We Speak Your Names Poem

We Speak Your Names
Because we are free women,
born of free women,
who are born of free women,
back as far as time begins,
we celebrate your freedom.

Because we are wise women,
born of wise women,
who are born of wise women,
we celebrate your wisdom.

Because we are strong women,
born of strong women,
who are born of strong women,
we celebrate your strength.

Because we are magical women,
born of magical women,
who are born of magical women,
we celebrate your magic.

My sisters we are gathered here to speak your names.
We are here because we are your daughters
as surely as if you had conceived us, nurtured us, carried us in your wombs, and then sent us out
into the world to make our mark.
We Speak Your Names Poem

and see what we see, and be what we be, but better, truer, deeper
because of the shining examples of your own incandescent lives.

We are here to speak your names because we have enough sense to know that we did not spring full blown from the forehead of Zeus,

or arrive on the scene like Topsy, our sister once removed, who somehow just grewed.

We know that we are walking in footprints made deep by the confidence strides of women who parted the air before them like the forces of nature that you are.

We are here to speak your names because you taught us that the search is always for the truth and that when people show us who they are, we should believe them.

We are here because you taught us that sister speak can continue to be our native tongue, no matter how many languages we learn as we move about as citizens of the world and of the ever-evolving universe.

We are here to speak your names because of the way you made for us. Because of the prayers you prayed for us.

We are the ones you conjured up, hoping we would have strength enough, and discipline enough, and talent enough, and nerve enough to step into the light when it turned in our direction, and just smile awhile.
We Speak Your Names Poem

We are the ones you hoped would make you proud because all of our hard work, makes all of yours part of something better, truer, deeper.

Something that lights the way ahead like a lamp unto our feet,

As steady as the unforgettable beat of our collective heart.

We Speak your names.
We Speak your names.

Ruth Perry Louise Scott Larney Jackson
Gertrude Jackson Faye Rodgers Betty Bland
Octavia Scott Jannie Martin Callie Davis
Jeannetta Rhone Maurice Pugh Inez Harvey
Rosie Jordan Charmaine Newman Barbara Warmsley
Belinda Andrews Gertrude Taylor Pia Holmes
Thelma White Viola Williams Sandra Perkins Frenchie Andrews

We Speak your names.
We Speak your names.

You could not have known how closely we watched your every move.
How we hung on your every word, when you prayed a powerful prayer,
or at the women retreat as we gathered around in a circle
and you spoke words of wisdom and prosperity into our lives.

Or how you so gracefully shared a scripture during a break down or I would say a breakthrough. Proverbs 3:5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your path.
We Speak Your Names Poem

Your gentle expression of love as you encouraged us to sing in the choir,
usher on the Usher Board, act in a play, except a leadership role,
or teach a Sunday school lesson
and while doing these things study God’s word and hide it in our hearts.
We thank you because it made us walk taller, smile wider, dream bigger,
and study our Bibles more.

We speak your names.

We speak your names.

Lois Clemons Winona Taylor Rosa Thomas
Cora Mack Kathryn McDade Leatrice Singleton
Jackie Hudson Margaret Williams Charmaine Newman Adrian Jackson Rosie Williamson Lauvella Cole
Catherine Byrdsong Lillie Milner Claudia Newman
Joyce Slay Emma McCray Ethel Cloy
Juanita Simmons Lisa Sweeney Vonna Haynes

We speak your names.

We speak your names.

You could not have been in each of our little black girl bedrooms,
Watching us hold that make-pretend microphone as we lip-synched
Yes Jesus Love’s Me when dinner was ready downstairs,
when we begged our parents for piano lessons,
or curled up under the covers with a bible story when we had math homework to do.
We Speak Your Names Poem

You could not have known that your collective example of the

limitless possibilities that were open to us

is what allowed us to look our mothers in the eyes and say.

Mama, I want to be a singer,
Mama, I want to be an actress,
Mama, I want to be a dancer, a sculptor, a lawyer, a leader,

or a world-changing force for good.

And even when she rolled her eyes and shook her head

and pronounced us more our father’s child than we had been hers,

she knew you had planted those ideas in our heads, and she thanked you for letting us see that we

could be a part of something better, truer, deeper.

We speak your names.
We speak your names.

