



Mrs. Janie Smith Gonsalves

February 9, 1912 - April 8, 2014

Janie Smith Gonsalves was born February 9, 1912 on a plantation near Bamberg County, SC. She was the daughter of Frank and Rebecca Carter Smith. She was the granddaughter of slaves and the daughter of sharecroppers. Her 102 years of life epitomized the strength, hard work, resilience, and hope of generations of African Americans.

Janie has never been written up in history books, but her ordinary life was extraordinary--not only for the grace and loving care with which she lived, but also because her life represented the thousands and thousands of untold stories of the courageous black men and women to whom we all owe our admiration and gratitude.

Janie grew up poor in a sharecropper's cabin with no running water, no electricity, and sometimes not enough food to eat for her and her nine siblings. From an early age, she worked hard with her parents in the tobacco and cotton fields. She attended primary school for a few years when she was not needed in the fields. To get to school, which was several miles away, she had to talk by the houses of some less than neighborly white families who often loosed their dogs to attack her and her siblings. In addition to working the fields and helping to raise her siblings, Janie sometimes went to the main plantation house to help cook. When she was 24 years of age in 1936, she moved to Columbia, SC, to cook, clean and nanny for the plantation owner's daughter's family. For over 20 years with only one day off a week, she cooked all the meals, cleaned the house, and helped to raise two young girls. Once

the girls started school at night; after they had gone to sleep, Janie would borrow the girls' elementary school texts and taught herself to read and write better. Like so many of her ancestors before her, Janie knew and valued education. For all of her life, she sent money to her younger siblings and then to her many nieces and nephews to help them with their schooling.

In 1950, Janie moved to Washington, D.C. -- part of the great migration northward--and started working for Henrietta Brooke, as a maid, becoming cook for the family in the mid 1950's. In 1963, on her day off, she attended Martin Luther King's speech and she talked of that experience and how she was moved by the passion and hope that Dr. King gave her and all who listened. When Mrs. Brooke died, Janie worked as the cook for Elliot Bates McKee, moving with him to Annapolis in the winters and Massachusetts in the summers from 1969-1991. One summer, Janie met James Gonsalves, a retired highway worker turned strawberry and vegetable farmer. They married and Janie moved to Carver, MA. Janie continued to plant her garden with vegetables; as well as peanuts.

She was a remarkable person; someone of deep compassion and faith; she attended church all of her life and was a member of the United Parish of Carver for over 30 years.

she grew up listening to her grandmother tell first-hand stories of slavery; she bloodied her hands picking cotton as a sharecropper; she had the courage to face attacking dogs to get to school; she served as a domestic servant for nearly 60 years; she listened in person to Dr. King's inspirational speech; and she was never so proud as the day when President Obama was elected.

Janie's paternal grandmother (Mariah) was born and raised in slavery, was bought by Captain Stokes of Bamberg, SC. He named her. She received a last name when she married. Janie's paternal grandfather (Frank Smith) was born and raised in slavery. Janie grew up on the Stokes' plantation. Janie did not know her maternal grandparents names, but they too were slaves.

Janie is survived by a sister-in-law, Mrs. Mozelle Smith; nieces; nephews; great nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

Graveside services will be held 11:00 AM Saturday, April 12, 2014 at Palmetto Cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina, with interment to follow.

The family request that condolences and memorials be made on their web page @www.palmermemorialchapel.com

Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Janie Smith Gonsalves*

October 04, 2023 at 11:33 AM



“ *I am sorry to hear of your loss. Proverbs 16:31 says: "Gray hair is a crown of beauty when it is found in the way of righteousness." The Bible promises a resurrection to all those in the memorial tombs. (John 5:28,29)*

R Brown - April 13, 2014 at 07:01 AM