



## Shirley Deloris Miller Garrett

September 5, 1935 - August 9, 2017

Shirley Deloris Miller Garrett was born September 5, 1935 in Horatio, a small town in Sumter County, South Carolina. Shirley grew up as the first daughter and second child of mother (Elizabeth), father (Roosevelt Sr.), sister (Celestine) and two brothers (Roosevelt Jr. and Wallace K.) on a 200 acre, three-generational family owned farm.

Born and raised in the family's church, Willow Grove AME, Shirley's religious life began here in Horatio. She continued her religious studies at Mather Academy Boarding School in Camden, South Carolina, following in the footsteps of both her mother and grandmother. Upon graduation, Shirley attended North Carolina College, and later transferred to South Carolina State University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Library Science, with an emphasis in Reading and Early Childhood Studies. Shirley was always a humble, confident, and beautiful lady. While attending South Carolina State University, she was chosen as Queen of the ROTC, and the following year Homecoming Queen. The family was quite proud of Shirley's early scholastic and social accomplishments; yet, she remained a quiet, unostentatious, amicable young woman with a strong moral compass which flowed into her adult life.

Upon graduation, Shirley taught Library and Social Studies in Statesboro, Georgia. She later returned to her high school, Mather Academy, where she taught for two years prior to relocating to New York City, earning dual graduate degrees. Shirley professionally studied at one of the nation's premier Early

Childhood Education institutions, Bank Street College of Education in New York City, earning her first Masters degree. Her focus of study highlighted reading with an emphasis on the gifted and talented. A life-long learner and educator, Shirley earned a second Masters in Library Science at Long Island University, C.W. Post campus. Shirley was one of very few highly credentialed African-American women in the NYC public school system who started teaching in the early 1960s and maintained a coveted career that spanned thirty-five years.

When we think of Shirley, a particular quote of late poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow comes to mind: "The love of a mother is wonderful," especially a Christian mother. They take care of all our needs, including the most important need of telling us of Jesus, teaching us to love and follow Him. Christian mothers give us a picture of God's love for us, how freely He gives us everything, all the while we try to make demands of Him." The sacrifice He was willing to make for us was profound. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32). Shirley's life journey never strayed from a love of the Lord, and a life of service to humanity. Perhaps this speaks to her childhood love of books which fostered her choice to be a Librarian and helper to others.

Relocating to New York, she served as a member of the Pastor's Aid and church organizations within Emmanuel Baptist in Elmont, Long Island. Shirley joined the Greater Mount Pisgah Baptist church in Sumter. In her latter years, she was a Sunday School teacher, as well as an active member of Bible study. She was also an integral part of the Pastor's Aid, Missionary society and other auxiliary programs which she initiated, honoring various members with personally selected plaques that she also financially underwrote.

Shirley was always passionate and committed to community activism, picketing and marching during the Civil Rights Movement. A lifetime member of the NAACP, she was an engaged member of the Sumter South Carolina

Chapter. She was also a member of the Southern Law Poverty Center, the Schomburg Harlem Museum, the Urban League, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, the National Teachers Association, and most recently the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Unbeknownst to many, Shirley met then presidential candidate Barack Obama at an intimate NAACP evening gathering of about 15-20 people. At the time they thought he was just a nice well educated young man who came to address the group. But after just a few minutes, she knew she was in the presence of greatness. He spoke extemporaneously on issues involving educational reform, citing a study unique to the South Carolina school system, including detailed facts and statistics, not because he was addressing educators (in fact very few educators were there), but simply to elucidate his point, of the need for systemic change and reform in order to empower our black youth in America. Shirley shared this impactful moment with Celestine and rushed to tell Michael that if Obama won the presidency, he had to take his family to the inauguration—which he did.

