



Rev. Carolyn Lee Williams Bell

December 7, 1944 - September 11, 2018

Activism takes a lot of different forms. Rev. Carolyn Lee Williams Bell had a powerful serve and a strong backhand until the last set on September 11, 2018. I've discovered for myself and through the life of my mother what it is to be someone who stands for other people's greatness. She lived her life in service of family, community, and the lives of all people and in particular the lives of African-Americans. It is inspiring to go through the articles written about her over the years, her accomplishments and notoriety. But the accolades are only by-products of a mission that she embodied: use your influence, knowledge, and wisdom to help others.

It became clear to me that tennis was her first vehicle for activism. Carolyn had a natural ability with tennis and in a short period of time became a national tennis champion. She won both the National girls and women's singles titles of the ATA (American Tennis Association) and in 1961, she was solidified as the nation's top African-American female tennis player. As a student at I.C. Norcom, she won many district and state tennis titles and was named the Olympian Sports Club's 1961 Athlete of the Year. She shared many state doubles titles with her brother, Lamar Williams. She trained in the same camp with her male counterpart, Arthur Ashe and became one of the first African-American women to play in the US Open Tennis Tournament

(Forest Hills). During the sixties, Carolyn traveled throughout the country competing in tennis tournaments, sometimes as the only African-American in which she and Ashe broke through color barriers. Their victories opened doors into whites-only tournaments, creating pathways for other African-American women and men.

Carolyn wasn't just a successful athlete. She earned a Master of Divinity from Virginia Union University, a Master of Science (Educational Guidance) from Virginia State University, a Bachelor of Social Work/Sociology from Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio), a post graduate Certification in Secondary School Guidance; and graduated from I.C. Norcom High School's class of '62 (Portsmouth, Virginia). She was ordained as a Minister and was named associate pastor at Canaan Baptist Church, Suffolk, VA by Dr. Robert Barnes, former Pastor.

Carolyn was a champion for communities that were underserved, oppressed or impoverished by using her gifts of writing and communication. She also used her relationships with people of influence from NFL athletes, pop music stars, politicians, entrepreneurs, activists, and ministers to forward her social justice aims. She participated in social justice activities with the NAACP and Urban League and rallied organizations into civil rights action. Carolyn personified social graces and that lead her to become Homecoming Queen at I.C. Norcom High School and also an AKA (Alpha Kappa Alpha) in college at Central State University. Her passion for education lead her to take court as a guidance counselor in Portsmouth Public Schools, at Old Dominion University in various positions and at Norfolk State University as Associate Vice President for Advancement/ Director of Community Relations. There she

worked in collaboration with former president Dr. Harrison B. Wilson and mentor Mal Nicholson in building community ties through the promotion of large concerts with over 10,000 people attending. She founded and became president of the Park Place Redevelopment Foundation, and acquired funding from the Ford Foundation to build 37 low-income-housing houses in Norfolk.

She embodied a relentless work ethic and a mindset of deliberate practice and study. Once she began a project, she would go deep and wide in her study of a subject's domain. Those skills of community organizing, relationship building, and persistent study served her well as an entrepreneur in writing grants and establishing 501C3's for various organizations across the country. In addition to affordable housing, her studies included HIV Aids issues, urban farming, women's issues, health and wellness, after-school programs for youth, trademark law and branding. Carolyn studied Jesus Christ and gave herself fully to live a Christ-like life and embrace people in need as family.

Carolyn lived a full and creative life. She didn't brag about her accomplishment but she was an angel walking among us. One of her most endearing traits was her humility. She recently co-authored an Amazon #1 best seller called "Bellringer Branding Bible". Rev. Bell was also featured in another Amazon best selling book called "Radical Transformational Leadership" written by systemic social change expert Dr. Monica Sharma. Struck by the need for more activism-focused children's books, she recently began work with graphic artists on a children's book. Her creative legacy included songs, a couple of tv show scripts, a musical play, motivational speaking, preaching, speech writing and a newspaper she founded and

published called “Spiritual Times”.

Carolyn was a philosopher and sage. She used her tennis racket in her activism as a youth and her pen and voice as an adult. There are many lessons to be learned from the life of my mother. One lesson is that you can express your activism on your job by examining how to make life better for yourself and others in the workplace. You can express your activism where you live by getting involved in the health and safety for all in your community. You can show your activism by making sure that your family is supported through moments of tragedy or turbulence. You can change things wherever you are and that is what she did. She was arrested “for” protesting for civil rights when she was in college and she was arrested “by” the injustices she saw around her throughout her life. I recall when she visited me in California and we attended a movie screening about mass incarceration. On the way to the airport she was so disturbed about those statistics and the systemic issues that she said to me: “ I’m going to do something about that”. And when she returned to Virginia, she did just that. She became instrumental in the Restoration Ministry here at Grove Church and went into prisons with the team to minister, mentor, and create resources for incarcerated populations.

Carolyn, aka “MaBell”, loved family and not just her surviving family: Me (son), Clare Norris-Bell (daughter in-law), Lamar Williams (brother), Maggi Curry-Williams (sister in-law), Nichole Williams (niece), Patrick Williams (nephew), Wallace Bell (brother-in-law), Barbara Blunt (sister-in-law) or those who preceded her in death: Harvey Bell Jr. (former-husband, my dad), Stacy Bell (daughter) Sandy Williams (father), or Beatrice Williams (mother) but an extended family of sons, daughters, cousins, nieces, nephews, and people

she mentored, counseled, served, organized, and lead.

There are many more stories I could share that are awe-inspiring. Rev. Carolyn Lee Williams Bell's life was one lived from a standard of excellence and commitment towards humanity. She used to tell me that I was her greatest accomplishment. I'm humbled yet honored to carry the torch of her legacy.

