

Obituary

Merle Delores McClendon was born February 14, 1930 in Ypsilanti, Michigan to the union of Joseph D. Perry and Sally B. (Miller) Perry. The second eldest of her siblings (Joseph, Merle, Richard, Elaine, Mary Jane, and William) Merle was affectionately called “*Nana*”, “*Grand Mommy*”, “*GrandMother*”, “*Grandma*” by her Grandchildren, Great Grandchildren, Neighbors, and Caregivers.

She accepted Christ into her life at an early age, and over the years attended several churches. Merle attended Ypsilanti Public Schools, and graduated from Commerce High in Detroit, Michigan. Merle worked as an LPN at Plymouth State Home and Training School. Later, she returned to secretarial school and obtained employment as the Executive Secretary for the Society for the Prevention of Blindness, from which she retired.

Merle was united in marriage to John Kinston McMillian in Detroit, Michigan in 1948. To this union three daughters were born Cheryl Diane Kinston (Vantrees, Garnett), Francine Elizabeth (Coles), and Gayle Elaine (Wachuku, Williams, Calhoun, Brockman). Merle also raised her nephew Joseph Perry Jr. and stepson James Reginald McClendon.

Merle was wonderful caring and nurturing Mother. She always made sure that her children had everything they needed, and as she would say, “most things they wanted”. Merle had two missions in life. One was to make sure her girls had excellent educations. That they would grow into strong, independent women able to care for themselves and stand on their own two feet if need be. Her second mission was that they learned to clean a house that could pass her white glove standards. Fortunately, she was successful in her first missions. However, her girls realized that her second mission was impossible, and so settled for a good try.

In 1979 Merle married the love of her life, Marine, Master Sergeant Willie James McClendon (who preceded her in death July 2017). Willie was affectionately, called “*Grand Daddy*”, “*Sgt. Mac*” or “*Mac*” by the family and friends. Together they shared 37 years of happy marital life. The last year on Mac’s life, they lived together at Lahser Hills Care Center.

Their home was a warm and loving gathering place for their large extended family to celebrate Birthdays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas with gifts and elaborate dinners. In order to feed the crowd, Merle and Mac enjoyed setting-up card tables, and kiddie tables in the Music and Living rooms to extend the Dining room. These events filled their house with loud laughter, love, and the joy of being family together again.

As loving, Grandparents, Merle and Mac attended gospel concerts, football games, track meets, award ceremonies, and graduations. Merle once had to be escorted from the football field, mistaking a time-out as a perfect time to greet her grandson on the field, in the middle of a game. She regularly sent Mac off to the Post Office with a “College Care Packages” to assure that her “Grands” had an adequate supply of “Ramen Noodles” to last the month.

When she and Mac lived in Amarillo, Texas, it only took a message that one of her kids, Grands, or other family members had taken ill, to put Mac behind the wheel of their car; with Merle hiding in the back seat as they crossed over bridges and overpasses. Once back in Michigan so she could take charge. Her family meant everything to her and she was everything to her family.

Treasured Moments

Granddaughter Kimberly hosted a 15 years Anniversary Party at a local hotel. So, all the family could join them in the celebration of their Union and love. Gabriel landscaped their flower beds annually, to enhance the entrance of their home and to provide them with a beautiful view and a flowery scent as they sat on their front porch. For Merle's 80th Birthday, Kimberly, Grandson Chukumere, and his wife Jasmin gave her a big party for the family to celebrate her life. And, for her 89th Birthday, they hosted and held a dinner party at a local restaurant. Randy made frequent pop-in visits to check-in and check on their well-being. Tuwuonidiary used to drive over to shovel their snow, help cook the holiday meals, and was honored with being given the secret "banana pudding" recipe to carry on Merle's tradition. She also earned the nickname container girl for her penchant of bringing empty containers for leftovers for everyone. She sat with Merle and Mac often, keeping them company in the nursing home (with an eye on the nursing staff). When her cleaning routines became harder Kelly stepped-in and became her cleaning partner. Every Sunday after Church Service, Kimberly and Kelly regularly visited Merle to brighten her day, and start her week off with love and care. Lastly, Andre, her youngest grandson, was a live-in helping hand, and Mac's "Buddy" from the time he was a little boy. Caring for him gave Merle and Mac purpose and helped to keep them active and young.

