benefit of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority really scored with Lena's first appearance at the Kennedy Center and joining the wild applause were Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Henley, Griff Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Chester Carter of Capitol City Liquors: Rose Elder, wife of golfer Lee Elder: Aaron Brown, formerly of Chex Brown: Roi Bernard of Charles the First; Dr. Lillian Beard, Councilwoman Hilda Mason, Mr. and Mrs. Dennette Harrod, Dr. and Mrs. Alvin Robinson, Dr. Eddie Saunders and School Board Member Barbara Lett Simmons.

$100 tickets, a reception was held at the lovely building of the Organization of American States, immediately following the performance. Many had an opportunity to meet the honorary chairpersons. Mrs. Henry Strong introduced Mrs. Joan Mondale, wife of the Vice President, Walter Mondale, who spoke briefly. Other chairpersons included His Excellency Alejandro Orfila and Mrs. Marion Barry.

Prior to departing from the Kennedy Center Mayor Marion Barry read and presented a proclamation to Ms. Horn which proclaimed Monday, Lena Horn Day in the District of Columbia. He thanked her for her performance, on behalf of the citizens of the District and told her that he personally signed her proclamation. Among the guests was Lena's daughter, Gail Lumet.

SISTERHOOD AWARD RECIPIENT — From (L-R) Ms. Peola McCaskill, basileus of Chi Eta Phi Sorority, stands with son John McCaskill as she received the "Sisterhood Award" from founder, Aliene C. Ewell at an awards luncheon held recently at the Blackburn Center, Howard University.

SHOWTIME

★ Theatre
★ Arts
★ Music

Billy Dee Williams, as Lando man, governs Cloud City in "The Cairissian, a dashing rogue and con Empire Strikes Again."

There's color now in that Galaxy far, far, away!

Bill Lane in Hollywood

"When my agent called and asked if I would be interested in playing Lando Cairissian, I had some reservations", says Billy Dee Williams, who creates this important new character in "The Empire Strikes Back", the film that continues the "Star Wars" saga.

"But after getting to know director Irvin Kershner I knew I wanted this role".

What were his reservations?

"I was afraid it was just another romantic figure they were asking me to play", Williams says. "You see, after 'Lady Singa The Blues' and 'Mahogany', I didn't know what direction to take. I had become a romantic leading man and I was not happy about that. I love character roles, and Kershner convinced me that this is what I was being asked to play.

"Lando, who runs a mining operation in space, is a very complex character indeed. Both a scoundrel and a hero, you think at first he is a bad guy, all bad, but he ends up as someone the audience is rooting for. It is that transition, conveying the change convincingly, which is the challenge for an actor."

Williams has had two careers, divided by what he frankly describes as 'a spell in the darkness'. While still in his teens, the Harlem-born actor was a success on Broadway in such plays as "A Taste of Honey" and "A Cool World", then experienced a period of setbacks in his career.

"I'd had things pretty good until then", he recalls. "Suddenly, it became hard. The lucky streak was over. My reaction was to become hostile, which is not what I had been brought up to be."

How did he extricate himself from the darkness? "I retreated. I lived as a recluse in a room on East 9th Street (New York), studied Eastern philosophies and got to know myself. It was like going into a desert. After a year, I emerged and was able to walk into any situation and see beauty in it," he explains.

Later, he was to achieve a position of respect in his profession. At the Ford Theatre in Washington, President Carter himself led the standing ovation when Billy Dee triumphed as Martin Luther King in the tour de force of "I have a Dream".

"All life is a proess of change," says Williams, and that is why Lando interests him. "He is a character in transition".

Philip Michael Thomas was great, but the show wasn t. That's probably the way one could explain the demise in New York of the Jamaican musical stage piece "Reggae" and the arrival back in Hollywood of actor Philip Michael Thomas, who was co-star in the troubled show with Calvin Lockhart. But Thomas had little need to worry, for his call roster here is always clicking, and especially now since he has won an Emmy nomination for his acting display in the PCP television special, "The Wack Attack". All of which makes Thomas and his manager Beverly Noga quite happy.

The Current Essence Magazine says in a terse article by Bonnie Allen that Black Americans also did not seize much of anything in the seventies, just past; that, like Rip Van Winkle, they took a nap like a man who figured he had it all made. And now comes the time to awaken and wad through the wreckage that has slipped up on him with more fury than every before. The article says, however, that black people must re-elect Jimmy Carter—because he owes a debt to the black voters. Yet, there are a lot of black people who believe he is taking too long to recognize the debt orand to make a move to pay it.

