



## Raymona McNeal

August 15, 1930 - April 29, 2020

Ruthie Raymona Neal McNeal (August 15, 1930 – April 29, 2020)

Raymona McNeal departed this life on April 29, 2020 at the age of 89. Born Ruthie Raymona Neal in Guilford County NC, she was the eldest of five siblings born to Charlie Hubert and Gertrude Farrish Neal. Growing up on a tobacco farm, she graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Reidsville, NC. She was baptized at Brown's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Gibsonville, NC.

At the age of 19 Raymona married Aaron Bigelow of Caswell County and moved to Washington, DC. To this marriage was born two beloved daughters, Mona and Theresa. Following a separation, she eventually pursued training and began her career as a licensed cosmetologist to ensure a future for her and her children. She subsequently married Jesse McNeal of Portsmouth, VA in 1963 and with her daughters, settled in their Northwest Washington home. She strongly encouraged and supported Mona and Theresa's educational development through high school and college graduation.

During the decade 1953-1963, with a caring and generous spirit, Raymona worked tirelessly in support of her family. With her encouragement and direct assistance, her two sisters, Hessie and Evelyn and brother Eddie, were able to leave the family farm and join her in Washington, where they began successful life journeys. She maintained a very close bond with her baby brother Curtis, who resides in North Carolina.

Along with a quiet and shy personality, Raymona possessed an entrepreneurial spirit. She founded and managed a cosmetology business and opened a successful beauty salon in downtown Washington, DC. She was a master baker, selling cakes and pies to her many friends and associates, in addition to providing meals to elderly neighbors and friends. Her sweet potato pie was legendary, to the extent that guests' first comment upon arrival at a family event became. "Did Ray bring that pie?"

In addition to attending cherished family reunions, Raymona traveled extensively domestically and internationally with a travel club, her daughter Mona and with her sisters, Hessie and Evelyn on much anticipated annual Las Vegas trips!

After converting to Catholicism Raymona became a devout member of the Traditional Choir and Sodality of Nativity Catholic Church. She was an active member of the National Council of Negro women and the NAACP.

Raymona was preceded in death by her husband, parents and sister Hessie. She is survived by daughters Mona McClellan and Theresa Strawbridge (Dennis); goddaughter Brenda Suber; godson/nephew Norman NeSmith Jr.; sister Evelyn Neal NeSmith (Norman); brothers Eddie Neal (Dianne) and Curtis Neal; granddaughters Arrione Strawbridge and Mallory Strawbridge; six nieces and ten nephews. Many other relatives and friends mourn her passing.

Your many expressions of sympathy and every act of kindness are deeply appreciated. Regrettably a private funeral service will be held on Friday May 29th, 2020. Your prayers are requested for the family and the world at this challenging time.