



Willa Payne

April 1, 1938 - January 13, 2023

WILLA L. PAYNE was born on April 1, 1938 in Clarksdale, Mississippi to the union of Albert Crawford, Sr. and Charlie Mae Crawford. She entered eternal rest at the age of 84 years old on January 13, 2023 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Willa grew up in Clarksdale and Chicago, lived most of her adult life in Chicago and later relocated to Atlanta. She accepted Christ at an early age at Old Landmark Church in Chicago and, after moving to Atlanta, joined St. John Apostolic Holiness Church, where she served on the Mother Board.

A powerful family matriarch, beloved mother, grandmother, great grandmother, great-great grandmother, sibling, church mother, licensed teacher, licensed nurse, retired E-7 US Army Sergeant First Class, Housing Commissioner for Fulton County, Georgia and Dekalb County, Georgia, international traveler, prayer warrior, one of the saints - Willa was all of these things and more.

Willa was an amazing woman and truly lived her best life. She was independent, smart, gorgeous, spunky, confident, strategic, strong, super spiritual/faithful, had what seemed like a direct telephone line connection with God and would not be deterred from achieving ANYTHING that she set her mind to. She had an empowering and inspiring effect on all those with whom she interacted. The members of our family are strong, determined, and accomplished and, in many ways, that is because of Willa. She set the tone

for her life and was a strong family leader and example of excellence and unyielding love for her "children".

Willa was a courageous pioneer. Anybody that thought that she was not going to accomplish something she said that she was going to do need only watch. In 1970, she was the first woman and the first Black woman to buy a home, in her name, in Country Aire, Markham, IL. Up until that time, it was very difficult for women to buy homes in their names but Willa was determined and as a young, divorced mother of four girls, she used keen strategy and went forward courageously and purchased a home. Seeing no bounds on her life or the life of her children, she moved her girls out of Chicago to the suburbs when Black people were primarily still living in the city of Chicago.

Willa was a leader. She joined the US Army in 1974 (retired 1994) and was well decorated, achieving the rank of E-7 Sergeant First Class in the Administrative and Medical Fields. Willa was also highly educated and was a licensed nurse. In her 50s, she went back to college again and became a licensed teacher. Her 2 year old students loved the patience and fun personality of "Mrs. Willa". Later in life, Willa was a Housing Commissioner in Fulton and Dekalb counties in Georgia. She regularly addressed Congress at the US Capitol in Washington, DC advocating for senior housing while also performing her Commissioner duties locally. All power moves.

Willa believed that neither she nor her children should be limited in life and believed in the equality of all people. In the 1960s, Willa was a member of the SNCC and CORE civil rights

organizations and through CORE she sent her two eldest children to farms in Wisconsin every summer through a pioneering exchange program providing Black children an opportunity to travel and experience different aspects of US life. This was a unique opportunity that Willa did not shy away from involving

her children in.

She grew up in segregated Mississippi but loved to recount how she was shielded from segregation and never experienced it growing up. She would describe to her children how her grandfather and uncle (the Andersons) were renowned carpenters that could get loans from the local banks and they built Clarksdale, MS, how her grandfather had the biggest house in their neighborhood and how she and her siblings' clothing was ordered out of the Spiegel's catalog in Mississippi in the 40s and 50s every year. Willa moved through life blessed and highly favored.

Willa always made time to listen and pray with and for those in need, and was never uncertain about God or the power of prayer. For example, when her great-grandson was born at 24 weeks, she called daily for 93 days to find out how he was doing and would launch into prayer each time. She would come to the hospital and lay hands on her great grandson's incubator and pray and all the doctors would stop their work to join her prayer. When she was thanked for her efforts, she would often matter-of-factly note: "that's just reasonable service".

She loved the show The Highlander, which was set in the Ireland/Scotland area of Europe, and all of her grandchildren knew that we had to be quiet when The Highlander came on. She loved the green grass of Ireland and the sound of the Irish folk music. She lived a charmed life and had the opportunity to travel with family to Ireland for her 80th birthday. She was so blessed that she might possibly be the only person that has ever been authorized to get into international air without a passport book. She was welcomed with open arms into Ireland and at 80 years old, she joyfully and without hesitation rode a horse for the first time, practiced archery for the first time, visited the North Atlantic Ocean, the Burren, the Cliffs of Moher and navigated across the entire

country of Ireland by train during an impromptu trip. She stayed at Ashford Lodge on the grounds of Ashford Castle while Queen Elizabeth was also staying at Ashford Castle. Once, she was told that the grounds were only for the residents of the castle (she was staying at the lodge, not castle). Well, in her typical confident and spunky fashion, Willa gingerly went over to the lawn of the castle, stretched out on the grass as only a blessed 80 year old diva could do and said "take my picture" anyway. You'll find that picture in this celebration booklet. She knew no bounds on her life.

