

A composite portrait of Gladys S. Willis. The top portion shows her from the chest up, wearing a pink scarf and a necklace, with a soft, slightly faded appearance. The bottom portion shows her from the chest up, wearing a light-colored sweater over a white collared shirt, with a more prominent and detailed appearance. The background is a soft-focus landscape with purple flowers and green foliage.

*In Loving  
Memory  
of*

*Gladys S. Willis*

**Sunrise**

*February 26, 1915*

**Sunset**

*May 10, 2013*

*Friday, May 17, 2013 - 12:00 noon*

**ETERNITY FUNERAL SERVICE**

129 Engle Street • Englewood, New Jersey

*Bryant Crockett, Organist*

# *Obituary*

**Gladys Selma Dennis** was born on February 26, 1915 in Montgomery, Ala. to Charles and Annie Dennis. She was raised in the Methodist church and educated in Alabama, where she attended the Tuskegee Institute. As young woman residing in Montgomery, Gladys earned a living as a seamstress and loved creating school outfits for her children and neighbors.

Music was her true passion, and her artistic flair was best expressed through her abilities on piano and organ. She played a variety of classical and spiritual pieces. Her favorite composer was Tchaikovsky - with Nat King Cole and Mahalia Jackson topping her list of favorite contemporary performers. Early on she was hired to play choir rehearsals and services at African Methodist Episcopal Church in Montgomery, where Raymond and Rosa Parks were members. She later recalled that the Parks' paid her \$2 a week to play two choir rehearsals during the week and one service on Sunday.

By the late 1930s, Gladys relocated to Harlem, N.Y., where she met and married Henry R. Willis, Sr., who was a tailor by trade. He preceded her in death on January 26, 1972.

It was in Harlem, on W. 111th St., where she raised her five children. She was heavily involved in the Parent Teacher's Association and participated in an endless procession of school events, often volunteering to play piano for recitals. In 1962, the family purchased a home in Teaneck, N.J., where they were among the first black families in the neighborhood.

Always a striver, Gladys returned to the workforce in the mid-1960s and reinvented herself as a clerk and shop steward at the legendary Gimbel's department store in Manhattan's Herald Square.

In 1981, she concluded her 15-year career in the children's accessories department and retired to her home and ever expanding garden. A huge believer in family traditions, she always made sure her family gathered to celebrate holidays and birthdays. Gladys was especially proud of her five grandchildren, who affectionately called her "Nannie." She happily took on a role as their full-time caregiver and enjoyed tickling the ivories for them. She also attended all of her grandchildren's graduations and was extremely proud to witness many of their accomplishments.

Gladys was also an avid coin collector and a wiz at crossword puzzles. In 2008, she proudly voted for Sen. Barack Obama, who would become the first black president of the United States. In an interview prior to the election, she - a native of the segregated south and herself the granddaughter of slaves - confided that she never thought she would live to see such an event occur in her lifetime. She would vote for him again in 2012.

She departed this life on the bright and sunny morning of May 10, 2013 surrounded by her loving family at her home in Teaneck, N.J. She was 98.

Gladys was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, Albert, Scott, Charles; and sisters Hattie and Katie.

Surviving are her five children Reginald C. Dennis, Sr. (wife Sylvia), Valerie Willis-Gallop, Henry R. Willis, Jr. (wife Leslie), Reba Willis and Winona Brooks (husband Herbert). Also surviving are her five grandchildren Reginald C. Dennis, Jr., Michael and Anthony Feeney, Scott Gallop and Dawn Tennent. In addition, she was survived by one niece, Annie Collins and a host of loving relatives.



# *Because The Angels Came*

*No more grief or sorrow, no more suffering or pain, now there is everlasting peace because the angels came. Only God knows what is best and He gently holds my hand . Guiding me to a better place because the angels came. When the sun rises tomorrow and I answer not my name, Please don't cry ..... Rejoice with me because the angels came. I now can rest in peace as I never could before. answered the gentle knock of the angels at my door. So please don't mourn for me as new wings I now claim, I can take my flight to heaven because the angels came.*

*-Author unknown*

## *Acknowledgement*

*The family acknowledges with deep appreciation all acts of kindness extended to them during this bereavement hour. God bless you for all your thoughtfulness and concern.*

---

*Professional Services Entrusted To:*

*Eternity Funeral Service, LLC*

*Aree Booker, Executive Director*

*Licensed Funeral Director in New York & New Jersey*

*NY Lic. # 00367 NJ Lic. # 4346*

*129 Engle Street • Englewood, NJ 07631 • ph (201) 568-2671*

*"Comfort, Care and Integrity when you need it most"*

*www.eternityfuneralservice.com*

