

# Rachel Herod's Talents And Versatility Reflected In The Fruits Of Her Labor

## Outstanding Black Women of Yalobusha County: The Project Continues

With each story I become more aware that while growing up in Yalobusha County in the sixties and seventies, we were surrounded by multi-talented black women with strong constitutions, unfurled strength and a magnitude of fortitude. Women who willingly took domestic jobs in white homes, along with work in the fields and

then in the factories to provide for their families.

Prideful women whose parents taught them to appreciate their heritage and the importance of religion and education. Women who still found the time to visit the hospitals and cook meals for the sick and shut-in. Women who were able to endure the harshness of segrega-

tion and discrimination while nurturing their own families and who can now enjoy the fruits of their labors. Valerie Herod Belay shares her story of this kind of woman in such fascinating detail that I am awestruck, yet even more inspired.

Sadly, the subject of this article, Rachel Herod, passed away on July 30th. We must carry on these legacies!



By Dottie Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. This article is part of 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

## The Rachel Herod Story

by Valerie Herod Belay

My mom, Rachel Lee Campbell, was born in Calhoun County and spent most of her early life there. She was the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Silas Campbell. She had one sister and five brothers. Only her sister, Annie Robinson, and one brother, O.V. Campbell, are living today. Mom's family were proud farm owners and still maintain the family farm today. The Campbell home was a religious household with my grandfather teaching Sunday School and his children joining church at an early age. Mom called Zion Springs Baptist Church in Bruce her church home. Later her own children would recall performing on many Mother's Day programs at Zion Springs.

My mother has a rich and proud ancestry in Mississippi stretching back to the documented birth of her third great-grandfather, Rueben Stephens, in 1836. Mom's maternal lineage originates with the Steen/Stephens families. Her paternal surnames come from the Campbell/Winters families, which can be documented to 1841 in Mississippi. Other descendants of George Campbell, my mother's great uncle, are presently documenting the origins of the Campbell family prior to their arrival in Mississippi. A marker at the Memorial Garden Cemetery in Banner, an unincorporated town in Calhoun County, states: "This is the resting place of freed Black people and their descendants. The members of the Hawkins, Pearson, Reese, Steen and Shipp families established the Mt. Pleasant Church, Bryant School, a cotton gin, grist mill and a blacksmith shop in Calhoun County." The Steen mentioned on the historical marker refers to my mother's second great-grandfather, William "Billie" Steen.

The families' establishment of a school confirms their belief in the importance of education. Mom attended Bruce schools through the eighth grade, but because the town had no colored high school, Mom moved to Water Valley to continue her education. She lived with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Campbell, until graduating from Davidson High School, where she was a member of the Glee Club.

After finishing high school, Mom married John Watson Herod of Water Valley in 1954. They had five children. Dad was a teacher and later a principal in Water Valley and Coffeeville schools throughout their 63-year marriage. He passed in 2017.

Over her lifetime in Yalobusha County, Mom had several jobs including domestic work like many African American women of the era, a short stint at the Water Valley Poultry Plant and then several years as a seamstress at Big Yank Corporation, where she was a member of the United Garment Workers of America. Mom eventually retired from Borg Warner Incorporated, an automotive parts supplier, at age 62 as a quality inspector.

Mom taught us that rewards would be received in glory. Nevertheless, she received some while living too! My parents were greatly honored to serve as Grand Marshals for the Water Valley Christmas Parade in 2002. Mom was



Rachel Lee Campbell and John Herod were married in 1954. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are among their strongest lasting legacies.



delighted to have her winning squash casserole recipe published in a cookbook in 1980. Finally, Mom's most recent honor was to share her recording, "A Talk with Mom-Rachel Herod," with the StoryCorps.org project.

My mother's artistic bent showed in her hobbies. My favorite was that she sewed all her daughters' clothing, even my pageant gowns! Mom also has a large photograph collection documenting family and Water Valley history. After the Bank of Water Valley was torn down, she shared her pictures of the original building with the Historical Society.

