

Pallbearers

Nephews

Flower Bearers

JMBC Hospitality Ministry and Nieces

In Appreciation

Words cannot fully express how deeply we appreciate the outpouring of love, support, and compassion shown to our family during this difficult time. Your kindness and thoughtfulness have brought us comfort, and we will forever hold your generosity in our hearts.

Special thanks to:

Doctors Joseph and Brenda Williams
The Lincoln High School Class of 1965
Faith Strong

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Colonial Healthcare Family Practice
Colonial Neurology and Sleep Lab
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CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR

Merline Brunson Brown



Friday, July 31, 2026
Eleven O'clock in the Morning

Jehovah Missionary Baptist Church
609 Manning Avenue, Sumter SC 29150

Pastor Marion H. Newton, Presiding
Reverend Ray Sanders, Eulogist

Reflections of a Life Well Lived

Merline Brunson Brown (affectionately known to her family and friends as “Merl the Pearl”) was born on September 30, 1947, in Clarendon County to the late Willie Reginald and Inez Pringle Brunson. On Wednesday, July 22, 2026, while surrounded by her loving family, she gained her heavenly wings at Prisma Health Tuomey in Sumter, South Carolina.

Merline was a devoted and lifetime member of Jehovah Missionary Baptist Church (JMBC) in Sumter, South Carolina. As a child and youth, she served as a member of the Sunbeam and Youth Choirs. During her adult years, she served on the Hospitality Ministry and held the position as President for two terms. She remained an active member until her health began to decline.

Merline received her early education in the public schools of Sumter County, South Carolina and proudly graduated from Lincoln High School with the Class of 1965. Believing that learning was a lifelong pursuit, she later continued her education at Central Carolina Technical College (formerly Sumter Area Technical College) and Morris College, where she completed coursework that prepared her for new career opportunities and personal growth.

Throughout her working years, Merline built a career defined by dedication, compassion, and a strong work ethic. She began as a cashier at Top Dollar Retail Store before accepting a position as a Teacher's Aide with the Sumter School District. In that role, she played an important part in nurturing and encouraging countless students, helping to support their educational journey and positively influence their young lives.

Never one to shy away from hard work, she also spent weekends and summer breaks assisting as a receptionist at the gas station of a longtime family friend, always willing to lend a helping hand wherever she was needed.

In 1981, Merline began what would become the cornerstone of her professional career when she joined Prisma Health Tuomey (formerly Tuomey Hospital) as a Unit Secretary. For two decades, she faithfully served patients, families, physicians, and fellow staff members with professionalism, kindness, and unwavering dedication until her retirement in 2001.

Adding a fun and unexpected chapter to her life's story, Merline also briefly stepped into the world of acting. She was cast in the film *Nailed*, portraying the role of a hospital patient. Although the movie was ultimately never released due to budget constraints, she always enjoyed sharing the story of her time on set, adding yet another memorable experience to a life filled with unique adventures.

Throughout her life, Merline was deeply committed to serving the Sumter community, dedicating her time and compassion to causes that made a lasting impact on the lives of others.

During her career at Prisma Health Tuomey, she volunteered with the Safe Kids program, helping ensure children were properly fitted with bicycle helmets and car seats to promote their safety and well-being. She also generously gave her time to Asthma Camp, supporting children and families affected by asthma.

As a faithful member of JMBC, Merline continued her spirit of service by volunteering at the House of Hope, where she helped distribute food and clothing to individuals and families in need, always offering kindness and encouragement along the way.

Following her own breast cancer diagnosis, Merline transformed her personal journey into a mission of hope and advocacy by founding *The Pink Ladies Relay for Life Team*, which was later renamed *The JMBC Ladies and Gents*. As the team's captain, she faithfully attended planning meetings, served as the liaison between team members and the local Relay for Life committee, established fundraising goals, developed creative campsite themes, coordinated event logistics and supplies, and ensured that every survivor and caregiver on the team was recognized and celebrated. She also made certain that those who had lost their battle with cancer were lovingly remembered during each event.





