



## Millie Ruth McClelland Charles

November 20, 2020

Millie Ruth McClelland Charles, expired November 20, 2020 of “natural causes” at the age of 97.

She was born July 25, 1923 in New Orleans, LA, the only child from the union of Rev. William B. McClelland and Mrs. Frankie Little McClelland. Millie Ruth was baptized at the First African Baptist Church on Third Street, Central City New Orleans.

Millie’s parents divorced when she was 3. She spent her formative years with her mother living with her maternal aunt, Hattie Little Minor, and her maternal aunt’s husband, Willie Samuel Minor in Central City. During these early years, Millie embraced New Orleans’ unique culture – “the good eatin” food, the second line, the Mardi Gras Indians, the Baby Dolls, and everything New Orleans’ Black culture had to offer.

Millie’s mother died of kidney disease when she was 8 years old. Her maternal aunt brought her to live with her father and paternal grandmother. This household was far more restrictive. In fact, Millie would often be reprimanded by her father, Rev. McClelland, for being caught dancing in the street! Nevertheless, it simply inspired Millie to be more skillful in not getting caught.

Other aspects of Millie’s early life were infused by the traits and strengths of her parents, and her paternal grandmother, Millie McClelland Blissett.

In Millie’s reflection of her parents, she was aware that both were well educated as well as not easily intimidated. For example, Frankie Little boarded the streetcar with Millie and Millie’s godbrother who had noticeably light skin. The streetcar conductor told Millie’s mother that she could not take the white boy behind the screen. Her mother told the conductor the boy was “colored”. The conductor did not believe her and insisted that she bring the child to the front. Frankie Little became so infuriated that she snatched both children off the streetcar and walked to their destination.

Her father, Rev. McClelland, was also not easily intimidated. He refused to accept the city's low offer to buy his property via eminent domain, as part of the plan to build the "Magnolia Projects" (currently known as Harmony Oaks). He fought the matter in court and lost but was the last to leave.

The other significant influence in Millie's life was her paternal grandmother Millie McClelland Blissett. Millie Blissett was a Garveyite (i.e. of the Universal Negro Improvement Association – UNIA, founded and headed by the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey). The UNIA was dedicated to racial pride, economic self-sufficiency, and the formation of an independent Black nation in Africa. Millie Blissett also attended night school to get a 3rd grade education, and later received a "Certificate of Merit from the Moler System of Colleges in 1910, for having satisfactorily met the requirements for hairdressing, manicure, and massage. She also received training to make wigs through Madame C. J. Walker (first Black female millionaire). Millie Blissett was also a property owner in St. Bernard and Orleans parishes.

Having such strong personalities as examples in her life, and filled with self-confidence, Millie Ruth at the age of 15, wanted to attend college away from New Orleans. However, her father refused to support that idea. She enrolled at Dillard University, in 1939, thinking nothing of entering the university 2 years younger than most of her peers.

At Dillard, she majored in Literature and Fine Arts; her minor was Education. She joined the university choir, directed by Dr. Frederick Hall, and for the rest of her life, boasted of her membership in Dillard's famed choir. As a proud Dillard University alumna, she would sing the alma mater spontaneously, and did so with fervor as recently as 1 month ago.

In Millie's adult life, spawned by her years as a Dillard undergrad, she was exposed to the Congregational denomination, that merged into the United Church of Christ. She was later inspired to join Central Congregational United Church of Christ because of the active role it played at the time regarding social justice issues (Andrew Young grew up in Central). In later years, though briefly, she joined Beecher Congregational United Church of Christ; and post Katrina, she returned to her Baptist roots by joining Christian Unity Baptist Church.

Millie's self-confidence was evidenced as well, upon graduation in 1943, when she chose to teach English at Union Central High School in rural Columbia, Louisiana. The following year she applied for, and was hired to teach junior high school at Avery Institute in Charleston, SC. In 1947 she was hired by the American Red Cross to work in the recreational program for army servicemen in Japan. She resigned after 7 months,

because she did not want to be transferred to Korea, which she described as “too cold!”