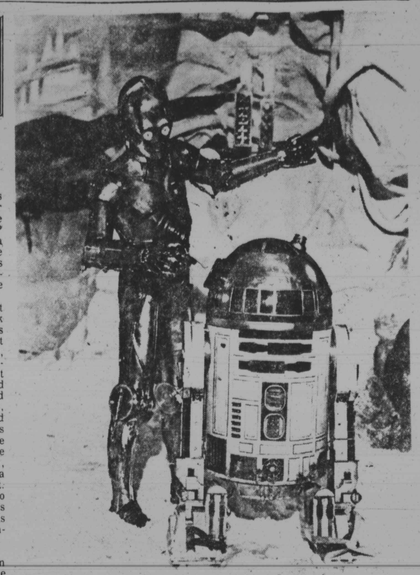
To this weriter's point of view somebody has been owing Black Americans a debt ever since the first slave boat landed. We were the real boat people, floated against our will.

Rudy Ray Moore is back again. In another movie about life in the ghetto world where PCP is the exotic high of a people burdened with the inability to cope. His movie, "Disco Godfather", is about the use of PCP.

RCA tossed a giant boogie party at a swank New York spot, Les Mouches, the other night to salute Dick Griffey, the Los Angeles entrepreneur who has built the nation's second largest black-owned recording company, Solar Records. On hand were many of the artists who record on the Griffey label, The Whispers, Dynasty, Shalamar, Lakeside, a whole slew of talent. Among the guests also were singers Phyllis Hyman, Stephanie Mills and Evelyn "Champagne" King.

Disc Jockeys from everywhere, those deejays spinning for black-oriented radio stations around the U.S., will all be here soon for the big Conference 80 sponsored by Sidney Miller's Black Radio Exclusive magazine.

Forest Hamilton and Jerry Boulding are heading up the big affair of four days to be held at the downtown Hyatt Regency hotel. Stevie Wonder and Don Cornelius, along with Detroit record merchandiser Calvin Simpson, are among the biggies selected to head up symposia and panels having to do with the working operations of black music, black radio and black [illegible]



C-3PO and R2-D2 in the Rebel Alliance's ice cave complex.

"Amorous Flea" delights... audiences ★

For some reason audiences at the Arena Playhouse have always enjoyed comedy. Even if the play was billed as a tragedy, the few funny scenes in any production would almost certainly produce the greatest responses from the audience.

Well, for those Arena Player fans who love comedy, as well as anyone who has not made it over to the playhouse, located at 801 McCulloh St., there's quite a production waiting for you.

"The Amorous Flea" is the title of the production, based on the seventeenth century French playwright Moliere's "School For Wives."

The play, musical adapted by Bruce Montgomery, is a fast-paced, bawdy farce about an old man, a busybody, who closets a young girl in a nunnery and later at his house to make sure she grows up to be his perfect wife.

'Perfect' according to Arnolphe, the busybody, means a totally ignorant, but his creation's ignorance proves to be the old schemer's undoing.

The young lady, Agnes, meets a dashing young stranger, and after one stolen kiss both become eager to learn more about love and each other, much to Arnolphe's displeasure.

Arnolphe was played wonderfully by Marvin Sampson, who blustered about the stage practically bursting with self-importance. His young consort-to-be, Agnes, was portrayed by Terry Daniels, a beautiful woman wih a voice to match.

Ellen Smith and John Hargrove turned in splendid performances as Arnolphe's saucy maid, Georgette; and his sly, bosterous man-at-arms, Alain.

Hugh Harrell, who also had a very good voice, played Chrysalde, Arnolphe's friend and confidant. The young swain, Horace was portrayed by Sterling Robinson who, although a fine actor, sounded off key several times during the premier performance.

Rounding out the cast were Samuel Wilson and Harvey Denmark as Oronte, Agnes' longlost father, and Enrique, the father of Horace.

Ed Terry did a fine job directing and staging the production, and his staff of Shirley Watson, Roscoe who directed the five-piece band; Jeanine Fleming, costume designer; set designer Roscoe Fleming; and lighting director Penny Demps, all did a masterful job.

Few plays cause the audience to leave the auditorium singing and laughing, but the latest production by the Arena Players accomplished just that. It runs through June 1, with performances on weekends.

Slappy White's new show 'White and Reno'

Production has begun on "White and Reno", a half-hour comedy program development project for NBC-TV starring William Allen Young, Martin Short, Slappy White, Judy Landers and Audrey Landers, it was announced by Michael Zinberg, vice president, Comedy Programs, NBC Entertainment.

"White and Reno" looks at the lives and escapades of a struggling, racially mixed comedy team, Steve White (Young) and Danny Reno (Short), who share an apartment in New York City with their ex-vaudeville manager Steve's Uncle Benjamin (Slappy White). Booked to perform in a remote area, the comedians discover to their dismay that their audience is the Ku Klux Klannish "Riders of the Night".

Benefit Prayer breakfast for Peace and Love

Larnelle Harris, popular young Gospel singer, will be guest soloist at the Masonic Temple, on May 17, at 9:30 a.m.

