



Betty Lougenia Ellison-Harpole

August 17, 1936 - August 4, 2022

Betty Lougeina (Neal) Ellison-Harpole was born August 17, 1936, in Memphis Tennessee and she transitioned peacefully to be with the ancestors on August 4, 2022. She was the seventh of eight children born to Ogie Tinsley and James Charles Neal. She is survived by her older brother, Ira Tinsley Neal, who is the last surviving sibling, preceding them both in death are Harold Neal, Charlotte McKinney, Naomi Cahill, Ellen Stamps, Samuel Neal, and Phillip Neal.

Betty was raised and spent her formative years in Memphis until attending the University of Wisconsin. She eventually married and had four children, Harriett Anita Pickett, Frederick Hughes Birts Sr., Reginald Neal Birts, and Aneer Rukh-Kamaa (Harold Vernon Birts), all of whom have been left to honor her memory.

Betty began her career in education as a preschool teacher for the Head Start/Early Head Start Federal Program in Milwaukee, WI. From there she would go on to spend over 20 years teaching kindergarten through ninth grades for the Milwaukee Public Schools, outside of a brief time when she taught for Elgin-Schomburg, Illinois Public Schools.

Betty eventually left Milwaukee and moved to Minneapolis when she married the late Rev. Coleman Ellison, Milwaukee-St. Paul District Presiding Elder of

the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. In Minneapolis, she worked as the director of volunteers for the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization. She missed the classroom, however, and so she returned to teaching after earning a graduate degree from the University of Minnesota. She spent the remainder of her career working within the Minneapolis Public School system for another 20 years, touching the lives of countless students.

Betty was more than a committed educator, she sought to make an impact beyond the classroom. She was often asked to speak on education and was a guest speaker for the America Assistance of University Women, founded in 1881, one of the nation's leading voices promoting equity and education for women and girls.

“Ms. Harpole” as students called her, founded the African American Self-esteem group at Ramsey International Fine Arts Center, to foster greater confidence and pride in young African Americans. She was very active in her community as well. She campaigned and knocked on doors for Jesse Jackson's presidential run and for the first black mayor of Minneapolis Sharon Sayles Belton. She hosted fundraisers such as a Minneapolis riverboat ride benefiting African American Educators and the Democratic Farmer Labor Party. She committed to the pursuit of justice and never stopped participating in many civil rights protests, even most recently marching for “Black Lives Matter.” She was affectionately known among the young activists in Minneapolis as “Mama Betty.”

Betty was raised as a devoted Christian and had several church homes over her lifetime. She was in the AME missionary society, started the “Salad Festival” for the AME Missionary Society, and served as the AME representative for the Minnesota Women for the United Methodists council. She also ran a well-known summer program and “parents' night out” for many years at New Salem Missionary Baptist Church.

Many may not have known that Betty was a talented calligrapher, skilled roller skater, impactable dancer, and quite the fashionista. She enjoyed expressing her artistic side, organizing local plays, musicals, and Black History celebrations, she even contributed jokes several times to the “Family Circle,” a national syndicate cartoon by Bil Keane.

Betty’s legacy is best summed up by her motto:

“We cannot allow our children to grow up like dandelions and expect them to smell like Roses” Betty Ellison-Harpole 1989(C)

She lived by those words and as a result has touched so many lives, from her students to her own children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

She will forever be “Grandma Betty” to her twelve loving grandchildren: Chinyere Betty Tamara Charles, Imani Ellen Shari Mance, Kahleia Ogie Aisha Pickett, Kristin C. Birts, Frederick Hughes Birts Jr., Daniella Imani Buckingham-Birts, Reginald Omari Neal Birts, Tacari Aleah Dazmine Birts, Jalen Elijah Robinson, Betty Aita Ndoye Rukh-Kamaa, Frederick Alioune Ndoye Rukh-Kamaa, Calvin Serigne Ndoye Rukh-Kamaa, and ten precious great-grandchildren: Phoenix Anita Simone Griffin, Nyla C. Walker-Pickett, Akira M. Hughes, Christopher Naasir Ikena Mance III, Xavier Ade Alioune Mance, Halle Marie Birts, Gabriella Amari Birts, Isabella Regina Birts, Amyia Birts, and Kamren Collaso.

She is also affectionately remembered by a host of nieces, nephews, grand nieces and nephews, cousins, daughters/granddaughters-in-law: Michelle Buckingham, Trish Woods, Sophie Ndoye Rukh-Kamaa, Natalie Mazurek, Laurie Birts, sons/grandsons-in-law Ricky Griffin, Christopher Mance II, and

other extended family members.

In lieu of flowers, the family has asked for you to donate to one of the following educational organizations, in memory of Betty Ellison-Harpole.

Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)

<https://northsideachievement.org/join-us/donate>

UNCF Minneapolis –St. Paul

<https://secure2.convio.net/uncf/site/SPageNavigator/Donate.html>

Previous Events

Visitation

AUG 20. 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (CT)

New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
2507 Bryant Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Funeral Service

AUG 20. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
2507 Bryant Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55411

Feel free to use the following link to join service by way of ZOOM <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/7308570993?pwd=VElYd3djbnpRdm10ZjFIR3UrTGUxZz09>

Tribute Wall



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Betty Lougenia Ellison-Harpole.*



August 18, 2022 at 12:53 PM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Betty Lougenia Ellison-Harpole.*



August 16, 2022 at 11:53 AM



“ *In honor of our mother's years of services in education the family requested in lieu of sending flowers that a donate be made to one of the following organizations, that support educational endeavors in Black and Brown Communities.*

Thank you!

<https://northsideachievement.org/join-us/donate/>

[us/donate/https://secure2.convio.net/uncf/site/SPageNavigator/Donate.html](https://secure2.convio.net/uncf/site/SPageNavigator/Donate.html)

Harriett Anita Pickett - August 11, 2022 at 04:37 PM

HP

Correction: that a donation

Harriett Anita Pickett - August 11, 2022 at 04:54 PM

SM

“ *My love and condolences go out to the family. Mrs. Harpole gave so much of her life and service to community for an array of causes. She was a loving educator for what seemed like all her life. She taught me and my brother in grade school along with many others. I remember her as a kind gentle being committed to her city and people. Thank you to the family for sharing her with us. Thank you Mrs. Harpole. May you rest peacefully and may the ancestors welcome you as you journey to the spirit realm. -SM*



SM - August 10, 2022 at 10:26 AM