She returned to New Orleans in October of 1947 and worked for the Children’s Division of the Louisiana Department of Public Welfare. She met her future husband, Charles Carroll Charles, during this time. They married in November of 1950. Unfortunately, Charles died at the age of 30 on December 29, 1950. Millie was 1 month pregnant at the time.

This was another significant loss in Millie’s life, but as done in the past, she managed to fortify herself with her passion for people-- especially youth-- and through discovering ways to strengthen families. She also found support in friendships that were actively cultivated throughout her life, starting with the Mickens family when she was 8 years old. Said friends became the families that her daughter embraced as her aunts, uncles and cousins.

In the mid-fifties she enrolled at Louisiana State University in pursuit of a master’s degree of social work. However, the racism at the time, moved her to seek masters level education outside of the South. She enrolled at the University of Southern California and graduated with a Master of Social Work in 1957.

In 1965, she was asked, by Dr. Emmett W. Bashful, Chancellor of Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO), to start a social work program within the sociology department, which became the School of Social Work offering baccalaureate and master’s degrees with Dean Millie Charles at its helm, into the 21st Century. During the turbulent times of the 60’s, 70’s, and beyond, New Orleans experienced tremendous changes in the political, social, and racial equity environment. Millie Charles, played a major role as a committed activist for social change, and through the School of Social Work, produced thousands of social scientists and inspired social workers, who contributed to creating a “more equitable” social and political New Orleans, though there is still more work to be done.

A building has been erected in her name: Millie M. Charles School of Social Work. A million-dollar endowed chair was awarded at Southern University in her name: “Millie M. Charles Endowed Chair of Human Rights and Social Work.”

She was founder and president emeritus for the New Orleans Association of Black Social Workers. She has served in the role of reviewer for social work programs throughout the country for accreditation on behalf of the Council of Social Work Education. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Greater New Orleans Urban League, the Louisiana Endowment of Humanities, and she holds the distinction of Alumna member of the New Orleans (LA) Chapter of The Links, Inc.

She received an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters from her alma mater, Dillard University, 1993. Her numerous awards include: The Dillard University Dave Dennis Lifetime Achievement Award at the 150th Founding Gala (2019); Morris F.X. Jeff Community Service Award from the African American Leadership Project (2013); The Times-Picayune Loving Cup for 2013; Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Conference of Artists, New Orleans Chapter (2012); National Association of Black Social Workers' Lifetime Achievement Award (2010); Distinguished New Orleanian and Social Work Pioneer Award by Urban League of Greater New Orleans (2009); Role Models award from the Young Leadership Council (1993); The National Association of Social Workers' Social Worker of the Year (1975) , and awarded her the Pioneer Award (1995); The National Council of Jewish Women awarded Hannah G. Solomon Award, 1976.

She has received numerous accolades, tremendous honors and joys throughout her illustrious, fun-loving life that included people of all walks of life; taking time out every now and then, for a game of Bridge, Bid Whist or Pitty Pat. All who have known her have been blessed AND charged with the duty of activism.

