

# **From the Cradle to the Grave Our Legacy of Love and Hope**

## **A Collection of African American Funeral Programs 1958-2005**

### **The Life of Mrs. Geraldine Taylor (January 7, 1929 – June 8, 2004)**

Steamy butter rolls, crunchy fried chicken, creamy potato pie and fresh cornbread flavor the taste buds of the South, but they also flavor part of the legacy Mrs. Geraldine Taylor left behind for her children according to her youngest daughter, Mary Williams of Jackson, Tenn.

Taylor birthed 12 children, but two died at infancy.

“She raised all 10 of us, and we never went hungry. She was just wonderful because she never gave up on one of us,” Williams said. “She never put us off on anybody even though sometimes all we had to eat was cornbread and beans. But we were happy.”

And now that cornbread has entered into the recipe heritage that her children still use along with Taylor’s instructions for the best fried chicken and butter rolls. She was always providing for her children, and then her children’s kids, and eventually all the way through the fourth generation.

When the “gospel train came and took [her] home,” according to a poem that decorated a page of her funeral program and was signed with love by her grandchildren and great grandchildren, Taylor left behind six sons, four daughters, 27 grandchildren, 46 great grandchildren and three great-great grandchildren.

“She was a wonderful mom, always very loving. She would sit us down and tell us just to love one another,” Williams said. “She’d say, ‘Son, if someone does you wrong, just pray for them and God will take care of it.’ She never did anybody wrong.”

With 10 hungry mouths to feed, Taylor worked hard at various jobs including keeping older people, cleaning houses and even working in the field when Williams was little. While Taylor was busy trying to support her family, she was never too busy for her loved ones.

“She was always there when we needed her and even when we didn’t,” Williams said.

The mark of a good friend is one who is always there for you when you need them. But the mark of a good mother is one who not only is there for you when you need her but especially when you don’t need her. Children sometimes try to push a parent’s advice away, but Williams said one notable trait about her mother was her strong will and fight to keep the family together.

In addition to the good recipes she left behind, the love she taught her children to show and the values she held of staying together as a family, Williams said her mother always had a smile on her face and a kind word for others.

“My mama always smiled. Nobody ever seen her angry,” she said. “She just had a way with people.” Even when Alzheimer’s disease took a grip of Taylor, Williams said that she never forgot her children.

“She had a couple of heart attacks and kidney failings, but she’d still be laughing and talking,” Williams said.

While laughter was a good dose of medicine for Taylor, Williams said she did have her nights when she would cry alone in the darkness.

“We’d hear her crying because maybe she missed her mom and dad, but we’d just all go in and hug her. She was a wonderful, wonderful lady, a real strong lady too.”

Another fond memory Williams remembers about her mother, was her obsession with high heels.

“She always wore high heel shoes. Kids would be laughing when the bus pulled out because she’d be out in the yard sweeping and stuff, just wearing those high heels,” Williams said. But those high heels served a higher purpose than just looking good. Williams recalls her mother used to dance.

“She’d always say, ‘Don’t watch me, watch my feet.’ And then she’d do this little step and the children would follow.”

As the funeral program mentioned, “God gave Geraldine an everlasting peace and called her home on the evening of June 8, 2004.” But her legacy of laughter, dancing, smiling, cooking and love will live on in the hearts and lives of the generations to follow.