

worked with rural residents, showing them how to take care of their property, inside and outside, cook, can and make crafts. During a visit to the Winston County Fair Mamie met Lincoln Shields, a native of Noxapater who had also graduated from Alcorn. It proved to a fortuitous connection - they subsequently married and moved to Coffeeville.

Mrs. Shields extension service work in Yalobusha County began in 1963 as Negro Home Demonstration Agent. In 1967, she became the area home demonstration agent in a pilot program known as the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. Her territory initially covered Panola, Tallahatchie and Yalobusha counties and later Grenada and Tate counties. She also served as County 4-H agent for Yalobusha County. In 1974 she became Mississippi's first African American county extension home economist. She spent the remainder of her cooperative extension service career in this position, retiring in June 1989.

From her office in Water Valley, which was next to the county courthouse, Mrs. Shields built a network of clubs around both black and white families, including 4-H and Future Farmers. The goals were to help participants improve their nutrition and homemaking skills and to foster stronger relationships within their families and the community. When her children were students in the Coffeeville School System, Mrs. Shields served as PTA president from 1979-81, and she could often be found walking the halls of the schools as a concerned parent.

The impact that Mrs. Shields had on all those she encountered in her extension work is virtually impossible to measure. What is certain is her profound effect as a role model for many in need of mentorship. She not only patiently taught basic skills around the house but on more than one occasion served as an emergency counselor for families in crisis. The Shields were the first African Americans in Yalobusha County to be FHA homeowners, and Mamie and Lincoln used their experience to aid those seeking to build new homes.

After her retirement in 1989, Mamie Shields remained dedicated to her community. A fine cook and seamstress, she was often consulted for weddings and other social events. She willfully gave service to those in need of them without reservation.

Mrs. Shields also brought her talents to a number of organizations including Epsilon Sigma Phi, the extension professionals' organization; Mississippi Council on Family Relations (MCFR); district, state and national extension home economist associations; Yalobusha County AARP chapter secretary; Central Mississippi, Incorporated (CMI) personnel and advisory board; Yalobusha County American Cancer Society, secretary; Mississippi Action for Progress board member; Yalobusha County Library board member. Mrs. Shields served as coordinator of the Yalobusha County diabetes wellness support groups affiliated with churches of the Mt. Moriah District Baptist Association. She was largely responsible for administering a \$10,000 grant to bring diabetes education throughout Mt. Moriah District Churches. This was in association with the Appalachian Diabetes Coalition of Marshall County, West Virginia.

Mamie Shields' spiritual life was as important to her as her professional and community pursuits. When the family arrived in Coffeeville, they joined the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of the late Reverend William Murphy Brown. There, she served as a Sunday school teacher, youth director, deaconess, and the mother board. She organized the first Baccalaureate Service for Coffeeville High School graduates at Bethlehem in 1979 and the one in 1980. Her ministry reached into the Mount Moriah Baptist District Association where she served as youth director coordinating activities throughout the district and as an assistant to moderator Amos Sims. She also earned a Bachelor of Theology in 2006 from the Coffeeville extension of Mississippi Baptist Seminary and a Bachelor of Religious Education in 2011. These followed courses of study in Christian education in 1993 and 2006.

Mrs. Shields also served as class secretary of the seminary and later, served as dean of the Coffeeville Extension to continue the organization's reach into Yalobusha County.

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Beyond their professional work, Mamie and Lincoln Shields have often assisted neighbors who suffered losses from storms or fires. And every year, since the late 1960s, they have planted turnip and mustard greens that the community can take free of charge – no restrictions on the amount and only one request: break the leaves off so that the plants can continue to reproduce and grow and therefore be a blessing to others. It is a perfect metaphor for their lives of service.

In this last year of her eighties, Mother Shields remains a devoted wife, homemaker and grandmother and still a source of encouragement to her three children. You can find her at times teaching her great-grandson how to cook or bake or providing leadership among the women of the church. Her latest project was teaching the deaconesses to bake communion bread. Many people continue to visit her, seeking her wisdom on raising a family, homemaking, and general life lessons. Mamie Shields has served a long time. More importantly, she has lived well by serving others well.

**Through Her Children's Eyes**

**Jeffery** – Mom always taught me the importance of having a relationship with God. She did more than “talk it” – we lived it by regularly attending Sunday School, Church and Baptist Training Union on Sunday evenings. Mom taught us to treat everyone with love and respect. She taught us to be accountable in life with our schoolwork and always insisted “if you said you were going to do something, always try to do it.” Mom stressed giving your best in whatever you do and trust God to do the rest. Mom is so devoted – I watched her and her sisters taking care of their father as he got older. Mom, during her 70's, mastered the computer and mastered Microsoft Word. She could perform operations as well as I could. Mom is always up for the challenge of learning and doing new things.