Survivors: Daughter: Hrimgalah Amen(formerly known as Charlene Carol Charles), Grandchildren: Enensa Amen, S'nemeht I Ya Khu Amen-Olatunji, Haiti Anut Amen Claiborne, Surrama Uttima; Great Grandchildren, including: Nuari Amen, Satepra Amen, Ausu Raar Amen, the Corinaldi offsprg.; Sister-in-Law Cora Charles, Nephews and Nieces: John Carlos Charles (inclgd wife & offsprg), Brian Charles (inclgd wife & offsprg), Pierre Charles (inclgd wife & offspring), Homer Charles (inclgd wife & offsprg), Michael & Carol Charles (inclgd offsprg), Andrea L. Gibson, Karen Lodrig (inclgd offsprg), Nykki Lodrig, Nokomis Woods, Lynn Buggage, Ana Robinson, Ana Bufkin, Mary Claire Avery, Denise Jenius, Anita Marshall, and Erika Jacobs; 1st, 2nd & 3rd Cousins: Laura Little Moore, Solomon & Annette Little, Lucinda Byrd, Mariam Jones, Marguerite Scott, Jean Cupit (dtr: Wendy Tatum, grndsn: Jarvis O'Neal), Rose Marie Breaux, Percy & Lettie Humbles, Jr. & offspg, Valencia and Tyrone Humbles, Willye Doretha & offsprg; Numerous Godchildren including Shaun M. Lewis, Akilah Jefferson Shah, Terrance Lodrig, Elnoris Jackson-Branch, Vera Sims, Johnny & Atiyya Abdur-Rahman Chavarria, Hefen Saakhi; and a host of other cousins, nieces, and nephews too numerous to mention by name, but beloved nonetheless.

Millie's oldest living friends are Mrs. Virginia Mickens Dupre (age 96), whom she met at the age of 8, growing up in the same neighborhood, and attending Thomy Lafon, Hoffman, and McDonogh 35 together, and Mrs. Rhea Lucien (age 99), whom she met when she

attended McDonogh 35 High School (the only public school for African American students in New Orleans at that time); Millie and Rhea went on to attend "Fair Dillard" University together, class of 1943. Mrs. Edna Q. Lewis (age 93), Callye F. Chatman (age 94), Marilyn Piper Riley, Shirley Jones, Anne McLean, are also old friends since the early 50's & 60's. Millie Ruth McClelland Charles will Lie in State at Gallier Hall from 11:00am to 1:00pm on Thursday, December 10th.

A private funeral service will be held the morning of Friday, December 11, 2020 at 9:00 am. While invited guests and family are limited due to COVID protocols, the service will be available by Zoom at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/547962124?pwd=V1dTSIhhWWtOYzQ3M2ZVUFk5R2hUUT09> (Meeting ID: 547 962 124 / Passcode: 009030) or on Facebook Live at [www.facebook.com/ChristianUnityBaptistChurch](http://www.facebook.com/ChristianUnityBaptistChurch)

Dean Charles will Lie in State at the Millie M. Charles School of Social Work Building from 11:30am to 1:30pm pm Friday afternoon. A procession to her burial site at Mount Olivet Cemetery will be held that afternoon. Arrangements by D.W. Rhodes Funeral Home, 3933 Washington Avenue. Please visit [www.rhodesfuneral.com](http://www.rhodesfuneral.com) to sign the guestbook, share memories and condolences for the family.

# Cemetery

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## **Mt. Olivet Cemetery**

4000 Norman Mayer Ave.  
New Orleans, LA, 70122

# Events

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**DEC**   **Visitation**                      11:00AM - 01:00PM

**10**

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Gallier Hall

545 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA, US, 70130

**DEC**   **Visitation**                      11:30AM - 01:30PM

**11**

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Millie M. Charles School of Social Work Building

New Orleans, LA, US

# Comments

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“ i will see you again Mama Millie, {Duplessis}

**Diane Duplessis** - December 15, 2020 at 09:45 PM

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“ Mildred Armour-Jackson lit a candle in memory of Millie Ruth McClelland Charles



**Mildred Armour-Jackson** - December 13, 2020 at 10:45 PM

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“ Christine D Thomas lit a candle in memory of Millie Ruth McClelland Charles



**Christine D Thomas** - December 11, 2020 at 12:39 PM

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“ Condolences, prayers & love to the family & all who are dear to DEAN MILLIE CHARLES. As a student of Dean Millie Charles at SUNO, I will forever remember her strength, courage & passion for people & her spirit for excellence. Her legacy for positive change & justice will remain in the lives & hearts of the many her life encouraged & influenced forever. Dean Millie will be greatly missed & always loved. May she rest peacefully in JESUS CHRIST loving arms



