

# LocalSunday

## A GULLAH *voice* *stilled*



DAVID LAUDERDALE • Staff photo

Flossie Stafford Washington's casket arrives in a wagon at First Union African Baptist Church.

### Flossie Stafford Washington laid to rest on the island she loved

**F**lossie Washington's burial on Daufuskie Island last week marked a changing of the guard.

"The keepers of the gate, of Daufuskie are now gone," said the Rev. Ervin Greene.

When Greene came to Daufuskie as a young man in the late 1960s, the flock of Gullah on the island that has no bridge was greater than 100.

On Tuesday, as Flossie was lowered into the Cooper River Cemetery beside her husband, Jake, that number has dwindled to fewer than 10.

"Blossom's gone," Greene said. "Deacon Hamilton's gone. Flossie was one of the last. If anyone asks you where the old people are, we're the old people now. The mantel falls to us."

Greene came from Patterson, N.J., to conduct the funeral. The familiar



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woodframe First Union African Baptist Church still stands in a hushed wild-wood.

On this day, the old sanctuary and balcony were full. Golf carts parked by the clear glass windows where wagons pulled by a marsh tacky, ox or bull stood during most of Flossie's life.

Flossie's white coffin, beneath mounds of fresh flowers, was pulled into the churchyard on a wagon. It was provided by family friend and Daufuskie businessman Wick Scurry.

He got Flossie's body and her family, which totals 10 children, 24 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren and 11 great-great-grandchildren, to Daufuskie from Hilton Head Island that day. Before the crowd of more than 200 left, he fed them a Lowcountry buffet at his Daufuskie Crab Company restaurant.

The Haig Point development also provided a ferry to Daufuskie and 20 golf carts. A number of volunteer drivers awaited the mourners at the dock.

A great-grandson serving in the Army came from Hawaii. He was in the mighty throng of family members who waited beneath the oaks and pines to file into the church.

The Rev. Lillian Mitchell of Hilton Head sang "I'm Going Home on the

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# VOICE

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Morning Train." Deirdra Mobley sang "It Is Well With My Soul." The Rev. Matherleen Snell sang "Take My Hand, Precious Lord."

After circling her Daufuskie home one last time, Flossie was buried as Greene prayed and the vault men nervously watched the barge they needed to catch back to the bustling world over the water.

Emory S. Campbell of Hilton Head, and the Rev. Greene, wondered if today's generation feels the same sense of responsibility that Flossie's did.

Greene said, "Their message was, 'Get something. Be somebody. Hold onto what you get.'"

## ISLAND GIRL

Flossie "Woy" Stafford Washington was born 88 years ago on Bull Island at the mouth of the May River.

She and her brother Thomas had some early schooling on Hilton Head before her family moved to Daufuskie when she was 10.

Thomas was the great storyteller.

"He could make a dog laugh," Greene said.

Jake Washington was Daufuskie's defacto mayor. He was Mr. Fix-It on an isolated island where cars were started by hooking two wires together, and a screwdriver could be found stuck in the ignition of a tour bus with no roof.

Jake was a waterman. He hauled oysters to market and the mail to Daufuskie. When he left to get the mail, he also got a handful of grocery lists. He brought tourists, preachers and teachers to the island, rain or shine.

"You could set your watch



DAVID LAUDERDALE • Staff photo

**The funeral for Flossie Stafford Washington, led by the Rev. Ervin Greene, filled the First Union African Baptist Church on Daufuskie Island on Tuesday.**

by him," Greene said.

Flossie was the quiet one.

She attended the Jane Hamilton School on Daufuskie.

During World War II, she worked at a Savannah shipyard that cranked out 88 liberty ships.

She had 15 children. Five died at a young age. She also raised five grandchildren and an adopted daughter.

She was the custodian at Daufuskie's two-room public schoolhouse.

She was an assistant to the island's last midwife, Sarah Grant.

She was known for her cooking, particularly Daufuskie's famous deviled crab. She picked several bushels of crab a week to fashion her delicacies, never skipping a beat with a house full of children.

She has an original recipe called "Smutter Fish" in Billie Burn's cookbook, "Stirrin' the Pots on Daufuskie."

In her final years, Scurry provided a daily cooked meal for Flossie. Volunteers from Haig Point delivered it, calling themselves "Flossie's Posse."

Flossie did not want to leave Daufuskie, but her children finally coaxed her to Hilton

Head where they could care for her 24/7. She died July 29.

Flossie once told Scurry, "I didn't know I was poor until I read it in the newspaper."

## 'THANK YOU, MAMA'

Margarite Washington was delegated to speak for the children at her mother's funeral.

Margarite and her brother Shermin were students in Pat Conroy's class on Daufuskie. She lives on Hilton Head but works at Haig Point, as well as the Beaufort County recycling center on Hilton Head.

Margarite made people laugh as she recalled lessons of her mother's life.

"I have never seen her get mad. But if you did, she would say what was on her mind, and that was the end of that.

"She said to always give to families that were less fortunate and God will always bless you.

"She said, 'You have six months to mind your business, and six months to leave other people's business alone. And you will be free for one year.'

"She said if you see a man with a suit and one with corduroy pants, choose the one with corduroy pants. She said

one is nothing but a showcas. "Mama told us never to buy a thing that you don't need.

"She told us to always pay your bills and always pay people back when you owe them.

"She told us to always keep grits, eggs and bacon in the house because if you have a storm you have something to eat.

"And the most important thing she said, 'Never ask God for money. Always ask him for help and strength.'

"My mother had a beautiful voice for singing. She said, 'What happened to y'all?'

"I remember Mama telling us to put God first in our lives.

"I remember Mama telling me don't let no job disrespect me. Tell them how you feel if it's going to cost you your job.

"I remember Mama telling me last week, 'When God is talking, be quiet.'

"Oh, I remember Mama putting us first.

"I remember Mama telling us don't let no man hit on us, and she meant it.

"I remember Mama telling us to have manners and wisdom and to always keep a job.

"I remember Mama telling us, 'Don't depend on a man. Always have your own.'

"I remember Mama telling us she wants the family to be close to each other and to work things out.

"I remember Mama going outside in the cold, washing our clothes on a washing board.

"I remember Mama feeding us first and then with what's left over, feeding herself.

"I remember Mama telling us every day is not going to be sunshine, but make the best of it.

"Rest in peace, because we know you made it.

"Thank you, Mama."

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