Merle loved her nieces and nephews were like her own children. She always made sure that all the kids in the family had new clothes, candy and toys for Christmas and Easter, and they returned her love. Nudie, her name sake "Merle" made her a warm fleece jacket and embroidered her name on her jacket and sweatpants as a special gift to keep her warm. She also made sure she had special treats and soft foods to eat when she was in Lahser Hills Care Center. Wendi bought her 15 cashmere sweaters to keep her warm from the nursing home cold drafts. Wendi also created a Memorial Garden for Francine in their backyard. Her niece Jacki was her shopping buddy. She loved to take Merle shopping and insisted on buying her the latest fashion and whatever her heart desired. Karen called Merle regularly to keep her spirits up. These conversations enriched her life by letting her stay up-to-date on the extended family. Her good friends Vie and Lucky would spend hours sitting on the porch talking and watching all the cars fly by. Once in the nursing home they would stop by and visit and bring treats.

Merle was known for her fashion style and sophistication. Merle maintained a fastidiously clean home, which included washing her windows and curtains monthly. Merle loved to crochet and created warm comfy blankets for her daughters and grandchildren.

She enjoyed music and the house was often filled with the music of Dinah Washington, Aretha Franklin, Brook Benton, or various gospel arts. There was always a fresh pot of coffee and plenty of discussion of the latest political activities in Washington, when the Obamas were in Office. Replicas of the Obamas adorned the fireplace, while pictures of the girls and her grandchildren decorated all the other flat surfaces in the music room and dining room.

Her eldest daughter Cheryl Diane took on the responsibility of managing Merle's care as her health declined over the past few years. She sacrificed a lot to keep her promise to Mac that Merle would receive the best medical care. She visited her mom regularly and accompanied Merle at her frequent doctors appointments

Merle and Mac were loved and cared for by a host of special angels who staffed Lahser Hills Care Center. Their lives were enriched by the frequent visits of family and friends. After the passing of Mac, his brother, Henry made weekly Sunday afternoon visits to bring Merle fruit and cookies. Merle's cousin Gerald and his friend Dorothy brought them joy and laughter as Gerald recounted the days when she was his babysitter.

Preceding her in death were her loving husband, Willie James McClendon; her daughters Francine (2005) and Gayle (2020); her nephew Joseph (little Joey) her Great Grandson Ominee Coles (1996) Stepson James Reginald McClendon (2001) and her Granddaughter Casaundra Williams (2018).

Merle leaves to cherish her memory, her loving daughter, Cheryl Diane; her sister, Elaine Berry; her son-in-law, James Coles Sr., her brother-in-law, Henry McClendon; 14 Grandchildren: Kimberly, Kevin, Kelly, Omahr, Randy, Lisa, Chukumere, Chakka, John, Osai, Tuwuondary, Gabriel, and Andre. She had 24-Great Grandchildren, and a host of Cousins, Nieces and Nephews, Grand and Great Grand Nieces and nephews.

Order of Service

Music Prelude	Organist
Opening Solo.....	Beverly Hendrix
Welcome/Opening Prayer	Rev. Kelly Kincaid
Lord's Prayer.....	Karen Winston
Old and New Testament Scripture.....	Rev. Henry McClendon, Jr.
Poem	James "Randy Coles Jr.
Musical Tribute.....	Soloist
Obituary	Chukumere Wachuku
Acknowledgements & Condolences.....	Merle Berry
Reflections by Family and Friends	2 minutes each please
Eulogy.....	Rev. Kelly Kincaid
Recessional	Organist

BACK

Pallbearers

James R. Coles

James R. Coles III.

