



Mrs. Lila Whittington Carter

November 12, 1935 - July 19, 2019

Lila Annie Ruth Whittington Carter was the first of nine children born to George Winslow (Winslow) and Minnie Rachel Jane Stepp Whittington at their home in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Family, close and extended, meant the world to Lila and from her earliest moments she was surrounded by loving parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Lila's father, the first African American brakeman in North Carolina, provided Southern Railroad train passes to Lila and her family and sparked Lila's lifelong wanderlust. From her mother she learned sewing, gardening, canning fruits and vegetables, making jams and jellies, and other homemaking and life skills.

As the first born, Lila became her mother's helper and she took seriously her role to solve problems and care for her younger siblings. It comes as no surprise that Lila pursued a career in nursing and in her personal life she enjoyed creating memories for her family through traditional and inventive meals and through treasured, custom pieces of clothing, including doll dresses and evening gowns, she sewed late nights on a Singer sewing machine. She cared deeply about the well-being of relatives and spreading happiness. She slipped money into envelopes, birthday cards, wallet flaps, and sweater pockets. Few knew about the tuition, home repairs, utility bills and mortgages she paid-- often without being asked.

Lila believed that we belong to one human family, and she was curious about the deep, complicated roots of her own family history. That curiosity fueled her interest in organizing family reunions and obtaining genealogy reports and DNA testing. The reports and tests confirmed that her parents were the descendants of slaves who shared ancestry with the Stepps, Carsons, and McDowells of Western North Carolina and Ireland. Historical documents and markers in Grey Eagle, before it became Black Mountain, and documents and artifacts associated with the Carson house and museum in Marion shed light on some of those relationships.

Lila loved learning and was an avid reader. She received her early education at the Black Mountain Colored School, later named Carver School, and graduated from Stephens-Lee High School in Asheville. Active in her church and community, she sang in the choir and played the piano at Mills Chapel Baptist Church.

In high school Lila was an exchange editor of the newspaper, and member of the Crown and Scepter Honor Society and French club. She loved to dance and took dance lessons. Like many women of her time she took typing and shorthand in preparation for a good job as a secretary. However, inspired by George Washington Carver, Florence Nightingale, and cousins who were nurses, Lila left Black Mountain in 1954 for Grady Memorial Nursing School in Atlanta, Georgia. Her experiences as a nursing student about fascinating medical cases were the source for stories that she loved to recount. Always the social butterfly, Lila was voted Most Cooperative at Grady. It was when she was completing an affiliation in psychiatric nursing in Tuskegee, Alabama that she met John Leland Carter, where he was completing a residency in internal medicine. They were married in 1957 and lived in Tuskegee until

moving to Boston, Massachusetts where her husband completed a residency in psychiatry. They moved back to Tuskegee, before finally settling in Salisbury, North Carolina to work at the VA hospital. Highlights and lowlights from her time in Alabama included knowing some of the Tuskegee Airmen, Lionel Richie as a teenager, and one of the doctors who participated in the controversial, unethical testing of African American patients.

Lila took time off for several years to raise three children, before returning to psychiatric nursing at the Salisbury VA. For a while she taught dance lessons at the Miller Recreation Center, exposing young girls to ballet, tap, jazz and the cha-cha-cha. At home she was imaginative and enjoyed making toys out of common household items and kid-friendly treats like snow balls, lollipops, popsicles, ice cream, and “doctored” SpaghettiOs with Meatballs. Culinary treats like asparagus mousse and homemade egg nog, fruitcake, rum cake, and cheesecake were her specialties. Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners were extraordinary because Lila enjoyed setting a colorful table with “the good dishes.” Lila herself was quite colorful and danced to her own music. Long before city women drove trucks, she drove a big green hand-painted pickup truck and thought nothing of it. She took belly dancing lessons and performed in public. Social, civic and charitable activities through memberships in Jack and Jill of America, Inc. and the Dragon-Dragonette Social Club kept her busy. She was also a member of the Psi Chi Chapter of Chi Eta Phi nursing sorority, and First Calvary Baptist Church of Salisbury. When she moved to Durham she attended Greater Saint Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina until her health began to fail.

