



Mrs. Bernyce Rivers

March 31, 1930 - February 19, 2021

May the Work I've Done, Speak for Me . . .

Bernyce Washington Rivers
(Affectionately known as Mother Rivers)

Life is but a living day, a time to work and a time to play, and then comes death! The essence of a life well-lived, one worth celebrating and remembering, is the ability to care for and share with others. On March 31, 1930, heaven graciously entrusted us with Bernyce Washington Rivers in Memphis, Tennessee, to the proud parents Walter Washington and Louella Holman Washington. To this union, two children were born – Bernyce and Florence. Both parents and sister Florence preceded her in death. On February 19, 2021, at 11:38 a.m. at Columbia St. Mary's Hospital/Ozaukee, Bernyce returned to her heavenly home. During her 90 year tenure, she touched numerous lives with her graceful style and stern persona. She was the epitome of a lady, but she didn't shy from correction.

Bernyce accepted Christ at an early age at Mt. Gilliam Missionary Baptist Church, located in the Orange Mound Community of Memphis, Tennessee. She was a faithful and dedicated member under the leadership of Pastor Eugene Bates.

Bernyce received her formal education at Melrose High School (Golden Wildcats) in Memphis, Tennessee. She attended and supported all of the Mass Reunions, which took place every other year. Upon graduating from high school, she furthered her education at Lincoln University – Jefferson City, Missouri – where she received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education, with a double major in English and Math. She was known as a prolific writer and thinker. Eager to start her career, she began working as an educator in the Memphis Public School System for ten years.

In 1954, Bernyce and her high school sweetheart, Charles Rivers, were united in holy matrimony and later moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their union was blessed with one son – Robert Rivers, who preceded her in death, as did Charles. As Bernyce continued to climb the ladder of success, she was employed by Milwaukee Public Schools as an English Teacher for 38 years. During the late 1960's, while working at Robert Fulton Junior High, Bernyce, along with Jeanette Bryant, were instrumental in removing barriers in hiring African American cooks in the MPS system.

Thirty-four of her MPS years were spent at Fritsche Middle School. She was affectionately known as Mother Rivers. Mother Rivers became an icon working with students and staff that she loved dearly. She remained at Fritsche Middle School until her retirement in 2002. She had a passion for education and always motivated her students to do their best, work hard and never give up. She wore many hats, including Director of the Independent Learning Center (ILC), African Dance, Drill Team, Gospel Choir, and Coordinator of the Ethnic Festival (bringing all cultures together). One of the highlights of her career was presenting a production which everyone enjoyed.

Being a member of the New Life Presbyterian Church (New Dawn Worship Center), she knew she had found her place in helping others in the community. She competed and participated every year to bring family and

friends together. There is a plaque given in her honor each year to the hardest worker. We will miss her energizing effort preparing Thanksgiving baskets for family and friends. She enjoyed working with the various ministries under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Terrell H. Cistrunk.

Mother Rivers was a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Education Association (NEA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators (MMABSE). She loved corresponding with all of her beloved family members, prayer partners such as Mary Stark, and extended family. She loved to travel the United States and abroad. She supported many organizations and charities in the U.S. and Africa, including Feed the Children, St. Jude Research Hospital, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tuskegee Airmen – Red Tails, and Shriners Hospital for Children. She always reminded others “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Mother Rivers was blessed with numerous Godchildren, nephews and nieces. She had a special bond with Taniya Chebre Lewis. As their relationship grew, Taniya affectionately called her “Granny”. Mother Rivers was always supporting her throughout her college years. She was the joy of her life.

There are special memories of caring and sharing with sisters Geraldine and Lillie of Memphis, Tennessee. Two sister-in-laws – Virginia Williams, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Ora Lee Rivers of O’Fallon, Illinois, who were very attentive.

During her final weeks of hospitalization, she was able to rely on her many friends and family, including Thelma Chancellor, Maxie Addison, Sue Saller, and Linda McLaurin.

She lived her life well and to its fullest. She loved life dearly, and family wholeheartedly and unequivocally, her friends, co-workers and extended family. She had a way with words and a way with life. She did it her way!