Shirley was lovingly known as “granddaddy’s mother, Grand Mama Sarah’s, daughter” exuding a creative spirit and a talented eye. Shirley possessed superior culinary art skills emulating her grandmother. She had magnificent artistic talent as displayed in her artwork. She loved the outdoors and enjoyed gardens full of life and color. It is no surprise that Shirley’s greatest hobbies embraced life and love including reading, music, art, traveling, visiting historical venues, engaging in a spirited political debate and of course shopping with her sister, Celestine. As the story goes, she was impressed when Lady Bird Johnson, President Lyndon Johnson’s wife, prioritized beautification across the interstate highways of America. One of her greatest joys was the cultivation of her homestead garden. She spent much time developing the magnificently landscaped 10-acre gardens with lush, robust palm trees, lovely ferns, azaleas, crepe myrtles, cedars of Lebanon, and of

course our beloved state flower, yellow jasmine.

While living in Laurelton, Queens, New York, Shirley met Thomas Garrett, her husband, who had attended North Carolina A&T State University and served in the United States Air Force. They were married in St. Albans Presbyterian Church in June of 1961, and their union blessed them with their son: Michael Reynard Garrett, Sr.

Shirley's son, Michael, also attended North Carolina A&T, like his father and graduated from New York Institute of Technology. He married Dianne Marie Stewart in 1993, and their union blessed them with two sons: Michael R. Miller Garrett, Jr. and Jordan A. Dennis Garrett.

Family was very important to Shirley; the cornerstone of her life. She was involved with all of her maternal aunts' children in some special way, from babysitting through mentoring, whatever needs arose. A close-knit family, Shirley was our rock. She was extremely devoted to her mother and father. Upon retirement, she returned to the family home where she and Delores Wheeler cared for her mother for over ten years until her passing. One of her happiest moments was the birth of her grand babies, Miller Michael and Jordan Dennis. Dianne and Michael felt so blessed when she actually moved into their home providing hands-on care during their infancy. Often referring to Miller as "wise owl" as he was very introspective even as a baby, and to Jordan, as "her baby", she truly enjoyed watching them grow and cherished the time she spent with them. Shirley was totally enamored with her grandsons, who both currently attend St. John's University.

The impenetrable bond between Shirley and Michael has been extraordinary. Shirley left an indelible impression on Michael, in ways too innumerable to express. She taught him the power of faith courage, strength, honesty, and conviction and never to waver. Michael recounts, "Mommy served in a dual role of mother and father, which in and of itself in this society is ubiquitous. We read together every night that I can remember followed by prayers (goodnight). She stimulated a fixation that has remained with me." The scripture of Matthew 7:13-14, is etched in my heart because of Mommy. In my

speaking to God, I offer Thanksgiving, learning to be charitable, staying the course in life, being a husband and father that would be recognized by action and deed as opposed to 'talk'."

Michael is so grateful to his mother who very skillfully wove the involvement of his grandparents into his early years through age sixteen. Imbued in his earliest memories, "mommy emphasized a love of reading starting in nursery school." His thirst for knowledge, ability to question, and to seek truth were all nurtured and cultivated by Shirley. Michael credits his early love of math to his reading of the newspaper, particularly focusing on studying statistics in the sports section. Whether teaching Michael, how to read or in later years, traveling to California to spend time with her brother, Roosevelt, their mother/son relationship was and still is inseparable.

Her loving niece, Cherise, has declared that, "Aunt Shirley was my second mother. Michael and I were raised together in South Floral Park, Long Island. We are first cousins, yet our familial bond is one of brother and sister." Cherise loved to listen to Shirley's daily words of wisdom. For example, "Let there be peace and let it begin with me," was one of her favorite sayings. Aunt Shirley loved to tell the story about the man, the boy, and the donkey. At the end of her recalling the tale, she would say, "And the moral of the story is that you can't please everybody. "Another favorite saying was, "The dog will need his tail to fan the gnats one more time." Cherise will always remember her smiles and her words of wisdom, and feels blessed by her personal guidance, and nurturing spirit.

