

I DID MY BEST, NOW I CAN TAKE MY REST

Celebrating The Life of our Beloved



SUNRISE:
10/22/1923

SUNSET:
06/28/2020

Alice Ruth Lyons Johnson

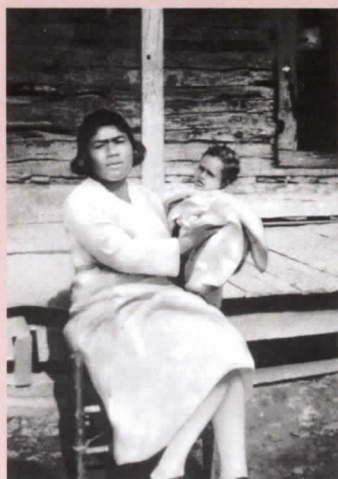
SERVICE HELD

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2020

MACEDONIA MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

2609 MACEDONIA RD,
BATESVILLE, MS 38606

Officiating: The Rev. Dr. Zannie Leland Jr.



Ruth and mother Malishia

Alice Ruth Lyons Johnson was born October 22, 1923 in Sardis Mississippi to Thomas Elias Lyons and Malishia Gipson Lyons. Her beloved community knew her as Ruth, Ms. Ruth, and Baby Ruth. She earned the nickname "baby Ruth" among childhood friends because she was fond of Baby Ruth candy bars.

Ruth was a loving mother, devoted wife, active church member, skilled seamstress, excellent, teacher and an participant in civic affairs in the community.

Shortly after her birth, her parents moved to Decatur, Illinois seeking employment. After her mother became ill they returned to Mississippi where her mother passed. Her paternal grandparents, William Lyons, and Luvenia Harris-Lyons reared Ruth and her brother, Calvin.

Ruth said, my grandparents did they best they could. I realized at a young age that I had to do for myself. It made an impression on me. I made up in my mind to do for myself and be the best at whatever I did.

She grew into a fiercely independent, feisty, articulate, confident, outspoken, opinionated, and strong willed woman. Her creed in life was **I will do the best in whatever I undertake**. She applied this creed to all her undertakings including, handwriting, recordkeeping, sewing, teaching and raising her children. Her handwriting resembled calligraphy, her recordkeeping was fastidious, teaching impactful, and she raised obedient children. Alice Ruth had a signature, laugh that was elongated, boisterous and, could be heard from quite a distance. Her laugh was accompanied by a hard, sometimes painful slap on the shoulder or back of the closest person. Her laugh and slap matched in strength, causing people to jump back to avoid the Ruth Johnson smack down.



Ruth and brother Calvin

She fought to claim an education for herself. Then, schools for African Americans ended at middle school. She attended Harmonia and Green Hill Schools, grades 1-4, Walton Chapel, grade 5, Gibbs Grammar School in Little Rock Arkansas, grade six. By then Walton Chapel included up to the eleventh grade. She finished her junior year there and her senior year at Oxford High School in Oxford, Mississippi.



Harmonia School Ruth attended

Alice Ruth was a reluctant and frightened student because of stories that teachers whipped children at school. She cried and pleaded every day to stay home. Her grandparents gave in and let her attend school every other day. On the days she attended, her Pa walked her to school. Her father, Thomas, ended that arrangement and insisted she go to school everyday. Her fear of whippings propelled her to become a star pupil. She was known as "that little smart girl who won all the spelling bees". Her teacher Ms. Olivet Ellis stated that she

was a hard working, excellent student. While the schools lacked many resources, she had excellent teachers. Realizing that teachers only whipped you if you failed to do homework, she came to enjoy learning and the positive accolades that came with being a good student. She said, "Once people started praising me, that made me want to do well in school."

Her grandparents were both formerly enslaved and illiterate, but valued education for their granddaughter. In search of a better education, they sent Ruth to Little Rock, Arkansas to live with her Cousin Ida Johnson Butler where she attended Gibbs Middle School for one year. Her relatives were poor, but never complained. Smoked ham and preserves were sent from her grandfather via postal service to assist relatives with her care. Gibbs is still operational today as a charter school.

