

Living Legend of Cumberland

Mrs. Lillian Louise Tolbert Adams



Lillian Louise Tolbert Adams was born August 8, 1929, in Greenwood, South Carolina. She was raised by her stepmother, Amanda Herbert Tolbert, her paternal grandmother, Hannah Tolbert, and her father, John S. Tolbert.

Mrs. Adams received her elementary education in Greenwood in a classroom where in the winter a fire had to be made in a potbelly stove before class could begin. She began her secondary education at Brewer High School. Even at an early age, she took the road less traveled and after completing the 9th grade, she transferred to Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina. While her previous classmates graduated in the 11th grade, she completed high school in the 12th grade under the auspices of Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown. Dr. Brown believed in exposing her students to many different experiences and leaders of the times, therefore; Mrs. Adams found herself in the presence of Mary McCloud Bethune as well as Paul Robeson and other celebrities.

Mrs. Adams attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Although an avid music lover starting with piano lessons in elementary school and adding the violin in high school, she discontinued lessons shortly after her freshman year in college finding the lessons too tedious. She decided to major in English and minor in History. While at Fisk, she became a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the SCA (Student Christian Association).

After graduation, Mrs. Adams first job was teaching English in Dillon, South Carolina at Gordon High School. It was there she met her future husband, David H. Adams. They were engaged within nine months of their meeting, but to her chagrin her father insisted that she not marry any man that she had not known for at least a year. She promised to wait until Christmas to marry but eloped in October. At the end of the school year with the war veterans coming back home to their previous jobs, her husband David was transferred to Wilson High School in Florence, South Carolina. She continued to teach at Gordon High School for two more years before then took a two year sabbatical to have two children, Hannah and David Jr.

Mrs. Adams returned to teaching English at Lincoln High School in Clio, South Carolina, her husband's hometown. In order to get a teaching position in Florence, she had to become certified in Elementary Education, so she attended the Benedict Allen Elementary Education Program. Upon completion, she was hired by Florence School District #1 and was assigned to Willow Creek Elementary School where Phillip Brown, her childhood schoolmate, was the principal. While at Willow Creek, she went back to school at South Carolina State College (now University) and earned her Masters' Degree. She also expanded her family of four to five with the birth of her daughter Debra. Following Debra's birth, Mrs. Adams developed her motto, "I never met a child, I didn't love and that child didn't come to love me too."

During the desegregation of schools, Mrs. Adams was transferred to Harlee Elementary School, where she was best known for saving the life of one of her students who was choking on a giant jawbreaker lodged in her windpipe. Mrs. Adams was the First Black Florence School District #1 Teacher of the Year. At this point in her career, Mrs. Adams felt compelled to strike out in a different direction in order to help children. She promptly enrolled in the University of South Carolina Guidance Program at Francis Marion College (now University) focusing on Elementary School Guidance Counseling. After successfully completing this course of study, Mrs. Adams secured a position at North Vista Elementary School as their guidance counselor. While at North Vista, she touched the lives of many children and was the grant writer and project director for Learn and Serve. It was a service learning project that partnered with Faith Health Care Center and Oakland Residential Care Home. She retired from the school system after 50 years of service. Although she had retired, Mrs. Adams continued to work in Lake City, South Carolina as an Elementary School Guidance Counselor replacing the current counselor so she could accept an assistant principal position. During her teaching career, Mrs. Adams has done graduate work at several institutions of higher learning such as Atlanta

University , North Carolina A&T and Francis Marion University ae among those institutions.

Mrs. Adams joined Mt Pisgah AME Church in Greenwood, South Carolina at an early age. As a child, she studied a chapter in the Bible nightly with her grandmother, and they fasted and prayed every Friday. Mrs. Goldie Martin was the guiding force behind Mrs. Adams joining Cumberland UMC. While in the then Young Adult class, she was called to be the teacher. Although she felt that she had not been a member long enough to teach, Mr. Woodrow Lyde, Sr. reminded her that there is no seniority in church, so Mrs. Adams accepted the position and began to teach. She worked with and became the president of the UMW in the local church and the Florence District. After the conferences merged to form the United Methodist Conference, Mrs. Adams became the first Black president of the Florence District UMW. Through the years, she has stayed faithful to God and Cumberland and has served under many of the church's pastors such as Rev. John Boone and Rev. Granville Hicks to name a few. She has been a Lay Speaker, Lay Speaker instructor, treasurer of the Cumberland Federal Credit Union, member of Interest Area #1 and a faithful member of Choir #1.

In addition to working and serving God, Mrs. Adams has always been civic minded. During the summer, Mrs. Adams worked at and headed Back-A-Youth, which found jobs for underprivileged youth during the summer months. Since her husband, David was a member of the American Legion Post #228, she joined the women's auxiliary. She was elected as the first black state officer of the women's auxiliary and also served as president of Post #228 women's auxiliary. Her accolades include past president of the Florence Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Golden Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Life Member of the NAACP, Life Member of Fisk University Alumni, Life Member of the National Council Of Negro Women, a Life Member of Post #228 Women's Auxiliary. Listed in Who's Who Among Black Americans, a member of the Retired Educator's Association, a honored Hospice volunteer and a member of the Eastern Stars.

At the age of 91, Mrs. Adams still continues to teach Saturday Sunday School. At the end of the day, she doesn't dwell on past awards and achievements; she simply wants to be known as a Christian woman.