Honorary Pallbearers

Andre Calhoun

John Coles

Omahr Garnett	John Coles Jr.
Jelani Garnett	Chakka Garnett
Chukumere Wachuku Jr.	Chakka Garnett Jr.
Chukumere Wachuku III.	Deon Jackson Jr
Gabiel Williams	Howard Kincaid

Flower Bearers

Friends of the Family

Final Arrangements Entrusted To

James H. Cole Home for Funerals, Inc.

22624 W. Grand Blvd. – (313) 873-0771

16100 Schaefer Hwy – (313) 835-3997

Detroit, Michigan

Interment

Glen Eden Cemetery

35667 Eight Mile Road

Livonia, MI 48152

Acknowledgment:

The family wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation the many prayers, comforting messages, floral tributes, and other expressions of kindness and concern provided at this time in thought and deed. A personal acknowledgement will be made at a later date.

FRONT COVER

Merle Delores McClendon

Sunrise February 14, 1930 - Sunset October 23, 2020

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2020

Family Hour 10:30 a.m. – Funeral Service 11:00 a.m.

Service Location

James H. Cole Home for Funerals, Inc.

16100 Schaefer Hwy

Detroit, Michigan, 48235

Reverend Kelly Kincaid, Officiating

Tributes

Words fail me when I try to express what my Aunt Merle means to me, how much I love her. I will never speak of her in past tense, she lives in my heart. And that is very present.

Love, Robin, Sissy

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Dearest Auntie Merle,

You always told me that I was just like you! Always worrying about family problems and trying to help out. Well Auntie, your job is done, worry no more, you rest now, I love you.

Karen C. Winston

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To My Aunt Merle,

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57 years ago you honored me by naming me, and taking me home from the hospital when I had gained the required 5lbs for discharge. For so many years, I thought my name was "Namesake." It will always bring a smile to my face as I fondly remember your silent warning to the Nursing staff at the Nursing Home- this is my Namesake- she's a Nurse- RN! All while giving them "the eye" Your memory will live on in the gift of the name (which I could never find on anything, until you had a pendant made for me.) I'm sure you're up in heaven, cleaning the place up, and brushing everyone's hair. Not goodbye, but see you later!

Your Namesake Niece,
Merle A. Berry, the Nurse- RN

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Dear Auntie,

I often share with my Husband how much I enjoyed watching you dance to Your Favorite Music ☐☐ I shall always cherish those memories and the memories of all the fun we had on our many shopping trips. ☐☐

Your, Loving Niece Jackie,  
Big Joey's Daughter

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Grandmommy, I am grateful for all the lessons that you taught me. You taught me how to overcome heartbreak even when you feel like your world is falling apart. In life, you loved and lost but still had the courage to keep going even when the pain was unbearable you didn't give up. Most importantly, you taught

me that even when life is hard and challenging life can be beautiful and full of wonderful things. I love you and will miss you and your beautiful smile, which I inherited.

Love your first grandchild,

Kimberly "Dumpling Doll" Vantrees

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To My Beloved Family,

I wish that I could be with you today in person to share in this celebration of life of my precious Grandmother.

Her life's journey from the very beginning was a myriad of fleeting, but memorable moments that she created and shared with everyone she knew. One of those cherished moments that she shared with me was an introduction to one of her favorite poems, INVICTUS, by William Ernest Henley. On that day, this poem crystallized in my heart and soul, but it would take me decades to truly understand and appreciate the truism of its meaning. This poem not only epitomizes her life's journey, but it was also her gift to me, as her oldest grandson. It was her secret to navigating one's inevitable journey over the stormy seas of life's adversity and on to the next. These are the prophetic words that she taught me, and they have become my life's purpose and compass.

## **INVICTUS**

**BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY**

Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance

My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years

Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul.

Bon Voyage, Grand Mommy! I will see you in my DREAMS.

Love "Kevy."

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Thank You, Mama
Love Chuckle ☐☐