

A Letter to My Grandmother(s)
George Anthony Pratt'23

Dear Grandma Lorraine,

Recently, I have thought about you quite frequently. For an assignment in my History of Civil Rights class, I was tasked with writing a letter to a loved one. Initially, I was going to write this letter to granddad because of the subject matter of the course, but after reflecting on how little knowledge I possess about you, I believed it was more appropriate to pen this letter instead to you. I have not written to you before and am now taking this opportunity to become acquainted with you through my dreams. I will be placing this letter underneath my pillow and a glass of water at the foot of my bed.

Firstly, thank you for raising my beautiful mother. I am sure I am who I am, in large part, because of the wisdom my mother gleaned from you that she has imparted to me. I desire to know you more and listen to your life's story, seeking to know you as a spirit guide. Also, I have thought about how you supported granddad, The Reverend Franklin D. Roosevelt, while he pastored Woodlawn Presbyterian (then Laura Street) and was a part of the local civil rights movement in Jacksonville during the 50s and 60s. Interestingly, as I was perusing through archives at the University of North Florida, I found the funeral program of activist Rutledge H. Pearson, in which granddad officiated. What was it like being married to him? Mom informs me you all were married in 1952 and met at a church camp. I hear that you reached PhD candidacy but did not finish your dissertation because of spousal duties. I am sure your...no, I

am not sure if your “sacrifice” (as my mother labels it) was well intentioned. Did you absolutely have to abandon your dream? I hope you enlighten me with this story.

I ask that you be with me in my academic journey; I am yearning to complete your dream and petition you to come back in me in this way.

Additionally, I am curious to know your mystery. Show me your story, if you please...the good and bad, the pain and pleasure. I am aware of your mother's death during child rearing. When considering the irony of your thyroid issues as a youngster (what I am told is the reason why you could not physically mother children), I cannot help but think of the trauma and pain of losing your mother and younger brother to childbirth. As I recall conversations with my mother, I begin to paint a picture of you, the brushstrokes loose with blush colors of your personality. You were quite the woman of a rare and precious quality. A Black woman working toward a PhD in the early 50s, adjunct professor, special education teacher, AKA, Presbyterian, and North Carolina native. What is most fascinating is that Mom tells me you were not too keen on taking pictures. Why was that? Also, why did you identify with age the way you did? Some women take years off their actual age, but you added ten. Could it have been that grandad was almost 10 years younger than you? Mom tells me you came from an entrepreneurial family who owned a lucrative taxi business in Charlotte during the early to mid-1900s, and on your mother's side you possess indigenous ancestry.

As I write, I am now reminded of a picture of you in a red Bible that sat on the bottom rack of the black bookshelf in Dad's office at 8052. I am also reminded of the gold Good News Bible

you gifted my father. I remember my mom telling me about how you and my dad would sit on the porch and drink black coffee together. While you did not get to watch me physically on Earth, I know you have been watching me from other realms.

I am seeking to open a portal to hear, see, and know you to serve as an intermediary between you and your loved ones on this plane of existence – my mother, uncle Morris, Justin, my father, Morgan... I am petitioning your help to heal myself and our family.

As I dream, I humbly ask that you make your presence known. I am asking if I can learn from you, gleaning some of the wisdom you taught my mother. I am asking to make contact with you, establishing a connection to other worlds, the spiritual dimension in which the ancestors live. I hope to work with you. In attempting to establish a connection with you, I have petitioned the help of my father's maternal great grandmother Celestine Margaret Hasty Robins Williams, whom my father's family affectionally calls Mother. She has emerged as a spirit guide, and I am in communication with her. Below is a letter I wrote to her, asking for assistance in putting me in contact with you:

Dear Mother,

I feel you trying to come through. You live so much in me. I feel your sweet spirit and hear your rich tone that maintained harmony in our family. Your marking of time and space, spiritual practices, softness – all things I think about when hearing your names – Mother and Beauty. What befitting names for your family and friends to call you with such reverence and high regard. I desire to tap into these qualities that your community identified in you. I am

attempting to contact you in more sensory ways than I can perceive. I am asking for both your safeguard and assistance as I use water to communicate with my mother's mother and you in my dreams. I am asking that you ward off any ancestral spirits that I am not mature enough to communicate with or those that do not serve my highest good.

Also, I am requesting for you to impart your wisdom within me as I come to learn more about my abilities. I need your ancestral knowledge to heal both myself and our family. I love you.

Ase.

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In this letter to you, I have also included an entry from my journal. As a devout Christian woman, I think you will be able to appreciate it. I shared some of the discoveries contained within with my mother. She shared with me that while on this plane, you too were a strong woman of faith, possessing a quiet and calm spiritual fervor and discipline. You will find it below:

October 31st, 2021

Today marks the beginning of Allhallowtide (a time to remember the dead) in the Western Christian tradition. While I honor my ancestors and the enlightened ones every morning, today I remembered the holy mothers of my father's family in a different way.

Early this morning, I discovered my 2nd great grandmother's family Bible and several pictures of my family dating from as early as the late 1890s. Naturally, I began taking notes and slowly

started to piece parts of my family's story that I had not considered before through obituaries, pictures, and oral histories my grandmother has shared with me. In doing so, I began to discern the great spiritual powers of my father's maternal grandmothers, prompting me to ask my grandmother some questions. From her responses, I was amazed to learn the different ways my grandmothers have harnessed their Christian faith with spiritual practices in their daily lives,

but more intriguingly how these technologies helped them engender desired outcomes and maintain kinship. Remembering the dead, who are not dead at all, or venerating the ancestors allows one to acknowledge who they are descended from. This morning, after hours of archival browsing and talking to my grandmother, I learn I descend from a bloodline of conjurers, healers, herbalists, and mystics. We must learn to honor the ancestors who live in us. So today, I don't remember the dead, but acknowledge the living spirits who have simply transitioned. I call their names...

Dorothy Mae Robins Clemons (great-grandmother)

Celestine Margaret Hasty Robins Williams (2nd great-grandmother)

Sarah A. Ramsey Hasty Williams (3rd great-grandmother)

Caroline Winne Ramsey (4th great-grandmother)

Elizabeth Campbell Winne (5th great-grandmother)

Lang Haynesworth Campbell Tindal (6th great-grandmother)

Ase.

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As I have come to know the gifts and knowledge of my father's maternal mothers, I am going to be intentional in learning about your abilities and insight so that I may be able to harness them as I continue to tread the sometime treacherous water of life. Recently, I have been thinking of some of the things I know you are fond of that my mother has shared with me. In addition to black coffee, during this Advent and Christmas season, I will place Queen Anne Cordial Cherries on my ancestor altar as an offering.

I strive to take time to remember you every day. I will honor you in both my devotion and living, especially in my pursuit of education and vocation of teaching. Thank you for mothering my mother, who in turn mothers me. I smell your fragrance on her – it lingers – so does your warmth.

In Love, Light, and Liberation

Your grandson,

George Anthony Pratt



Lorraine Flowe Wilson
(maternal grandmother)
1923-2000



“Mother” Celestine “Beauty” Williams
(paternal 2nd great-grandmother)
1906-1999