Pa transported her by mule and wagon to Oxford, Mississippi where she boarded with the Orange family and attended Oxford High School her senior year, while cleaning house for a family to earn money to help pay for room and board. In 1943 she graduated as Valedictorian from Oxford High School in Oxford, Mississippi. There was no money to attend college. She taught briefly at Rock Hill School before moving to Memphis where she worked at the Woolworth lunch counter.



Oxford High graduation 1943

She would later marry Marvin Johnson and move to the Macedonia Community where she sank deep roots. They engaged in subsistence farming, barely eking out a living while raising six children, Michael, Cheryl, Kenneth, Reginald, Cynthia, and Edgar.

Being an excellent seamstress, she sewed much of her own and her daughter's clothing. She worked on the farm, maintained a household, and cared for her children. She arose at the crack of dawn, prepared breakfast from scratch and headed to the field for a day's work. After working in the field all day she headed home to prepare dinner and supper. She often, after working on

her own farm, worked on neighbor's farms for \$3 per day chopping and picking cotton for extra income.

Books, magazines, encyclopedias, and newspapers were available for her children to read. She was actively involved in her children's education, and frequently requested the status of their progress from their teachers. She held offices in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and attended conferences. Recognizing the importance of constructive activities for young people, she and other women planned dances at the Macedonia Rosenwald School. On one occasion at an adult talent show for the school children Ruth danced the Charleston. She enrolled her children in the 4-H Club, helping to write speeches, and supervise their community projects.

A stickler for correct grammar, she could have heated arguments about the correct pronunciation of words like Cockle burr. The locals called them Kuker burrs. Mr. Webster was her favorite friend where there was disagreement about the pronunciation of words.

In her house, life skills were mastered at an early age. Ruth taught the proper use of eating utensils, how to set a table, menu planning, grocery shopping, cooking, housecleaning and ironing to all of her children. She insisted upon using proper biological name for the body parts. When Ruth was angry, she took it out on the pots and pans. While cooking she would slam the pots and pans down on the counter surface and stove. Everybody knew to tip toe around her if they heard banging in the kitchen. She was not one to hold her anger she would confront the person she was angry with and give them a piece of her mind, settle matters and move on. She had good relationships with neighbors and the community. One neighbor, Mr. Ira Booker, Sr. recalled, "We lived next door to each other for many years and I don't remember having a cross word between us".

She valued education for her children. While there was no money for college, she instilled in her children the desire for higher education. Discipline, delayed gratification, hard work, focus, and determination are attributes she taught her children that served them while struggling to get through school with little money. Her six children are educated, successful, accomplished, and productive members of society. She was a proud mama.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson created the Headstart Program as a part of the Great Society Programs, Ruth saw her chance to fulfill her dream of teaching. Headstart provided a solid foundation for preschoolers in poor rural areas and lifted many women out of poverty by providing a regular paycheck.

She applied for a teaching position and learned to drive. She returned to school and took classes in early childhood education.



She attended the University of Mississippi and Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, while raising a family and working full time. She graduated from Mississippi Industrial College in 1977 with an Associate of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Alice Ruth's worked at Delta Hills Head Start for 23 years. She held positions as Administrator, both Head and Resource teacher. Her distinguished performance earned her the distinction of Outstanding Employee from 1983-1985. The deep desire to be the best was reflected in her work as a Headstart teacher. She approached her teaching with meticulous preparation, thoughtfulness, and focus, to bring out the best in her students.

She positively influenced the life of many young children who attended Head start. Her reputation as an excellent teacher preceded her students. Teachers at the Batesville Elementary School expressed a preference for students from her Headstart class knowing the children were prepared to perform at grade level. After retirement she continued to work in education as a substitute teacher and tutor in Panola County School District.

Walton Chapel Church was her home church until she married and moved to the Macedonia Community. She joined Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, where she sank deep roots. She sang in the choir, taught summer vacation bible school, and assumed the role of church announcer after the death of sister Washie Mae Madlock. In this role she welcomed visitors and made announcements for over 30 years. Ruth was a firm believer that if anyone had anything to good to say about her, they should say it to her while she was living. She loved gospel songs that were spirited.