Shirley and Celestine, always reminded Michael and Cherise of Proverbs 3:5-6 with a passion and compassion as they urged them to pursue and utilize what they always called "your personal brilliance."

13Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

5Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own

understanding. 6In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Health issues and challenges never deterred Shirley from her personal work ethic. She endured pain, yet she never discussed it or complained to anyone. Although not frequent, as she was not a long-distance driver, she would drive from Rembert to Charleston to visit Celestine. A 30-year-old serious car injury that left physical scarring, eventually led to her last five years of rehabilitation in Charleston. Her ambulation became rather restricted, but not her zeal and zest for life. This past year was replete with three major blessings. She was celebrated at her Atkinson family Christmas holiday gala. She was chosen to be resident of the month at Summit Assisted Living on Daniel Island, where she resided. Finally, she spent a fun-filled, unexpected ten days during the early part of July with Michael, Dianne, Miller, Jordan and Celestine, ringing in the fourth.

One of her major wishes was to travel through northern South Carolina, North Carolina, and the Tennessee mountains. She and Celestine had planned the excursion for this October, 2017. As Shirley always said "God's ways are not man's ways." Instead, she has taken a step into eternity where the mountains, lakes and all of God's nature will be perennial in God's Paradise.

Shirley transitioned from labor to reward on August 8, 2017 where she was surrounded by Michael, who offered her a very lengthy, final tribute; Cherise, who offered a personal conversation and scripture reading, daughter-in-law, Dianne, who offered her tribute, and sister, Celestine who openly prayed and held her hand until she took her final breath. Thursday afternoon, Reverend Wallace Preston made a spontaneous visit, when he recognized that Shirley's clarion call was impending. He offered a very powerful, spiritual, and emotional administering of last rights which she heard before her step into

Eternity with God. The family is grateful that we were able to be with her during her spiritual moment.

The beloved mother and grandmother, is survived by her son, Michael Sr. , (Dianne), grandsons, Michael Miller Jr., Jordan Dennis, step-grandson Stephen Antonio, her very special favorite niece, Cherise, (all of New York); her sister and best friend, Celestine of Charleston, SC; two aunts, Wilhelmina Dennis Scott of Rembert (maternal) and Wilhelmina Atkinson Dean of Savannah, Georgia (paternal), sisters in-law: Mary Ellen, Mamie, Rose Garrett (New York), Josephine Gould (D.C.); brothers in-law: Kent, Charlie, Fred Garrett (New York and Greenville, SC.); nieces Dr. Grace Alieru and Alisha Robin Garrett (North Carolina and New York), a very special family friend, Delores Wheeler (Sumter, SC.), Marceletta Snell, Janie Presley, Arlethia Porter, Florence Gillis, Bernice Dinkins, her beloved church brothers and sisters in Christ, and a large host of Millers, Atkinsons, Dennis', Garretts, and dear friends. We also wish to acknowledge her special caregiver, companion and friend of five years, Sondra Crittenton of Ladson, SC., devoted physicians Dr. Steven Poletti and Dr. Michael Mikola, of Mount Pleasant, SC.

The family's wish is for you to understand Shirley's impeccable character:

-Shirley was a devout child of God.

-Shirley was a "Master Teacher", an Educator's Educator !

-Shirley had two lives: she was a sophisticated, cosmopolitan woman in New York, but when she came home to South Carolina, she was a country girl at heart

-She revered her Michael Sr. and she truly adored and cherished her grandsons, Miller and Jordan, as the sun rose and set on all three of them.

# Cemetery Details

## Evergreen Memorial Park

802 N. Guignard Drive  
Sumter, SC

# Previous Events

## Graveside service

AUG 19 (ET)

Evergreen Memorial Park  
802 N. Guignard Drive  
Sumter, SC

## Celebration of Life

AUG 19. 12:00 PM (ET)

Willow Grove AME Church  
Horatio, SC

# Tribute Wall



“ *Shirley Deloris Miller Garrett*

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October 04, 2023 at 11:33 AM