**ELDER PATRICIA COOK** - December 11, 2020 at 10:21 AM

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“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



**Lynn Buggage** - December 11, 2020 at 09:55 AM

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“ Gloria L. Connelly lit a candle in memory of Millie Ruth McClelland Charles



**Gloria L. Connelly** - December 11, 2020 at 07:23 AM

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“ Condolences to the family of Dean Millie Charles from David, Holly, and Gillian Terrie. I, David, had the pleasure of meeting Dean Charles at a meeting of community members concerning the city budget, I believe. I had never met her, but had heard her name mentioned many times growing up, as I overheard conversations among my relatives whom were employed within the “school system.” I appreciated her presence immensely.

**David Terrie** - December 10, 2020 at 08:20 PM

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“ Thank you, Millie, for all you have done for the city and for creating SUNO's School of Social Work.

**Ed Tedrow** - December 10, 2020 at 06:03 PM

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“ Charley Mack purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Millie Ruth McClelland Charles.



**Charley Mack** - December 10, 2020 at 12:56 PM

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“ I want to send condolences to Millie's daughter, H.M.K.Amen, her entire extended family, and the friends who knew and loved Millie. We all are aware of the incredible life Millie lived absolutely filled with incredible ideals and things she did to help her fellow human beings - like no other person I have ever known. But the memory which makes me feel her presence even now is that of a wonderful human being who, in a very simple, down to earth way, was a very warm, loving, caring, cheerful, passionate for justice and fairness for all, determined, respectful person. Embodied in all of this, she was a great listener. I knew Millie the entire time I lived in New Orleans - 1972 to 1984. From 1972 to 1976, I was the director of a delinquency prevention program, "Anchor Outreach", on Felicity St in the Irish Channel. We provided recreational activities and counseling services to teens in the area. We also provided internships to students from various colleges and universities in New Orleans, including SUNO. I had a great deal of interaction with Millie and her staff during that time. When our federal funding expired in 1976, Millie recruited me to teach in her social work program at SUNO and also serve as the director of the student internship program. Even though my family made the very difficult decision to move to Tallahassee in 1984, Millie, true to form, was very very gracious and even gave me the names of some people she knew in Tallahassee who may be able to help me if I needed help at any time. SO, THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES, MILLIE!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Charley Mack** - December 10, 2020 at 12:45 PM

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“ To the family my condolences for your loss. As a proud graduate of the 1977 class of the SUNO School of Social Work, I was inspired and motivated by Millie to achieve the highest level of professionalism throughout my career as a Social Worker, manager and an administrator. Thank you Millie.

**Shelby Price** - December 10, 2020 at 08:16 AM

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“ Dr. Charles was a source of inspiration in my life--a model of both fortitude and fun! We will never forget that full-hearted laugh! She showed us all how to "make good trouble" in her long and productive life. Rest in Power, Mama Millie! Best wishes to her good daughter, H. M. K. Amen, a steward of her mother's life and legacy, and a powerful spiritual source in her own right. Long life, dear sister!

Dorian Hastings

**Dorian Hastings** - December 09, 2020 at 05:09 PM

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“ As a proud alumni of SUNOs School of Social Work, I can say Dr. Charles had a profound, life changing affect on my life. I graduated from the school of Social Work in 1996 and because the program was guided by Dr. Charles in such a professional way I was able to turn that Masters Degree into a helping career that has had a positive affect on so many people. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Charles for her guidance and wisdom as the Dean of the School of Social Work. She was a wonderful role model and such a caring person. Her influence will be felt in New Orleans and around the world for many years to come.

Joan Laurendine Scanlan, LCSW

Joan Scanlan - December 09, 2020 at 02:53 PM

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“ SO sorry for the loss of Millie Charles. My condolences to the family. Graduated from school social work program with masters degree. LC S W now. TERRI Saunders Young

TERRI Saunders Young, LCSW - December 09, 2020 at 01:59 AM