

Alma Ophelia Polk Nicholson: A Shining Star - A Class Act - A Driving Force

— Outstanding Black Women Of Yalobusha County: The Project Continues —

What do you get when two sisters marry two brothers and raise 27 children in the deep south? Shining stars, and one of them is Alma Ophelia Polk Nicholson. As a young girl I admired and idolized many of the older girls in Water Valley, and Alma Polk was one of them. She was always so together - poised, beautiful and confident - and such a lady some would call her "proper." I

credit her for keeping me on the right track most of the time because I felt that she expected a lot of me, and I did not want to disappoint her. Today, she still has high expectations for our young people, a signature laugh, and such great diction that you can recognize her by her voice alone. At my request her sister, Mildred, and her brother, Walter, tell us more about their sister.



By Dottie Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She has launched a project to compile and share info about women in the county who have made an impact on the African American community. Her column appears bi-monthly, with occasional exceptions. She can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net



This week the life story of Alma Nicholson (above) is shared by two of her siblings.



Alma Nicholson is pictured with her siblings including (bottom row, from left) Vira, Walter, James Jr. and Essie; (top row) Mildred, Eleanor, Edith, Ruby, Alma and Berta. Seven brothers not pictured here are deceased.

Our Sister, Alma

by Mildred Fay Polk & Walter (Pap) Polk

Born the 12th of 17 children to James K. and Genie Marie O. Winters Polk, Alma has lived her entire life in Yalobusha County. The Jim Crow segregation laws and overt racism of her childhood years confined most black Mississippians to sharecropping or picking cotton, and Alma and her siblings persevered through it all. We all chopped and picked cotton as a way for our parents to make ends meet. Like most poor black families, we lived off the land that we sharecropped.

we did that.

We were a church going, Bible believing, and God loving family, thanks to our mother who raised us up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I was the youngest girl (number 15 of 17), and I remember my mom always preparing something for those special days we would have at church.

I think she saw some talent and maybe some interest in piano in our sister, Alma. So, the next thing we knew one of the oldest and biggest black pianos we had ever seen showed up in our guest room - we called it "the other room." It was so large that a full living room set, a full bedroom set with a 'chiffonade,' and now this huge piano fit inside.

A few weeks after the piano arrived, my mom chose Alma for piano lessons with Ms. Edith Wilson, one of the teachers at Davidson High School in Water Valley. Mom took Alma into town on weekends for lessons, and Alma became the first musician to play for our church, Bayson Chapel Missionary Baptist. One of our cousins, who happened to be an assistant minister at the time, was so overjoyed to have music during the service that he shortened the prayer meetings in order to hear Alma play. She later became the congregation's first official pianist, and for many years she faithfully played for the choir. We never heard her complain about the pay she received, which was probably nil, because she knew that God had her back and her life in His hand.

Most of us attended and graduated from Davidson

High School. However, Alma chose to leave high school when she became pregnant by her future husband. But that was not the end of the story. Alma always knew that she made a mistake in not finishing high school, and she dreamed of hearing her name called, walking across the stage, and accepting her diploma from a teacher, principal or school administrator.

She refused to let the dream die.

It wasn't until after her five daughters were grown that she completed her GED. She considered this one of the proudest moments of her life next to being saved and having her children. Alma has often said she was grateful God had afforded her the opportunity to close an unfinished chapter of her past.

Alma and her husband moved to Coffeeville - which is nestled between Water Valley and Oakland - after they married, and she has lived there ever since. As a young woman, she attended cosmetology school in Grenada and became a beautician. She ultimately owned and operated a shop for many years at a time when many blacks did not own their own businesses. Even today she will do a favorite customer's hair. Alma also earned a Certificate of Achievement in Biblical Studies after attending satellite schools in both Coffeeville and Southaven. This was another bucket list item, a goal met to enhance her credentials as a Bible teacher at church.

Back in the day our mom, Genie, and Aunt Sally Polk took charge

of decorating the church each year for the program we called The Lord's Acre Day. This was a time to thank God for the harvest of blessings we'd had in the present year. Parishioners took pride in bringing all the products they had grown and fruits and vegetables they had canned to place before the altar to say 'Thank You Lord' for another successful year of sowing and harvesting. They also offered a "Thank You for keeping us fed for another year."

After our mother died and Aunt Sally could no longer decorate the altar, Alma and our cousin, Ora Lee Phillips, took over the task. The event is now called the "The Harvest Program" and is held each year on the first Sunday in October. The premise is still the same: to give God thanks for His bountiful blessings for the year.

