

# Obituary

VIVIAN LOUISE BURNS

May 4, 1942 - August 8, 2020

Vivian was Herman and Pauline William's fifth of six children. She was born at home in Sylvester, Georgia and she had a cleft palate. The delivery doctor proclaimed that she would not likely survive and that her parents did not even need to name her. But God was on her side and she not only survived, she thrived. Her grandparents, Carlos and Maude (Peeler) Robinson helped to raise her. Having been brought up in a God-fearing family, she knew to trust in God early in life and joined Hopewell Baptist Church as a very young child. She learned to cook and care for her siblings when she was so small that she had to stand on a box to reach the stove and not once, did she recall ever getting burned.

Vivian attended Phyllis Wheatley Elementary and J.W. Holley High. She did quite well in school and won a local oratorical contest in seventh grade. She sang in an all-girls quartet that performed well enough to win talent contests. Vivian married Johnnie Lee (JohnLee) Thomas (deceased) in 1962 and moved to Atlanta where they raised their four beloved daughters – Sherrie Denise, Cleshia Suevail, Cheryl Evett and Johnnie Delores. The family found a Church Home at Antioch East Baptist Church where Vivian remained an active member until her passing. At Antioch East, she had served as a dedicated member of Usher Board Number 2 since 1965. She enjoyed volunteering in support of the Culinary Ministry, Candlelight Communion, Friends and Family Day and wherever her help was needed.

In 1969, Vivian began working for the Atlanta Public Schools in the cafeteria at Washington High. One summer, to earn extra money, she worked at Burgess Elementary School. While there, she met and later married Willie Bentley (Ben) Burns in 1978. They added his son, Kato, to their beautifully blended family. Vivian advanced through the ranks at APS to become a cafeteria manager and later a Nutrition Program Specialist. Her department assisted with designing and establishing all of the new and renovated school cafeterias and generated over \$62 million for the school system. She retired in 2004 after 35 years of service. Mr. and Mrs. Burns relocated from Decatur to Southwest Atlanta in 2010 after retirement.

Vivian loved the Lord and truly adored her family, friends and neighbors. She was so proud that all of her children and grandchildren are God-fearing, law abiding, educated and caring individuals. She was both financially well-disciplined and generous beyond measure. Everyone was welcome to pull up a seat on their porch which she kept festively lit year-round. She was an avid gardener and loved to work in the yard with Ben. She filled their front and back yards with beautiful plants and their garden with a bounty of vegetables. She kept the cabinets stocked with jars of homemade preserves and one or two bottles of homemade strawberry wine. She could make a full meal appear even when it seemed that there was nothing to eat in the house. She learned to sew in high school and was such a talented seamstress that she could craft a beautiful skirt from scraps leftover from other projects. She was a huge fan of Scrabble, invited everyone to play and had an impressive winning streak. She was intentional about letting the people in her life know that she loved them by staying in contact through frequent visits, calls and emails. She had become fully engaged on social media and loved sharing photos of the adventures she had in her garden where she encountered all manner of creatures and the beautiful blooms she had grown. She was a prolific writer of love letters to her family that they are still discovering after her passing.

Vivian was preceded in death by her parents, her grandparents, her brothers – Herman Williams, Jr., James Williams, Freddie Lee Williams, Anthony Tresvand, Allen Johnson, Edwin Johnson and Erroll Johnson and her sisters – Christine Robinson, Cathrine Lovetta Johnson and Delores Ann (Robinson) Wilkerson.

She is survived by her husband, Willie Bentley (Ben) Burns, her sister, Willean (Lena) Harris, her children – Sherrie Baker, Cleshia (Desmond) Bliss, Cheryl Thomas, Johnnie Thomas and Kato Smith, her grandchildren – Taylor Baker, Robert DeShazor III, Quinton Smith and Kendall Smith, her best friend – Carol Holt, a host of nieces, nephews, friends, neighbors, former co-workers and her church family at Antioch East. She will be profoundly missed and lovingly remembered by all whose lives she touched.

*...and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:7*