Through her exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication, and passion for helping others, her team raised thousands of dollars during her tenure to support cancer research, increase awareness, and provide valuable resources for individuals and families affected by cancer.

A remarkable **39-year cancer survivor**, Merline embodied resilience, faith, and hope. Her life stands as a powerful testament to perseverance, selfless service, and an enduring commitment to uplifting others. In 2024, Merline had the honor of serving as the Grand Marshall along with her daughter Cheryl for the Relay for Life Survivor's Walk. Her legacy will continue to inspire all who were blessed to know her.

At the heart of Merline's life was the enduring love she shared with her beloved husband, the late Willie Earnest Brown. They were united in holy matrimony on August 3, 1967, beginning a partnership built on faith, love, commitment, and unwavering devotion.

Merline often believed she had found her "Boaz" in Willie. From the very beginning of their marriage, he embraced not only her but also her seven-month-old daughter, lovingly and unreservedly accepting the privilege and responsibility of being called "Daddy." His selfless act of love affirmed the kind of husband and father he would become and laid the foundation for the strong, close-knit family they would build together.

Their loving union was further blessed with the birth of three more children, completing a family that became the center of Merline's heart and one of her greatest sources of joy and pride. Together, she and Willie created a home filled with love, faith, laughter, and cherished memories that continue to live on through their children and generations to follow.

Proverbs 22:6 reminds us, *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* Merline embraced this scripture with her whole heart. She was intentional about planting God's Word not only in the lives of her children, but also in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Reading her Bible was a cherished daily practice, and sharing its truths with her family brought her immeasurable joy.

Even during the most difficult days of her illness, one memory never failed to bring a smile to her face. She often recalled the day she was reading Psalm 121:1–8 aloud to her great-granddaughter, A'ryiah. As Merline read each verse, A'ryiah began moving as though she were praise dancing to every word. But when Merline reached the beginning of verse 3—*"He will not let your foot slip..."*—A'ryiah suddenly stopped, turned to her great-grandmother, and with the most earnest expression said, "But Gigi"—the name she lovingly called Merline—"He let my foot slip!"

The innocence in A'ryiah's voice, paired with the seriousness on her little face, sent Merline into uncontrollable laughter. She laughed so hard she had to pause and regain her composure before she could continue reading.

It was moments like these—filled with faith, family, laughter, and love—that sustained Merline. They lifted her spirit, strengthened her resolve, and reminded everyone around her that even in life's hardest seasons, God graciously provides joy through the precious gift of those we love.

Beyond her faith, family, and service to others, Merline found great joy in watching sports. Football and basketball were her favorites, and she was an unwavering, lifelong fan of the San Francisco 49ers and the South Carolina Lady Gamecocks.

Watching a football game with Merline was an experience all its own. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and her loyalty to the 49ers never wavered. She had a special fondness for wide receiver Deebo Samuel Sr., affectionately referring to him as "my baby." Anyone watching the game with her quickly learned that if an opposing player tackled him a little too hard—or even looked as though they might have injured him—her protective, motherly instincts would immediately spring into action.

Without hesitation, she would passionately declare, "Y'all better not hurt my baby!" Her spirited commentary often brought laughter to everyone around her and made game day even more memorable.

When Deebo was traded to the Washington Commanders, she was genuinely saddened to see him leave San Francisco. Although her heart remained with her beloved 49ers, she continued to cheer him on—except, of course, when the Commanders were playing against her cherished San Francisco team.

Her love for basketball was just as strong. She deeply admired Coach Dawn Staley, often praising her exceptional leadership, coaching excellence, and unwavering commitment to the young women on her team. Merline took immense pride in having a family member play under Coach Staley's guidance, considering it both an honor and a blessing. She especially enjoyed watching standout players MiLaysia Fulwiley, Joyce Edwards, and Maddy McDaniel, enthusiastically celebrating their talent and accomplishments throughout each season.