Currently, Larnelle has just recorded his third album "Free" with ABCWord Records. His first album, "Tell It To Jesus", is one of the best selling sacred albums, and his second album, "More", was recently nominated for a coveted Grammy Award.

As soloist and leader, Larnelle toured nationally with several popular groups including the Spurrlows. During that time he performed for more than three million people in high schools, colleges, universites, civic auditoriums and churches all across the United States and Canada. He was featured soloist with the famous Michigan Concert Choir.

Larnelle regularly appears on several major religious national television programs. He recently was featured on a Billy Graham Television Special seen coast to coast as well as in several Graham Crusades. He is appearing for the fifth consecutive year at the Christian Artists' Seminar at Estes Park, Colorado. He was soloist at the Los Angeles Mayor's Prayer Breakfast and his record albums brought three nominations at the recent Dove Awards. He can be heard in the new movie based on the story of Charles Colson's conversion singing the title song, "Born Again".

Larnelle was recently chosen by the Christian Booksellers Association to appear at their annual concention. He also made a special concert appearance at the huge Praide Gathering in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Thurlow Spurr, Music Director for the PTL Television Newtwork, said in a recent interview, "I have seen Larnelle Harris at a huge Jesus Festival, during a performance for the President at the White House, on numerous nationwide television shows, and wherever people of all faiths gather." Larnelle has a very special musicial magic. His is a unique gift of communicating Good News through music.

★

Dionne Warwick and Barry Manilow are framed by the very nicest kind of wallpaper — some of his song hits — as they prepare to merge their talents "Barry Manilow — One Voice," a new musical special on the ABC Television Network, Mon., May 19.

Night Scene seen—

By Bob Matthews

Once upon a time, bars in Northwest Baltimore could look for banner business on Preakness Day, for visitors to our town and the regulars too, spent pleasant hours sipping and discussing the horse race.

But no more!

Outside of a few bars in the immediate neighborhood of the Pimlico Race Course, there seems to be little attention paid to this second jewel in the Triple Crown.

Of course, all of the regular trackgoers frequent the nearby watering holes with the state race dates at the Northwest Baltimore track. The two main beneficiaries are The Stable Inn on Belvedere Ave. off Park Heights, and Willie Richardson's in the 5100 block Park Hgts. Ave.

At The Stable, which is actually named Paul's Stable, they are acclaiming their Saturday handicappers specials. On a day-to-day basis, it is interesting to just listen to the chatter in the club following the last race of the day.

Makes you wonder why everyone is not rich, since there always seems to be a reason for a particular horse or jockey's not winning. So, while you read all about the fantastic celebrations for Preakness Day, just bear in mind that it doesn't happen that way for Night Scenery.

But, all the clubs will be open for business as usual and waiting for you to check them out.

This week, vocalists hold the top spots with the Left Bank Jazz Society presenting one of the greats, Carmen McRae and her Trio, who are the featured artists at this Sunday's concert.

Carmen has become a cult figure, drawing fantastic crowds from coast to coast during her appearances. In fact, she is to the jazz world what Bette Midler is to the pop music lovers.

This will mark her first Baltimore appearance in over two years, and is expected to be well worth checking out. We especially like the way she dismisses her trio at some point during the performance, and plays piano and sings without them.

Over at The Bandstand, jazz vocalist Joe Lee Wilson heads the lineup along with Charlie Covington, piano and Hugh Walker, drums. Joe, is heralded as the closest thing to Eddie Jefferson, and indeed scats and sings in a similar style.

Bass player on the date is Arthur Harper, out of Philadelphia. Although we haven't heard him, am assured that he has paid his dues, and is well known in the music world.

The Sportsmen's Lounge is presenting the John Jamkins Quartet, featuring vocalist Eartha, through Sunday. The Saturday afternoon jazz jam will be headlined by Judd Watkins this week. This goes on from 4 to 8 p.m.

At The Closet, Frank Strozier, premier alto saxophonist heads up the set with the regular rhythm section. They'll be in position tonight through Sunday.

The newest jazz club in town, the Cafe Park Plaza features pianist Bob Budda and his group Inside Out tonight and Saturday, with the Pockets Rhythm Section skedded for the Sunday session.

The Port City Jazz Ensemble will make an appearance at the Inner Harbor tonight from 8 to 9:30. And as is customary with city-sponsored events, this one will be free.

Over in D.C., Nancy Wilson with special guest Wilbert Longmire, will appear in concert at Constitution Hall tonight at 8 p.m. While tomorrow night, Saturday, Stephanie Mills will play a concert at the same hall.

At BBlues Alley tonight through Sunday, it's the Ron Carter quartet. The Georgetown spot is now proclaiming its dinner show package and specialty of New Orleans style creole cuisine.