Ollie Rice Charmaine Newman Donna McCallum
Etta Rhodes JoAnn Moon Gloria Clancy
Mae Hawthorne Stella Bankston Ellen Senegal
Jeanette Johnson Mary Williams Sandra Shackleford
Bertha Hardyway Judith Lewis Audrey Burnett
Lucille Clay Rutha Lyle Sandra Perkins Kathy Newman
Gwendolyn Johnson Wilma Hairston Sadie Addison

We speak your names.
**We Speak Your Names Poem**

We *speak* your names.

Because we are *sensual* women,

born of *sensual* woman,

who are born of *sensual* women,

we celebrate your *passion*.

You taught us that the *mysteries* of true love

are sometimes harder to *unravel*

than all the others we attempt to understand,

but that when we are lucky enough to find the thread,

the reward is *worth* everything because

the time to have enough of *love is never*.

Because we have had our *hearts* broken,

we know your tears and have *felt* the same fears

of never finding one who can share our light

without getting *lost in it*, or *tossed in it*,

into a wind that always blows colder than we think it will.

We celebrate your willingness to continue to *search for love*,

and *find it*, and *lose it*, and find it, and lose it again

until we finally find it for real

and learn to *hold on tight by not holding on at all*.

From you, we learned that love, like beauty, comes in *many forms*.
We Speak Your Names Poem

You showed us what love looks like when it’s perfect, and when it isn’t.
You let us watch you looking, reaching, yearning,
always moving toward the light of something better, truer, deeper.

We speak your names.
We speak your names.

Sonja Cullen Mary Adams Augusta Saunders
Amanda Henderson Jackie Hyatte Margie Roberts
Lois Radcliff Cleo Lindsey Katherine Eaton
Charmaine Newman Loraine Abernathy Mary Rodgers
Delois Newman Mattie Walker Gwen Bouffard
Bennie Letcher Loretta Mincey Helen Crane
Annett Mills Christine Mitchell Pauline Newman

We speak your names.
We speak your names.

And you made it look so easy.
You changed the world around You with such fierce determination,
effortless style, and unshakeable grace, that we never suspected
how hard it was to be out there in the real world,

where sisterhood sometimes seems an abstract idea
and not the living, breathing thing we know
and need and want it to be.
We Speak Your Names Poem

We have sometimes *shivered* at the edges of a very cold place,
where people do not always see our beauty
or understand the rhythm of our song.

At those moments, we *whisper* your names
as a *talisman* and a *touchstone,*
so we will not forget *who* and *whata*
and *why* we are here.

And then, sometimes, in recognition of our *superior skill,*
or our *undeniable talent,*
or our *absolute* refusal to bend in the face of injustice,
sometimes, we win the prize. The *big* one.
The one they will mention forever after when they call our names,
or write our reviews, or *compose* our obituaries.

Sometimes, at that crucial, first one ever moment,
we are invited to come court at the *Wimbledon,*
or up to the *Oscar podium,* or the *Oval Office,* or the *Nobel Ceremony,*
or the *Broadway stage,* and express our feelings and the feelings of *every* other
African American woman watching
at a *moment* when all we really want to do is *call your names.*

All we really want to do is *thank* all of you for being with all of us,
whenever and wherever we find ourselves,
standing alone in the light. At those moments, we remember those lessons you shared
We Speak Your Names Poem

by living your lives with such integrity and honor
That they became something *better, truer, deeper.*

We *speak* your names.
We *speak* your names.

Rebecca Brewster  Lizzie Duff  Eleanor Cruse
Clara Banks  Angela Abernathy  Vienae Miller
Charmaine Newman  Pamela Woolfolk  Marva Williams
Ruth Ford  Venice Bridgefort  Joyce Ervin
Cressie Allen  Magdalene Garner  Linda Davis
Thelma Gabriel  Terri Boysaw  Janice Piegee
Yolanda Darrington  Etta Vernon

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who are born of free women,
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we celebrate your wisdom.

Because we are magical women,
    born of magical women,
who are born of magical women,
    we celebrate your magic.

We celebrate your courage.

We celebrate your spirit.

We celebrate your genius.

We celebrate your loving kindness.

We celebrate your Faith in God, in yourselves, and in us.

We thank you for the dues you’ve paid,
    and the prayers you’ve prayed.
We thank you for showing us how to fly by flying.

We thank you for these wings,
    and we stand before you now, your living legacy,
the flesh and blood of our collective dreaming,
    and we realize with a knowing deeper than the flow
of human blood in human veins that we are part of something better, truer, deeper.

We speak your names.

We speak your names.