Mom loved to quilt, and she enjoyed quilting with her cousin, the late Leona Cruthird of Water Valley, and my dad's cousin, the late Lunell Stokes Miller of Toccoola. She made close to 100 quilts for family and friends. Every grandchild was received into this world with one of their grandma's quilts and later sent off to college with a quilt especially made to fit those extra-long dorm room beds. In 2010 the Detroit School of Arts mounted a photo exhibit of Mom's quilts for the Visual Arts Major Program.

Mom gave her time, talents and treasures to Yalobusha County, and she fondly recounts her time as a Cub



Scout Pack Leader for my younger brother's troop. Mom and Dad also gave money to Water Valley High School to buy computers after dad's retirement.

Mom probably is best remembered for how she gave of her talents. But she is also well remembered for her skills in the kitchen. She enjoyed cooking and canning vegetables from her garden, and she made every type of

fruit jelly imaginable! As

part of her Christian missionary work, she routinely cooked meals for the elderly and infirm members of Water Valley until she needed those services herself.

As we advance in age, we tend to think about our legacy. If you were to ask Mom what she thought her legacy was, she would say, "My children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren." Mom and Dad had five children, all of whom were college educated. They are pharmacists, teacher administrators, respiratory therapist and safety specialist who attained advanced degrees and certifications in their chosen fields. Four of their children also proudly served in the US armed forces. Mom is extremely proud of each of her grandchildren and their accomplishments. Of the grandsons, two are noted physicians and two are noted chefs. Of the granddaughters, we count a US Army Captain, a State House Representative for Colorado, a restaurant manager, a social worker,

a television broadcast journalist and a veterinary microbiologist. Mom's eight young great grandchildren are still dreaming of future careers. I would say that's quite a legacy!

## The Graduation List

The schools that Rachel Herod's husband, children and grandchildren attended attest to the impact she had on her family. Simply put, her legacy extends well beyond Yalobusha County and the State of Mississippi.

**Mr. Herod** - Alcorn State University

**Johnny** - Northwest Junior College, University of Kansas, Baker College

**Barbara** - University of Maryland, University of Mississippi

**Michael** - University of Maryland

**Valerie** - Mississippi University for Women,

University of Southern Mississippi, Spring Arbor University

**Tony** - Columbia Southern University

### Grandchildren's List

University of Alabama, \*The University of Kansas, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, University of Central Missouri, \*University of Colorado, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, \*Bowling Green State University, Michigan State University, University of Washington (\*indicates multiple grand-kids attended the college)

## Teach Love, Not Hate

I agree with Valerie.

Based on this legacy one can only imagine the contributions that Rachel Herod's great grandchildren will make. Her life story has almost left me speechless. How impressive to be able to document your family ancestry back to 1836 and to have your family's contribution documented and preserved in history. It is no wonder that she poured her talents and

skills into growing a beautifully talented and extremely accomplished family. Her children and their offspring are following the examples that she and Mr. Herod and their ancestors set for them and many others.

Mrs. Herod's numerous contributions to the education of black children and the welfare of all of Yalobusha County were mostly behind the scenes. Though often unnoticed, she supported

her husband, his staffs, the teachers, the parents and the children for years. Especially now, as she is laid to rest, let us offer one more thank you to Rachel Herod for her exemplary life and her infinite legacy.

As I close this article, I am in some ways regretting energies that I have exerted recently in hopes that my alma mater, the University of Mississippi, was ready to make "a progressive move"

to address the racism that continues to fester on and off the campus. Murder and Racism all in one week, just days apart - negative national news again! The insensitive act in front of the Emmett Till memorial *really* hurt. I wonder if those Ole Miss fraternity boys would have turned out differently if they had more positive influences in their lives like Rachel Herod and the outstanding black women of Yalobusha County. We need to be teaching love, not hate! What say ye flagship university?

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