Cemetery Details

Private

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP **20**. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

J.T. Fisher Funeral Services
1248 N. George Washington Hwy
Chesapeake, VA

Service

SEP **21**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Grove Church
5910 W Norfolk Rd
Portsmouth, VA 23703
(757) 484-4149

Tribute Wall



“ *J.T. Fisher Funeral Services created a Tribute Video in memory of Rev. Carolyn Lee Williams Bell*



J. T. Fisher Funeral Services - September 20, 2018 at 05:24 PM

RF

“ *May God provide the strength to forge onward as you adjust to life without the physical presence of Rev. Carolyn. Carolyn and I were peers and IC Norcom and later co-workers at NSU. It was always a special joy to see one another. Carolyn's enthusiasm and ability to make one feel as though they were so very special will always be cherished.*



Rev. Joyce A. Foster - October 03, 2018 at 01:02 PM

TA

“Count me among the many lives that the Rev. Carolyn Williams Bell touched during her journey here on earth. I knew Mrs. Bell as a neighbor in Park Place in Norfolk many years ago. Our families lived a few houses apart.

I also knew Mrs. Bell when I was a student at ODU and Mrs. Bell was a dean in student affairs. She was supportive of the Black student groups (and other student groups) at ODU but also encouraged black students to get involved in campus-wide activities. I served on the university honor council probably because of her urging. She is one of the reasons ODU was a welcoming space and place for African American students during those years (late 1970s, early 1980s).

I hope at some point during the years that our paths crossed that I thanked Mrs. Bell for her support because it made a difference.

My deepest sympathies to her family. Thanks for sharing such a beautiful photo/video tribute to her.

Tammie Smith

Tammie - September 25, 2018 at 11:08 PM



“So so sorry for the lost. I will keep the family in my prayers. I knew her as Ms Bell while working at Norfolk State University. I got my 1st federal working with Ms Bell. She was awesome and knew how to bring grant monies into the University. I was sorry when she departed the University. She was missed. Rest in Peace. Ted Price, University Police Dept.

Theodore Price - September 21, 2018 at 09:53 PM

RN

“ *There is so much we could share about Mrs. Bell as a loving and sincere caring person to our family but there would not be enough space to say it all on the Tribute Wall. Mrs. Bell adopted our family whenever we relocated to Suffolk, Virginia.*



Thank you for your many words of wisdom, encouragement, and LOVE! We will miss you! Rest In Heaven!

Marcus and family, we send our prayers, love and many hugs!

*COL(R) Ronald, Vanessa & Joshua Newton
Tampa, FL*

Ronald & Vanessa Newton - September 21, 2018 at 12:09 PM

EH

“ *Extending love, prayers, and sympathy to Mrs. Bell's family during her passing. She was such a loving, caring individual that I met at Norfolk State University. May she rest from her labour and her great work will follow her eternally.*



*Estherine J. Harding
NSU Retiree*

Estherine J. Harding - September 20, 2018 at 07:51 PM



“ 34 files added to the album Life Tributes



J. T. Fisher Funeral Services - September 19, 2018 at 06:27 PM

CJ

“ *My condolences to the Family of Carolyn Bell
I have known her and her Brother Lamar
Williams for at least 40 years
Although our Professional Careers lead us to
different paths*



*We all shared a deep "PASSION" and love for "TENNIS" Whether it
was Watching the New Professional Tennis Stars Serena And
Venus Williams
Playing in tournaments, Sponsoring tournaments or Coaching
tennis exposing the young children:
this is what Carolyn Loved even after she retired
She was always supportive of me and The Tennis Program I wanted
to start*

*The Last time we were together was at "The Rededication Event" at
the New Cavalier Manor Tennis Courts. She would always call me
to check on me and offer her Talent to assist me
She was Loved, Lived a great Life. I will miss her
Cyneese L Johnson
Educator, USTA Professional Tennis COACH*

Cyneese L Johnson - September 18, 2018 at 03:21 PM

VP

“ *Rest in Peace From The Phillip Family of Grove Baptist Church*

Valorie Phillip - September 16, 2018 at 11:33 AM

DR

“ Carolyn Williams Bell was a great friend and supporter of the International Black Women's Congress. She had just completed on August 25, 2018 a powerful brochure on the organization that I know will move us to the next level. I will miss her, and I thank her for her commitment, not only to us, but to the Hampton Roads community and State of Virginia. A great woman has laid down but still has height in the community. Carolyn Williams Bell has height. May her journey into eternity be smooth and may she rest wherever she wants.

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose - September 16, 2018 at 11:05 AM

CW

“ Our deepest condolences on the passing of Carolyn Williams Bell. Sending prayers and love to Marcus, Lamar, Maggi and the entire family. A true icon in our community has crossed over. Rest in peace, Dear Carolyn.



Junius and Costella Williams

Costella School B. Williams - September 15, 2018 at 08:40 PM

BR

RIH! Carolyn was a loving human being and a great tennis player beautiful Homecoming queen who made us all proud class 1961 as well as city of Portsmouth. We all knew you were bound for greatness.

Brenda Reynolds - September 17, 2018 at 08:42 PM

EJ

My condolence to the family. May God continue to bless you.

Ethel Joyner - September 19, 2018 at 04:29 PM

RT

Dear Carolyn Bell

Every beginning has an ending and at most unexpected time too.

During your lifetime on earth you have made a mark that bells in rhyme and rhythm. I know your son Marcus Bell a gem of a gentleman you brought into this world who carries your great legacy. I feel I know you through his gentleness, kindness, love and respect unstoppable.

Rest In Peace

In love

Rajani

Rajani T - September 20, 2018 at 02:36 PM