Cemetery Details

Wood National Cemetery

5000 W. National
Milwaukee, WI

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 5. 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CT)

Northwest Funeral Chapel
6630 W. Hampton Ave
Milwaukee, WI

Tribute Wall

BH

“ I will forever love Mrs. Rivers she was my middle school teacher at Fritche Middle School, I still pray exactly the way she did for us daily. I was a lost child she showed me that my brain did work. I am now a registered nurse and I know she would be proud. Forever in my heart,

Beyada Hill - December 16, 2021 at 09:21 AM

HJ

“ Our heartfelt Love and Condolences extended to the family and friends of Bernyce. She was a fabulous Melrose Golden Wildcat who loved attending our Mass Reunions and supported our Scholarship Fund. She raised her nieces and nephews after the passing of their mother Florence and they were a part of the Glover Family. Bernyce received her Golden Wings on February 19th and her fellow Golden Wildcat Virginia Glover received her Golden Wings on February 21st. Rest in Heavenly Peace. The Glover Family and Melrose Family.



Hazell Jones - March 08, 2021 at 01:49 PM

GL

“ Georgia and Tasha Little purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Mrs. Bernyce Rivers.



Georgia and Tasha Little - March 05, 2021 at 08:10 AM

JH

“ With a majestic stroll, this Queen, Mother Berynce Rivers graced any room as a sage and one to know. Her earthly goodness and charm paved a way for her to become an angel on earth. I will cherish our private talks, prayer sessions and political banter. Mother always embraced me and spoiled me with a unique love and when she would hold my hand and look into my face, I knew I had a beloved angel and confidante.

I will hold her in my heart forever and know that, again, I had a blessed virtuous woman so very much like my mother. We will remain connected until we meet again. God is pleased with her service and her stroll in Paradise will be like none other.

Dr. Janie Hatton

Janie Hatton - March 04, 2021 at 11:08 PM

TL

“Granny, you are my superwoman. You shed light and love to everyone that you have encountered. I am grateful that God placed you into my life to nurture, shelter and love me in abundance. It is hard to put into words the impact that you have made on my life, but I will try. Thank you for giving me an amazing childhood despite the trouble that I had at home. You were so patient with through speech pathology and all. You made sure that I was well rounded with activities so that I could be well rounded, and you became my personal cheerleader. You saw something in me that no one else saw, potential. As I got older your role expanded to confidant and counselor. I would run and tell you secrets that no one else knew because I trust you with my life. You taught me that beauty is more than just the surface and that intelligence is key. We would often chat about the past and talk about the future because I expected you to be here with me forever. I started noticing changes as you grew older and I realized that although you are my superwoman, you are still human. It broke me to pieces that God called you home, but you lived a long and abundant life. You have impacted so many people. You have loved hard and laughed harder. I can promise you that the woman that you embodied is still the person that I aspire to be. Although your physical journey with me is over your spirit is still here with all of us. I will carry you with me forever and I hope that I can continue to make you proud. Granny I miss you now, but you will be with me always. May you rest in internal peace.

Love Always,

Taniya Lewis

Taniya Lewis - March 04, 2021 at 08:03 PM

GL

“ My daughter Tasha and I met Mother Rivers through Thelma Chancellor. We immediately fell in love with her! She was never anything other than Mother Rivers to us! Tasha was fortunate to work with her at Fritsche Middle School on her first job after graduating from college. We were always happy to see each other, catching up on the many things we missed and much more... We will always treasure the many shared memories and never forget you! Mother Bernyce Rivers was a beautiful, delightful, sharing person who always thought of others! She will always remain in our hearts and never be forgotten!

Georgia and Tasha Little

Georgia Little - March 04, 2021 at 07:34 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mrs. Bernyce Rivers.*



March 04, 2021 at 05:17 PM

EH

“ *Bernyce, you will be greatly missed from your family in East Saint Louis, Illinois.*

Elease Howard and Diane Howard

Elease Howard - March 04, 2021 at 02:53 PM

CP

“ *Mother Rivers was a loving caring woman. She loved her African outfits and wore them with pride.
She loved life and lived her life to the fullest.
Mother you are gone but not forgotten, you will always be in our hearts and prayers.
Sleep well Mother, sleep well 🙏*

Cecilia Pourrier - March 04, 2021 at 10:04 AM

LM

“ *Mother Rivers was a very caring and loving person and I will truly miss her. Our last conversation she stated she was ready and I know she is now with God.*

Linda McLaurin - March 03, 2021 at 08:53 PM

MS

“ *Aunt Bernyce, we just got the call today that you are gone.....we are in disbelief and are hearts are broken, you will be greatly missed!!!
We loved you dearly!*

MacAuther and Jaria Sharkey - February 27, 2021 at 03:02 PM