

Home Going and Life Celebration for



Edna Mae Cunningham

Sunrise
December 29, 1937

Sunset
April 5, 2020

Service

Saturday, April 18, 2020 • 11:00 a.m.

Rev. Troy P. DeCohen, Officiating

The Life of Edna Mae Cunningham

“Spiritual Mother to Many Children”

The quiet yet powerful Edna Mae Cunningham departed from this life on April 5, 2020 at Care One Rehabilitation Center, New Milford, NJ, where she received care due to a lengthy and debilitating illness. She left this earth plane with dignity and stoicism and surely is among those ordinary people who demonstrated extraordinary deeds. Who is this special woman?

Edna's lineage boasts the significance of both surviving and thriving in the Jim Crow infested south. Jim Crow enactments were strategically designed to re-enslave African Americans post Reconstruction. The forced separation and the economic, socio-political dehumanization of blacks prevailed. Jim and Fannie Smith her maternal grandparents were hard working farm laborers living in Young, Laurens South Carolina. Edna's parents the beloved Annie Lee Cunningham, born in Fountain Inn, South Carolina lost her mother at a tender age and had to help rear her younger brothers and sisters. Annie worked in all manner of occupations including arduous work in the cotton fields as well as domestic work. She met and later married the dashing and handsome JC (or Jake) Cunningham who somehow found work as a truck driver while the family lived in Fountain Inn, South Carolina. Their cherished union brought forth two beautiful girls adored by their parents; children Jessie Ann who died at an early age due to polio and the loving Edna Mae. After the death of her beloved husband JC, Annie Lee worked at all manner of occupations focused on caring for herself and family. Well after JC's death, Annie, in her forties moved to Greer, South Carolina. There she met the charming Charlie Bruton who lived in the same town and together they had a cherished son James Paul Calvin Cunningham. Both Edna and her mother doted upon this young prince with adoration and love.

During Edna's early lifetime onwards to her passing marked significant and essential historical events. Her birth coincided with tremendous change in the US and internationally, with the beginnings of the Second World War. While Joe Louis knocked Max Schmeling in the boxing ring within two minutes, Aryan superiority was challenged and black people cheered knowing there are so many untapped resources within the Black Diaspora. During Edna's development the Tulsa Race Riots, the Rosewood Massacre, the rise of the KKK and the White Citizen's Council all occurred. Although this era signaled two great migrations of southern black Americans to the north, it is unclear what prompted her family to remain in South Carolina. Edna's own attendance at school coincided with the killing and torture of Emmet Till, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the killing of those four precious little girls at Bethel Baptist Church, and of course the entire Civil Rights Movement.

As Edna moved from adolescence to adulthood much of her life was focused on helping her mother so that the family could survive with the economic deprivations as they were denied opportunity. She provided much needed assistance in helping her mother complete domestic work. Much of Edna's adulthood was focused on contributing to the well being of her family in whatever way she could.

Due to enormous health concerns Edna's mother found that she could no longer continue the many arduous tasks that supported the family. Edna also began to evidence a variety of serious health concerns. During the late 1960's together with a small amount of savings and earnings from her son who was beginning his teen-age years the family survived and was living in Greer, South Carolina. It was during that time that Edna's love and care for children manifested. Both she and her mother became the “nannies of Greer”, caring for children whose parents worked and others who needed love, attention and care. Whatever they had, they readily shared with these children, often putting aside their own needs for the snacks and special foods these youngsters craved. They both possessed a keen and instinctive grasp of child development and could be observed playing with their charges with an understanding of the importance of play in a child's development.

Edna's life from the late 60's to present coincided with major changes in anti-segregation legislation (abolishment of poll tax, enactment of the civil rights act, banning of segregation in federal housing, etc.) however also a major rise in anti-black violence. It is with certainty that the recent murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and so many others upset her.

Sometimes during the late 80's Edna and her mother made their necessary trek to the north. It was here in New Jersey that they obtained much needed medical care and housing. But most of all they were close to their beloved brother and son, and his family, including children so that their love and adoration could be shared.

However, the major damage to their health and well-being could not be overturned and in September, 2003, Annie Lee died quietly at Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck, NJ. Edna remained in their apartment for several years however, continued to experience major health deteriorations necessitating nursing care.

The history of this ordinary yet extraordinary woman's life coincides with some of the most dehumanizing experiences of African Americans, yet marked some important changes as she did live to vote for the 44th president of the US who is a black man, Barack Hussein Obama.

As we read these words we are certain Edna is smiling and perhaps saying, “they got it right”.

She leaves many to mourn including: her brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Lorna Cunningham, nieces, Jennifer and Joiselle; nephew, Michael; spiritual sons, Steffan Wood, Michael Brooks, Patrick Brooks, Tyson Brooks, Stuart Latta; loving friends, Beverly Wood, Betty Miller and a host of loving friends and family. We are indebted to the staff at Care One Nursing Facility who were attentive and loving towards Edna.

Order of Service

Opening Prayer

Musical Selection- “Take Me To The King”

Psalm 23

Reading of the Gospel-John 14 verses 1-3

Musical Selection - “His Eyes Are On The Sparrow”

Homily

Obituary

Prayers

Musical Selection- “How Great Thou Art”

The Final Blessing

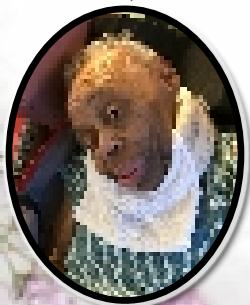
Musical Selection- “Nearer My God to Thee”



Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep

By Mary Frye

*Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there, I do not sleep,
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain
I am the gentle autumn rain,
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight,
I am the soft stars that shine at night,
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there, I did not die*



Acknowledgement

The family of **Edna Mae Cunningham** deeply appreciates and gratefully accepts your kind expression of sympathy. Your caring and thoughtful expression with cards, phone calls, support, and personal visits, were all extremely helpful as we walked the path of loss. We pray for your continued blessings and upliftment.

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