Now the torch has passed to the next generation, the children of Alma and Ora Lee. Alma has taught this next generation that the fruits and vegetables, the canned items and anything put around the altar should always be fresh from the field. Those in charge must never resort to plastic or artificial foods!

Alma remains a faithful and active member of Bayson Chapel MBC and on occasion still plays piano for the senior choir. She is also a Bible School teacher, the Christian Education Director and Seminar Facilitator with that take-charge attitude. In this case that means, if she was not appointed to lead an event, she will take charge anyway if she believes it is in the best interest of the whole. She has been an up-front, take charge person all her life, and that includes with the family! Many times, we are TOLD what we are going to do when it comes to the events hosted at her Coffeeville home.

One of the highlights is the annual New Year's Day gathering that is also the anniversary celebration of the many years of marriage of our cousins, Ora Lee and Raymond Phillips. Most years more than 100 people come by for food, fellowship and fun.

When Davidson High alumni, teachers, administrator and friends began having a school reunion, Alma was on the committee along with many others who lived in the Yalobusha County area. She has chaired the Bell-Polk-Winters Family Reunion Com-

mittee for the Mississippi team for many years. Alma is also chairperson for the Davidson High Class of 1966 tri-annual reunion, which was held in May this year in Water Valley. It was a great success and was featured earlier in this publication.

Alma loves to travel as long as someone else is driving. The three sisters living in the north Mississippi and south Memphis area - Alma, Ruth and Mildred - on occasion will hop in a car and visit other family members usually with me, Mildred, at the wheel. We have traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for family gatherings and for my own preaching engagements. We have been - though not traveling by car - to Orlando, Florida and Cincinnati, Ohio just for a few days of fun. Alma has also visited her daughter in Washington, DC.

Usually the three sisters travel together for real vacations. We went on our first cruise in 2003 to the Bahamas. It was such an experience for me - Mildred - that I said I was ready to go again. But not Alma and Ruth - who insisted "once is enough for me." Our cabin was pretty small for three people, so I let my sisters have the two bottom bunks. I'm so glad I did because as we were lay-

ing there just talking and laughing and too excited to fall asleep, Alma fell out of her bed. The laughter got louder and longer, and it was even harder to get to sleep after that little mishap. Alma and I did take a second cruise a couple of years later, but Ruth kept her word. She will not get back on a cruise ship.

Alma loves the Lord and tries to get to as many workshops, seminars, and conferences as she can each year to show herself approved unto God; a work woman that need not to be ashamed, and to rightly divide the word of truth. Like me, she has a hunger for the Word of God. Alma wants to know it in order to teach it to others, so they can pass it on to the next generation.

She attends as many Christian trainings as she can get to, that is, as long as she does not have to drive or go alone. Her church work is her main interest at this stage in her life's journey. I know mom would be proud if she was still alive to see the strong God fearing and dedicated servant Alma has become.

Alma is a widow and mother of five daughters, all of them fine, responsible young women. She also has seven grands and eight great-grand children.

PUBLIC NOTICES

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 24 OF THE WATER VALLEY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE DATED SEPTEMBER 10, 1985, AS AMENDED BY AMENDMENT

DATED JULY 3, 2018, AMENDING FEES FOR THE COLLECTION AND HANDLING OF SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

WHEREAS, on September 10, 1985, the City of Water Valley, Mississippi adopted the Water Valley Solid Waste Management Ordinance;

WHEREAS, by amendment dated July 3, 2018 Section 24 of said Ordinance was amended so as to increase the fees for the collection and handling of solid waste disposal and to provide for an effective date of such increase; and

WHEREAS, it has now become necessary to again amend Section 24 of said Ordinance so as to increase the fees for the collection and handling of solid waste disposal and to provide for an effective date of such increase so as to help defray the expense of operating the system for garbage and/or rubbish collection and disposal services provided by the City of Water Valley, Mississippi;

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE MAYOR AND BOARD OF ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF WATER VALLEY, MISSISSIPPI THAT SECTION 24 OF THE CITY OF WATER VALLEY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE DATED SEPTEMBER 10, 1985, AND AMENDED ON JULY 3, 2018, IS HEREBY AMENDED AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 24. FEES FOR THE COLLECTION AND HANDLING OF SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL.

(a) Upon each residence within the City of Water Valley, there is imposed a flat monthly charge of \$14.95 beginning August 2, 2019.