Alice Ruth was a member of the Macedonia Homemaker's Club, a program run by the Panola County Extension Homemakers. The members worked together to improve their lives and the lives of family members. They entered canned and baked foods into the County Fair competition where many blue ribbons were won. They formed close bonds and life long friendships.



Washie Mae, Eddie Barbara, Fairy, Matilda, Margaret, Ruth, and Ruby Young

In addition she was Panola County Extension Homemaker Council Secretary and in 1992 was awarded the first place for overall best County Secretary record book. She was recognized for her meticulous record keeping ability regarding the county council many activities. She engaged in civic activities such as poll watching for the Voter's League for many years. She valued her newly acquired right to vote. She did not take for granted her hard won right to vote.

Her children would occasionally see her fun side. Alice Ruth loved to dance when she was young.

She would cut a step to the radio music in the kitchen on Sunday nights, demonstrating to her shocked children the steps to the dances. She was a fan of wrestling matches on TV. She always had a favorite wrestler and could be heard screaming for miles when the match was in full swing.

After raising a family she travelled to St. Louis to see the Golden Arches, Atlanta to see the Martin Luther King Memorial, Colorado to see the Rocky Mountains, Detroit Michigan, Canada, Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina to see the Blue Ridge Mountains. She stepped easily into the role of grandmother. Visits to grandma's house in the summer meant drills on everything covered in the previous school year to make sure what was learned was retained. She doted on and encouraged her grandchildren. Many memories were created at grandma's house during Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas holidays. She lived to see her grandchildren grow up, attend college, graduate, get married, and start families. Life has come full circle for her.

She gave her best in all she did. Her motto can be summed up as **"I gave nothing less than the best"**.

Alice is preceded in death by her husband, Marvin Johnson, parents, Thomas Lyons and Malishia Gipson Lyons, paternal grandparents, William Lyons and Luvenia Harris Lyons, maternal grandparents, Robert Gipson and Alice Burns Gipson, 2 brothers, Calvin and Leroy Lyons, stepmother, Idell Beale (Lyons)- Hassell.

She leaves to **celebrate** her life and legacy six children, Michael Johnson (Bonnie), Cheryl Johnson (Eugene), Kenneth Johnson (Gloria), Dr. Reginald Johnson, Cynthia Benford (George), Edgar Byron Johnson (Joyce), 2 sister in-laws, Allie V. Johnson, and Rosie, and one stepdaughter, Idella Ware, 2 sisters, Bonita White of Memphis, and Mary Alice Hodges of Chicago, 1 brother, Judson Evander Lyons of Battle Creek Michigan.

Six grandchildren, Jason Gordon of Oxford, Ms., Brian Johnson (Christina) of Madison, Ms. Marlisha Johnson of Memphis, Tn., Brittany Benford of Jackson, Ms., Tyler Johnson of Miami, FL. Destin Benford (Aisha) Jackson, Ms.

Two step grandchildren, Daphne Harrison of Elkhart, IN, Glenn Ware, Jr. (Nicole) of Indianapolis, IN

Three great grandchildren, Nova Marie Johnson, Audrey Grace Benford, Mason Marie Ware

Two step great grandchildren, Tybiah Harrison, Mikaelyn Harrison

One step great great grandchild, Lexie Harrison

And a host of cousins, nieces, nephews, friends, church members, and colleagues.

RUTH'S FAVORITE QUOTES:

- THE MODEL OF A PERSON'S LIFE WILL LIVE BEYOND HIS WORDS.
- A MAN WHO TRIMS HIMSELF TO SUITE EVERYBODY WILL SOON WHITTLE HIMSELF AWAY.
- IF YOU FIND A PATH WITH NO OBSTACLES, IT PROBABLY DOESN'T LEAD ANYWHERE.
- EDUCATION CAN'T MAKE US ALL LEADERS, BUT IT CAN TEACH US WHAT LEADERS TO FOLLOW.
- THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY TO DO A WRONG THING.