



Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles

March 9, 1923 - June 28, 2020

Deola (nee Purnell) Lyles was the second child of Pete Purnell and Elizabeth (nee Herron) Purnell. Deola was born on March 9, 1923, in Montgomery County, Mississippi. Pete and Eliza had six more children and they all lived on the family farm outside of Winona, Mississippi. While everybody worked on the farm in some capacity whether it was picking cotton, shelling peas or feeding the livestock; Deola described herself as 'not the most adept farmer'. She didn't particularly enjoy the tilling of the soil or the maintaining of the animals, so she was often assigned other duties which kept the family fed, clean and happy. It was probably during her time on the farm where Deola's leadership skills were honed and she may have gotten the spark to become a teacher. Growing up, Deola was involved in various activities at SpringHill School and at the SpringHill Baptist Church.

Deola attended Alcorn State University to pursue a degree in education. She then, returned home to teach at SpringHill, Vocational High School, the same school she attended; ironically, her siblings, Henry, Vernon and Annie Bertha were her students. She often told the story of being her brother's teacher and basketball coach. Deola decided to pursue an additional degree and headed to Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. Deola's siblings also attended Alcorn State and she would visit them often. On one of her visits, she met Richard Lyles. Richard was also from Mississippi and attended Alcorn

State after serving in World War II.

After dating for several years, Richard and Deola got married on December 25, 1955. Shortly after they married, Richard and Deola moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was hired by Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) in 1957, where she worked at Fourth Street School, now Golda Meir.

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Deola's next assignment took her to LaFollette Elementary School. It was there she met her lifelong friends Martha Carter, George Hughes and Janet Trotman. Education was not her only passion. Family was important to Deola and Richard, so they adopted Vincent and Yolanda. They grew and shared in that love from the house on 12th and Burleigh to the house in which she remained until her passing. Their desire to share their love and home this way is something for all of us to admire. After desegregation, Deola was sent to Happy Hill Elementary School. She was the first African American teacher at Happy Hill and often told stories about the challenges she faced. She however was always quick to say that despite those challenges, she knew her job was to "keep the light on" for all the students in her classroom and her record speaks for itself. She retired from teaching in 1987. Even her former students still recall what she meant to them as a teacher, role model and an inspiration.

In addition to being a teacher, Deola was also involved in the teachers union, and was the Building Representative for Happy Hill. She believed in the union and took her role seriously as an advocate for others. Upon her retirement, she became involved with the Cooperative Tutoring Program (CTP) run by the Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Department.

Deola, Anna Ruth Williams and Gertrude Peyton along with several others

were responsible for maintaining relationships with many inner-city churches and youth focused organizations who provided after school tutoring services for MPS students. Deola served as a leader with the CTP for ten years. Upon her "second retirement" from MPS, she and Richard became City of Milwaukee Election Commission poll workers. Having started out working only on Election Day, they soon became permanent fixtures as the poll workers assigned to administer the absentee ballot process at the nursing homes in Milwaukee. They took their job seriously and were complimented by the residents for their friendliness and professionalism.

In addition to school and family, Deola took great pleasure in service to others through her tireless work at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. Having joined when they moved to Milwaukee, they immediately became engaged in their church community and maintained their involvement well into their senior years. Deola served as the Sunday School Superintendent, was a member of the Deaconess Board, the Wisconsin General State Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention and Church Women United. Her most cherished role was serving as the head of the Mt. Zion Scholarship Committee. Deola took great pride in raising money for the college bound students and hosted their annual "Return to School" dinners in her home.

As a result of her dedication, she often received invitations to the "college kid's" graduation. It would be fair to say being a part of the young people's success made her happy. It combined her love of education and her spiritual commitment to do as the Bible says in I Peter 4: 10 " as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:' Like other super heroines, Deola was a loving wife and mother. She ironed Richard's tee shirts, and made some of the best fried chicken, and pound cake to die for. Yolanda and Vincent knew they could count on her for

anything they needed, whether it was making cupcakes for the Brownie troop, hosting the annual birthday parties at Howard Johnson's Restaurant or driving them to school in high school.

She was also the "favorite aunt" for her many nieces and nephews and reveled in their successes and bragged to all of her

Milwaukee friends about the exciting things happening in CA, GA, IN, LA, MS, NV, TN or wherever they were living. Deola loved her family and was so proud of them all. She extended herself to other young people in the community as well. James Harris, her Godson, called recently to say he doesn't remember making any big decisions in his life without getting counsel from Mrs. Lyles. Many of Vincent and Yolanda friends have relayed stories over the years about how much they loved Mrs. Lyles and Appreciated the way she looked out for them. The love of her life, Richard passed away in 2017 and she left us to join him on June 28th. We take peace in that we know he is looking forward to seeing "Mama" and she is looking forward to seeing "Lyles": She was preceded in death by her sister, Lorine (Curtis) Minor; brothers, Vernon Purnell, Isaiah Purnell and McKinley Purnell; sister-in-law, Marilyn Lyles; brothers-in-law, Arthur Lyles and Joseph Lyles. Deola is survived by her children, Vincent (Bethany) Lyles and Yolanda Lynita, her grand children Megan, Alisha, Shelby and Miranda, Clarence, her great grandchildren Brionna, GeNiyah, GeKolby and the newest addition, Ivy Li, her great-great granddaughter.

Deola is survived by her sister, Annie Bertha Sullivan; brother, Henry (Theresa) Purnell; brother-in-law, Hosea (LaHomia) Lyles; sisters-in-law, Constance (Vernon), Carolyn (Isaiah) and Mabel (Arthur) and a host of nieces, nephews and cousins and their families who adored her and are part of her circle of love.

Cemetery Details

Wisconsin Memorial Park

13235 W. Capitol Dr.
Brookfield, WI

Previous Events

Visitation Only

JUL 9. 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Northwest Funeral Chapel
6630 W. Hampton Ave
Milwaukee, WI

Tribute Wall



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.*



July 08, 2020 at 04:11 PM



“ *Stacey K Albregts purchased the Heavenly Sentiments Spray for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.*



Stacey K Albregts - July 08, 2020 at 03:17 PM



“ *The Willis, Taylor, and Brownridge families all appreciate the warmth, love, and hospitality demonstrated by Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles as a kindred southern cousin that migrated north. We appreciate everything and you have our sincerest condolences. We know that your candle will continue to burn through Vincent. Rest in Heaven.*

Wendell Willis - July 08, 2020 at 02:04 PM

WW

“ Wendell, Anne, Maddie, Max, and Halle Willis purchased the *Beautiful in Blue* for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.



Wendell, Anne, Maddie, Max, and Halle Willis - July 08, 2020 at 01:55 PM



“ Enduring Grace was purchased for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.



July 08, 2020 at 09:13 AM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.



July 07, 2020 at 11:28 AM

KD

“ Kim & The HPGM Board of Directors purchased the *Love's Journey* for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.



Kim & The HPGM Board of Directors - July 06, 2020 at 03:42 PM



“ *Christa Richardson sent a virtual gift in memory of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles*



Christa Richardson - July 05, 2020 at 12:59 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Mrs. Deola Purnell Lyles.*



June 30, 2020 at 09:31 PM