(b) Upon each office within the City of Water Valley, there is imposed a flat monthly charge of \$28.60 beginning August 2, 2019.

(c) Upon each commercial or manufacturing establishment operated or conducted within the City of Water Valley and which does not utilize a dumpster(s), there is imposed a flat monthly charge as follows beginning August 2, 2019:

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| 1. Mercantile Retail, Wholesale and Retail Establishments (including Florists) | \$57.20 |
| 2. Grocery and Convenience Stores | \$85.80 |
| 3. Drug Stores | \$78.65 |
| 4. Laundries | \$42.90 |
| 5. Restaurants (including drive-in restaurants) | \$78.65 |
| 6. Service Stations and Garages | \$57.20 |
| 7. Liquor Stores | \$57.20 |
| 8. Churches and Bona Fide Not-for-Profit Civic Organizations | \$42.90 |

(d) Upon each small business not enumerated in Section (c) above within the City of Water Valley and which does not utilize a dumpster(s), there is imposed a flat monthly charge of \$42.90 beginning August 2, 2019.

(e) Upon each commercial, industrial or governmental entity within the City of Water Valley which utilizes or is required to utilize a dumpster(s) by virtue of the amount of solid waste generated by it, there is imposed a flat monthly charge as follows beginning August 2, 2019:

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| 1. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up one (1) time per week | \$51.48 |
| 2. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up two (2) times per week | \$102.96 |
| 3. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up three (3) times per week | \$154.44 |
| 4. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up four (4) times per week | \$205.92 |
| 5. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up five (5) times per week | \$257.40 |
| 6. For each four (4) yard dumpster, picked up six (6) times per week | \$308.88 |
| 7. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up one (1) time per week | \$77.22 |
| 8. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up two (2) times per week | \$154.44 |
| 9. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up three (3) times per week | \$231.66 |
| 10. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up four (4) times per week | \$308.88 |
| 11. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up five (5) times per week | \$386.10 |
| 12. For each six (6) yard dumpster, picked up six (6) times per week | \$463.32 |
| 13. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up one time per week | \$102.96 |
| 14. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up two (2) times per week | \$205.92 |
| 15. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up three (3) times per week | \$308.88 |
| 16. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up four (4) times per week | \$411.84 |
| 17. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up five (5) times per week | \$519.80 |
| 18. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, picked up six (6) times per week | \$617.76 |
| 19. For each four (4) yard dumpster, extra pick up | \$51.48 |
| 20. For each six (6) yard dumpster, extra pick up | \$77.22 |
| 21. For each eight (8) yard dumpster, extra pick up | \$102.96 |

This amendment only relates to and affects Section 24 of the Water Valley Solid Waste Management Ordinance, as amended hereinabove. All other parts of said ordinance and said section, as amended, shall remain in full force and effect.

This Amendment shall be effective as provided by law.

The foregoing Ordinance, having first been reduced to writing, read and considered, was adopted in whole on motion first made by Alderman Cinnamon Foster and seconded by Alderman Nicole Folsom, and upon a vote of the Aldermen as follows:

Alderson Kagan Coughlin voted: absent;
Alderson Nicole Folsom voted: aye;
Alderson Cinnamon Foster voted: aye;
Alderson Herbert Rogers voted: aye;
Alderson Fred White voted: aye;

The Mayor thereupon declared said Ordinance to be duly adopted on this the 2nd day of July, 2019.

Donald Gray
/s/ Donald Gray
Mayor, City of Water Valley, Mississippi
Attest: Vivian Snider
/s/ Vivian Snider
City Clerk, City of Water Valley, Mississippi

Aunt Sallie Polk, mentioned by Mildred and Walter above, married to their Uncle Will, was featured in the second article in this column back in July, 2018. They had 10 children.

Recently, I assisted with the coverage of Alma's Davidson High class reunion

and was shocked to learn that a few years back one apparently inconsiderate official barred Alma from attending because she had not officially graduated with the class. When her classmates learned about this, they insisted she participate, and true to her take-charge nature, she

became the event chair. How about that? Now the gathering continues to be one of the largest and most successful Davidson class reunions to date.

What a wonderful tribute from her sister and brother. She is well respected beyond Mississippi and has poured her

energies into many, many lives outside her immediate family, her church family and the community at large. She epitomizes the outstanding black women of Yalobusha County, and this is just part of her story.... just ask anyone who knows her. She is something else!