

Lucille Armstrong

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102-YEAR-OLD LOVES LIFE, INSPIRES OTHERS

By CAROLYN O'QUINN; Community Life Writer

It was her birthday and she was 102 years old. Friends and neighbors had streamed in and out of Heritage Inn on St. Simons Island, all day long Sunday to visit "Miss Lucille" Armstrong.

Now she sat quietly in her chair amid her memories awaiting the next visitor who would kiss her light brown cheek and tell her how good she looked.

Although she spends some time in a wheelchair because of arthritis in her right knee, her skin is as soft as a baby's and her smile is as sweet as ever.

Her many visitors came to wish her a happy birthday and to feel the positive vibrations Mrs. Armstrong radiates. Alert and attentive with a droll sense of humor, she does pretty well with names except when the younger generation shows up looking exactly like the first.

"There's always a smile in there," said a young woman in her early 20's, indicating Mrs. Armstrong's room. "You want to come to see her because she's so sweet."

She had come by not only to wish Mrs. Armstrong many happy returns of the day, but also to congratulate her on being honored by her church at the celebration of its history.

She has been a member for 83 years and is the oldest member of the 129-year-old First African Baptist, Brunswick's oldest black church. Church members presented her with an engraved plaque in appreciation for her years of service to the church in a special ceremony Sunday.

'She's sweet. It feels good to be around her," said Jackie Traeye, who has known Mrs. Armstrong all her life. "She has always been a positive influence on many people and especially to the children of the church.

"I remember when I was a child, Mrs. Armstrong would listen to our Sunday School recitations. She would nod her head as we recited and if we faltered, that head would just nod more emphatically, as if she could pull us through it.

"She was always so kind to us and she has been an inspiration to a great many people. It's people like her that are the reason our church has been so strong and lasted so long."

Mrs. Armstrong was born Jan. 5, 1890, on Amherst Street in Brunswick. An only child, her family moved to Washington D.C., where her father, Joseph Ruffin, worked in the U.S. Treasury Department. Her mother died when she was 8-years-old.

"From then on my father just took over and he always took care of me," she said. "He was a good man, they don't make them like that anymore."

Her great-aunt, who lived in Brunswick in a big two-story house across the street from Hall's Funeral Home on Gloucester Street, asked that she be allowed to come and live with her.

As a young girl, she often traveled on the train from Washington to Brunswick and remembers the trips as a gentler time when train travel was less hectic and more luxurious with lots of porters. "It was smooth riding. I loved to ride the train," she said.

Her school teacher in Brunswick was Miss Ida Jones, who also played the organ in the church. In Washington, she attended school through the eighth grade.

She was in her teens in Frist African's church choir when the choir sailed to Jekyll Island on the Emmeline or Hessie to sing for the millionaires. She remembers being introduced to the Rockefellers, Carnegies and Vanderbilts at the Jekyll Island Club. "They made us so welcome and we enjoyed the trip so much," she said.

She and her late husband, Henry Armstrong, reared their three children here. A homemaker, she said she never had to work out of her home very much. Once she was a sitter for five years with an elderly person in Washington.

And she did a lot of church work. "I used to bake, you know," an understatement for the hundreds of cakes she's made over the years for church socials and fund-raisers.

Her son, Everett, calls her twice a week from his home in New York, and she often hears from her daughter, Lottie, who lives in St. Mary's nursing home in California. Her eldest child, Henry Armstrong, Jr. of Jekyll Island, who is 81 and a deacon in the church, visits her every week. She has five grandchildren and said she knows "most everybody."

Mrs. Armstrong said she has never used alcohol or tobacco but she does have one weakness. "I love to eat sweets," she said with a grin. "You see that box of candy there? Dr. Inman's wife brings me a box of candy every time she goes on a trip." The W.O. Inmans were neighbors of hers when she lived on Jekyll Island with her son.

Why does she think she's lived so long? "Just the good Lord's good to me, that's all. All of them say 'I'll never live to be that old.' I tell them, that-you don't know. Because I never thought I'd live to be this age, either."

She said she is enjoying her life at Heritage and that her health is good, "so far as I know," she quipped.

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FUNERAL FRIDAY FOR MRS. ARMSTRONG

The funeral for Lucille Ruffin Armstrong, 102, of Brunswick will be held at 4 p.m. Friday in the Frist African Baptist Church with the Rev. Rance Pettibone officiating. Interment will follow in Greenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Armstrong died Saturday, May 9, in the Southeast Georgia Regional Medical Center.

Pallbearers will be Walter Belton Jr., Nathaniel R. Kennedy, James Eppings, Walter McNeely, Alfred Wrice and James Wright Sr. Honorary pallbearers will be officers of the church.

The body will be placed in the church one hour prior to the service.

The family will be at the funeral home from 7 until 8 tonight.

Surviving are two sons, J.H. Armstrong of Jekyll Island and Agnew Armstrong of Bronx, N.Y.; a daughter, Lottie Henderson of Carlsbad, Calif.; three grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

The retired Glynn County native was a member of First African Baptist Church.

Hall and Jones Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.