**Angela** – Mrs. Shields is a wonderful mother-in-law. She always had encouraging words when our boys were little. She said, “Angie, if you feed them, you can get along with them.” I did just that and still do it because it really works! She also taught me to make homemade biscuits and I take great pride in making them for my family and for the whole family when we are gathered in Coffeeville.

**Derrick** – My mother always exhibits a balance of grace and truth. She invests deeply and relationally in the lives of everyone she encounters. Her love for people and family is exceeded only by her love of God.

**Andrea** – My mother-in-law has been an inspiration to me from the beginning of my marriage to Derrick. Being an African American female in the US Army and full-time student at that time brought a unique set of challenges when planning and setting career goals. She has a way of motivating you with one conversation and making you feel that you can accomplish your goals with hard work, good organizational skills, the passion to move forward and most importantly, with the help of God. She is a positive role model in my life.

**Suzette** – (Mom or Mommy, as I sometimes still say!) is such a huge influence in my life – always has been. It is exceedingly difficult to talk about her alone and not mention Daddy because they did so much together down through the years, and it's even more difficult to express my thoughts about her in a small paragraph! It has been and still is such a gift from God to have Mamie Shields as my Mom - and to have benefitted from all that she has been and still is to enrich my life. She helped me bring up our daughters, teaching them as I saw her teach others in her career. When we returned to Mississippi to live, we heard countless stories from people, seemingly from everywhere, telling us of how Mom and Dad blessed their lives – furniture after a house burned, help with talking to their children, with recipes and with cooking meals for their families, with church programs' order of service, with flower gardens, the blessedness of getting greens free from their garden every year - the list goes on. I watch as they happily help others. Mom loves to keep track of who picks greens – just to know how many people are blessed from the garden.

The example for all of us is of dedication and loyalty to whatever her family is doing. The grandchildren talk of how awesome it is for her to still tuck them in, especially when they are not feeling well. Her touch is truly special! I learned that she once considered becoming a nurse. Mom writes in a

daily journal and has photo albums depicting family members over the years, demonstrating both her love of history and her pride in family members' achievements. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren are all here at Christmas time – her pound cakes and banana puddings are a hit with the entire family. Great-grandson, Justin, gets a cookie pudding because he does not want bananas in his dessert – and she does it especially for him. Lord willing, we look forward to gathering around Mom and Dad at Christmas 2020!

Mom inspired my life verse Colossians 3:23: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” No one is perfect, and Mom is no exception. But she is definitely one who loves her family, loves people, loves her Church, loved her work in training and teaching, and loves to keep current (she has gotten herself a Facebook page) and learn more about the Bible so she can keep teaching others.

When I read of the Proverbs 31 woman – I think immediately of her, which culminates in verse 31 which says, “Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates”.

**Larry**—Mamie Shields and I have had a special relationship since August of 1978, when she welcomed me into her home to visit her daughter for the first time (Of course, I called first before I just ‘showed up’). She not only has strong ideals but also exerts a strong influence on others. Taking seriously the Lord's instructions to His disciples to “compel them to come,” she reaches out to others to consider the Lord and the church. Without apology, she seeks the Lord and offers Him to everyone within her reach. She knows from her own experience overcoming challenges that God is the absolute necessity one must have in this life to succeed and make a difference.

MAMIE LEE HERRON SHIELDS . . . a woman of great achievement, singular influence and dedicated to purposes beyond herself. Coffeeville and Yalobusha County are stronger because of her unselfish generosity toward others. And while many in the community may be unaware of her contributions, they are not unnoticed by a righteous judge who rewards all of those who demonstrate the commitment to faithfulness in service to others.

**My Closing Thoughts**

Oh, how I wish we were simply getting ready to purchase a red rose or a white one for church this coming Sunday – a red rose to indicate your mother is living and the white to honor a mother no longer here, and then heading out to a Mother's Day brunch.

Instead our churches are closed, and we are in a global pandemic, in a country where black and brown people are the most vulnerable. We are suffering and dying in higher percentages, yet we must continue to pray and seek to worship in our own ways, through television, radio or via live stream on our phone or computer. Even for some that is a struggle, especially where technology is limited. Many of us are on lock down, practicing social distancing and looking out for friends and neighbors while others seem oblivious. Many of us, too, are separated from our mothers, able to see them only through a window or video screen. The number of mothers and individuals we continue to lose to the Covid 19 virus is overwhelming and devastating. Yet, we must not despair. We must be encouraged by the faith of our mothers - mothers like Mamie Shields, who continues through faith to sow positive seeds that bear fruit. She has learned, earned and returned! Thank you, Mamie Shields! Happy Mother's Day to you and all the mothers of this world!

– break the leaves off so that the plants can continue to reproduce and, therefore, continue their growth and be a blessing to others.

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