Whether cheering from her favorite chair, celebrating a big win, or passionately defending her favorite players, Merline brought energy, laughter, and heartfelt devotion to every game. Her love of sports reflected her vibrant spirit, fierce loyalty, and the genuine joy she found in sharing those moments with family and friends.

Merline leaves to cherish her memory four children: Cheryl Renee Brunson (Bryant Burrell) Pierce and Wilgena Elaine Brown (Julius Rembert) McGee of Sumter, South Carolina, Mechelle Kaye Brown Vinson of Gaithersburg, Maryland and Michael Ray (Katrine) Brown of Trondheim, Norway; two sisters: Willene Cocklin of Sumter, South Carolina and Erlene Williams of Panama City, Florida. One special nephew, brother and son: Reverend Ray Sanders of Columbia, South Carolina and one dearly beloved special lifelong friend like a son: Michael Wayne Pierce Sr of Ridgely, Tennessee; four sisters-in-laws: Angela Brunson of Washington District of Columbia, Dorothy Baker of Sumter, South Carolina, Ann Green Goode of Cleveland, Ohio, and Angela Green McCain of Columbia, South Carolina; two brothers-in-law: Moultrie Brown Jr. of Yucca Valley, California and Bobby Brown of Palo Alto, California; ten grandchildren: Christopher Ryan (Adrienne) Pierce of Huntingburg, Indiana, Michael Wayne Pierce II of Tampa, Florida, Chelsea Renee Moriah Pierce of Riverview, Florida, Antonio Tirrell (Paige) McGee of Sumter, South Carolina, George (Yasmine) Vinson Jr. of Honolulu, Hawaii, Markus Latrell Vinson of Richmond, Virginia, Selma Inez Brown and Sofia Isabel Brown of Trondheim, Norway and Michael Scott and Lethea Chanel Scott (Elvin) Smith of San Antonio, Texas; ten great grandchildren: Vanity Nicole Pierce of Hampton, Virginia, Valory Alexandria Pierce and Carter Regen Pierce of Santa Claus, Indiana, Vivianna Renee Pierce of Jasper, Indianna, Liam Zahir Pierce of Tampa, Florida, Aryiah Renee Thornton of Riverview, Florida, Naomi Kaye Vinson of Richmond, Virginia, Breyon Scott and Brielle Scott of San Antonio, Texas, and Ja’zya Smith of San Antonio, Texas; two Bonus great grandchildren: Tristan Michael Ray McGhee and Alexandria Marie Dawn McGhee of Huntingburg, Indiana and a host of beloved nieces, nephews, other family members and dear friends.

Merline was preceded in death by her beloved husband Willie Earnest Brown, her parents Willie Reginald and Inez Pringle Brunson; four brothers: DeLeon T. Brunson. Isaiah Brunson, Larry Brunson and John Brunson; two sisters, Hattie Richburg and Edith Williams; a daughter: Katherine Mackey Scott and a grandson: Daniel Marlon Brown.

Order of Service

Pastor Marion H. Newton, Presiding

Organ Prelude Shonda English

Processional & Viewing Clergy and Family

Opening Hymn “It Is Well with My Soul”

Old Testament Psalm 23 Pastor Nate Brock

New Testament John 11:1-4 Pastor Linda Kennedy

Prayer Pastor Ricky Simmons

Selection “Trust in God” The Combined Choir

Reflections: (please limit to 3 minutes)

Church Deacon Edgar Tabon

Community Sister Mae Robateau, Lifelong Friend

Family The Children

Acknowledgments Dr. Maria Newton-Tabon

Selection “You Are My Strength” The Combined Choir

Words of Comfort Reverend Ray Sanders

Call to Discipleship

Recessional Medley of Songs

Interment

Tuesday, August 4, 2026 @ 11:00am

Fort Jackson National Cemetery
Columbia, SC