Lila valued getting to know people from all walks of life. For a time she lived in Charlotte and enjoyed the closeness of neighbors and a son who lived across

the street. When she moved in September 2013 to Bartlett Reserve, a senior living community in Durham, she saw herself as an ambassador of sorts for those who joined the community after her. She knew the names of all staff and residents and a little something about each of them. There she developed warm friendships and thrived on opportunities to share dinner with groups of friends; learn about different religions; take art, creative writing, and jewelry classes; attend Bible Study; and take trips to local historical sites and attractions. She also enjoyed frequent visits from her children, her sisters and brothers, and their children and grandchildren. After her husband died, Lila enjoyed annual trips with her sisters to Myrtle Beach. Lila always demanded to know the latest family news and was the last to leave family gatherings. Her address books were legendary and relatives frequently called her to get current contact information for their close family members. Friends and family looked forward to receiving birthday cards that were embellished with her calligraphy. Great nieces, Riley, Skylar, Lourdes, Chloe, Noelle, and Celine brought her great joy when they visited her in Durham. She had a special bond with Gizmo, her spoiled 14-year-old Silky Terrier.

Lila was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, John Leland Carter; siblings David W. Whittington, Sharyn L. Whittington, and George L. Whittington. She is survived by her children Toi Y. Carter (Mike) of Bethesda, MD; Jonathan L. Carter of Java, VA, Wex (Wendell) Carter (Angel) of Charlotte, NC; grandchildren Julia Toman, MD, John Toman (Laura), and a great grandchild, Corvin Tobias Toman; siblings Willie (Bill) A. Whittington, Leona P. Whittington, Katherine V. Dubose (Robert), Leslie A. Whittington, and Keith A. Whittington (Emily); and many beloved nieces, nephews and cousins.

A celebration of Lila's life will be held at the Greater Saint Paul Missionary

Baptist Church, 1102 Juniper Street, Durham, North Carolina 27701 on Thursday, July 25; Family Visitation at 11:00 a.m. and Homegoing Service at 12:00 noon, with Dr. William-Hazel Height delivering the eulogy. Interment at the Salisbury National Cemetery in Salisbury, NC will take place on Monday, July 29th at 1:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes donations in memory of Lila W. Carter to Duke Homecare and Hospice (<https://dhch.duhs.duke.edu/make-donation>, or call 919-620-3853); and to Oak Grove Cemetery (PO Box 263, Black Mountain NC 28711), in support of its upkeep.

Cemetery Details

Salisbury National Cemetery

501 Statesville Blvd
Salisbury, NC 28144

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL **25**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Greater St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
1102 Juniper Street
Durham, NC 27701

Celebration of Life

JUL **25**. 12:00 PM (ET)

Greater St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
1102 Juniper Street
Durham, NC 27701

Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Lila Whittington Carter*

October 05, 2023 at 11:31 AM



“ *Sending thoughts and prayers to each of you during this difficult time. I only had the pleasure of meeting your mother once, but I remember how kind and cordial she was to me. Jon has shared many stories with me throughout the years. What a blessing the three of you received by having her as your mother.*

Renee Blackwell

Danville, VA

Renee Blackwell - July 24, 2019 at 07:43 PM



“ *Mrs. Lila Carter was my best friend Toi's mom and she was the sweetest lady you would ever know! She was cool, fun, caring, loving and giving. She always made me feel welcomed in her home. We would go on trips to Morrow Mountain with picnic basket in tow or she would fire up the grill in the back yard and have an awesome time at home. As we got older she offered sage advice and was so proud of your accomplishments along the way. She will ALWAYS hold a special place in my heart! Toi, Jonathan, Wendell (Wex), Mike and other family members - I love you dearly. No matter how miles separate us, the closeness is everlasting. May your memories of your mom bring you solace in the days, weeks and months to come. May God forever bless and keep you. Roz Mitchell, Salisbury, NC.*

Rosalind Mitchell - July 24, 2019 at 02:13 PM

YW

“ *A wonderful lady who shared her warmth with all.
Our prayers are with the family.
from:
The Waiters Family
Salisbury, NC*

Yvonne Waiters-Dixon - July 24, 2019 at 12:50 PM



“ *Lavender Reflections Spray was purchased for
the family of Mrs. Lila Whittington Carter.*



July 22, 2019 at 10:01 PM



“ *Pretty Please was purchased for the family of
Mrs. Lila Whittington Carter.*



July 22, 2019 at 08:47 AM