

A Biography

Perseverance

Aretha Franklin
1942-2018

Romans 5:3-5

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Aretha Louise Franklin was born on March 25, 1942 in Memphis, Tennessee, to a Baptist preacher, Reverend Clarence La Vaughan "C.L." Franklin and mother Barbara Siggers Franklin, a gospel singer. The fourth of five children, Aretha was a self-taught child prodigy with a powerful voice. A gifted pianist, her God-given musical talent was apparent from an early age. As a young child, she sang often in front of her father's Detroit congregation.

Tragedy struck Aretha's family when at age six her parents separated. Her Mother moved away from the family to Buffalo, New York, where sadly, four years later in March of 1952 at the age of thirty-four, she suffered a massive heart attack and died. Aretha's aunt, Clara Ward, a famous devotional singer, became a major influence in her life and source of support. The family eventually settled in Michigan where C.L. pastored Detroit's New Bethel Baptist Church. He was soon known nationally as a renowned preacher. Aretha toured with her father's traveling revival show and while on tour she befriended many of gospel's great singers.

By age fourteen, Aretha had recorded some of her earliest tracks at the church. Life on the road at such a young age exposed Aretha to adult behaviors and at fifteen she became a mother. Two years later she had her second child. After taking some time off, she refused to let her circumstances keep her from achieving her dreams. She returned to performing and in 1960, with her father's blessing, Aretha moved to New York and signed with Columbia Records. She released several popular singles, many of which today are considered classics.

By 1961 Aretha had a few top ten singles on the R&B charts, but they failed to showcase the talent evident in her gospel music. She married her manager Ted White who decided a change was in order and Aretha signed with Atlantic Records. The decision paid off and in 1967 her hit song, 'Respect,' reached number one on both the R&B and pop charts and she won her first two Grammy Awards.

1968 proved to be another difficult year for Aretha. She was asked to perform at the funeral of her father's friend, Martin Luther King Jr. where she sang a heartfelt rendition of "Precious Lord." She went on to sing at the democratic convention that same year. Sadly, the

following year Aretha and husband Ted White divorced. The death of another close friend, Mahalia Jackson, spurred for Aretha, a renewed interest in gospel music. In 1972 she released a gospel album titled 'Amazing Grace.' It sold more than two million units and became the bestselling gospel album of all time.

The remainder of the 70's proved good for Aretha as she received eight Grammy awards and an invitation to perform at the 1977 presidential inauguration. She married her second husband, actor Glynn Turman in 1978.

The next several years were again challenging as Aretha saw her popularity decline in the music world and she was saddled with a massive tax bill. Her father was shot during a home burglary and slipped into a coma from which he never emerged, dying in 1984. A few months after burying her father she and Glynn divorced. Aretha relied on her faith to keep going and believing during this heartbreaking time.

Aretha's career rebounded again in the late 80s with the release of her biggest-selling album of all time, 'Who's Zoomin Who.' She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and received an honorary doctorate in musicology from the University of Detroit.

The 90s brought with them an invitation for Aretha to sing at the inauguration of Bill Clinton. She was also honored with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. She continued recording and was the subject of multiple documentaries and tributes.

Aretha released her final studio album on Arista in 2003. Two years later she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and became only the second woman ever to be inducted into the UK Music Hall of Fame. In 2008, Aretha received her eighteenth Grammy Award, making her the most honored artist in Grammy history. She was tapped to sing at the 2009 Inauguration of President Barack Obama.

The very next year Aretha was given an Honorary Doctorate in Music from Yale University. A few months later she suffered from a pain in her side and was forced to cancel the remainder of her tour dates to undergo major surgery. Not wishing to reveal the nature of her illness or specifics of her surgery she took some time off to step away from the limelight and heal. Her recovery took her to her knees and she put out a call for prayer to friends and family. She says she wasn't concerned or afraid. "My faith in God is too great for that and my family and close friends gave me great support, and here I am today," she adds.

Aretha speaks often about the level of success she has achieved and attributes her singing abilities as being a gift from God. She says, "Being a singer is a natural gift. It means I'm using to the highest degree possible the gift that God gave me to use. I'm happy with that... my faith always has been and always will be important to me." Aretha understands the importance of perseverance as again and again she stubbornly finds a way to triumph over troubles by refusing to give up and through holding on to her faith.

The lyrics to the Gospel Song she wrote and released, 'Never Gonna Break My Faith,' sum-up her life best.

My Lord

I have read this book so many times
But nowhere can I find the page
That changes what I experience today
Now I know that life is meant to be hard

That's how I learn to appreciate my God
Though my courage made me try
I can tell you I won't hide
[Chorus]

You can lie to a child with a smilin' face
Tell me that color ain't about race
You can cast the first stones, you can break my bones
But you're never gonna break
You're never gonna break my faith

Faith and hope ain't yours to give
Truth and liberty are mine to live
You can steal a crown from a king
Break an angels wings
But you're never gonna break my faith

My Lord

Won't help them to understand
That when someone takes the life of an innocent man
Well, they never really won because all they've really done
Is set the soul free where it's supposed to be?

[Bridge]

For those we lose before their time
I pray their souls will find the light
I know that the day will surely come
When His will, His will, will be done

Word Count: 1,189