Willa is survived by her 5 daughters Crisilla Wesley (Brian), Tzfeera "Peggy" Ritcherson-Levi (Yaakov), Liz Johnson (Ronny), Yolanda Clark, including her bonus daughter Jacqueline Washington, 12 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, 1 great-great grandchild, siblings Albert Crawford, Jr. (April), Jeffery Crawford (Brenda), Bettie Simmons, Vivian Jones, Abe Wilson (Carol), Leroy Wilson, Rose Coffey, close friend Charlotte Johnson and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, in-laws and friends. Willa was preceded in death by her father Albert Crawford, Sr., her mother Charlie Mae Crawford, her bonus mother Luvenia Brooks and her siblings Mary Alice Washington, Jesse Crawford, Emil Brooks, Jr. and Mae Brooks.

Previous Events

Public Viewing

JAN **20**. 12:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Gregory B Levett & Sons Funeral Homes & Crematory
4347 Flat Shoals Pkwy
Decatur, GA 30034
(404) 241-5656

Celebration of Life

JAN **21**. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. John Apostolic Church
1903 Clark Drive
Tucker, GA 30084

Tribute Wall



“ We would like to extend our condolences to the family. Continue to rely on God and know that he hears your prayers, because he cares for you. With caring thoughts.

Evans family - January 29, 2023 at 10:36 AM

YA

“Heyy! Im the grand daughter, Yanyiah child of Yolanda's second oldest child Peggy. I just wanted to share that this woman right here was a very kind, loving, cheerful, and just a positive grandmother that she could be. I really am trying to sleep at night, but as you know, things just doesn't feel the same around here without our grand mommy. Sadly I did plan on seeing her sometime a few months ago but never gotten the chance to because my mom was so busy with school, my graduation, her other children, and work. We all know that can be a hard time doing, but thats besides the point. Grand mommy Willa used to pop up at my nana Yolanda's house each time we were sick nanas called her to make her famous hot soup for my cousins and I. Everything was awesome, everyone loves being around her. I then one day learned how to play the piano and guess who taught me what the key of D flat was, Grand mommy Willa. I am so grateful for her, it took everything out of me when I found out she passed. Rest In peace. I am sure that when I go back to school, I will be distracted with memories because my bonus mommy died. I do want to confirm she was my favorite grandmother. Hehehee! Nanas, if your seeing this I promise you'll always be the second favorite I love you! I can't not think about her experiences with us teaching us things, and helping us become a better person that we are today AMEN!! It is a blessing that even though she is in heaven, I know that she is still with us and she is STILL HELPING US RISE!! Hey! Yes lord thank you for her! I feel like a preacher myself actually hahaha. It has been fun and real with you grandmother I REALLY appreciate you and everything you have done for us humans and for us to still be on this earth is because of you. I want to thank you for that. I got all A's but did you know I only get them for you? I'm in 8th grade now, can you believe it! I'll be a freshman this year. I sure do study hard to do what you did as a young 14 year old. You did everything we could ever ask for, thank you soooo much I try my best because of you! Im crying while writing this to you grandmother, I hear you saying stop crying Yanyiah I am still with you! Yes I know and I'm doing everything I can to make you proud. My lungs are better they don't hurt anymore like the last time you saw me. You are in good hands now. Thank you

so much for the love and support from you that no one else could show us. I really do smile a lot now, I don't look at the negative things in my life anymore, I am focused on my school, my family, and you of course! If I am being honest I feel like you sometimes, when I score a good grade on tests and work hard to help my mom I say GOD THANK YOU LORD. Jesus got me! He has placed his beloved hands on my heart and told me YOU CAN DO THIS YANIYAH! AHHHHH AMENNNNN!!!! WHEW! Grandmother I hope you know that we still have you in our mind thinking of you, everyone is doing ok and hopefully healthy, and that we pray over your name every night to show you grace. In God's words Amen and Lord thank you thank you thank you!

Yaniyah - January 21, 2023 at 07:04 PM

TW

“*Mother Payne was a TRUE Woman of God that genuinely and intimately loved God and people. She was a Servant in more than one capacity. She was an Advocate and a fighter. Although she was short in stature, she stood tall in her Faith. May the life she lived in public and private speak for her. She will be missed. My condolences to her family and friends.*

T. Wesley - January 20, 2023 at 03:53 PM

YA

YES AMENNN!!!! She was a wonderful spiritual woman!

Yaniyah - January 21, 2023 at 07:05 PM