

## Outstanding Black Women of Yalobusha County

tory and economics in the public-school system for 30 years. Though she officially retired in 1997, she worked part-time until 2001. However, she remains a presence in her former students' lives. Every time she sees them, they invariably express appreciation for how she taught them and made them feel worthy.

Dorothy says she is proudest that she stayed in an area where her skills were most needed – teach-

ing students from low economic neighborhoods and those who did not desire or could not afford to go to the white private academies that sprang up after the mandatory integration. In a bit of turnabout, Dorothy noted that now many of her students offer their professional services to her.

Dorothy's parents provided her with what I would call a unique and atypical environment: no sharecropping, no servi-

tude or reliance on a boss-man. She and her siblings were taught black pride, independence and survival skills. They learned the value and benefits of owning land and saw firsthand the advantages and disadvantages of community service and civic duty. If I were to guess, no more than seven to 10 black families might have owned over 100 acres of land in Yalobusha County in the 1940s. Dorothy is deeply gratified that she

and her siblings have held on to every one of the 160 acres that her family farmed. Her mom and dad would be so proud!

The 2015 book Delta Jewels featured Dorothy along with other black Mississippi women, and Congressman Bennie Thompson honored her with a letter of commendation, a certificate and a special mention on his website and Facebook page during Black History Month. Dorothy A. Kee is still teaching!

## Dorothy A Kee: Through A Daughter's Eyes

By Syreeta Latrice Kee

When my grandmother, Clara Moody Smith, was pregnant with my mother – she would be the first of seven children – she and my grandfather, Clemmie, were in Spokane, Washington, where he was stationed in the Army. They hurried back to Mississippi before Dorothy was born because they wanted her to arrive in their home town of Coffeeville. They appreciated the importance of family, who were nearby.

Clemmie Smith's parents passed away early, and he and his brothers - all close in age - were charged with caring for their younger siblings. Strangely, all three of the ones attempting to run the household were drafted and sent into World War II.

With no one left to care for the younger ones, an older relative, Leora Ross, moved in to take over the reins. After Clemmie was discharged, he returned to the family home and decided to work the land. Leora, affectionately nicknamed Nola by his children, would remain with them for many years before moving to Chicago with her son.

A family of strong faith, the Smiths encouraged daily Bible reading and participated in all the services and activities at Smith Chapel Baptist Church. But while religious education clearly was important, the couple also emphasized secular education and hard work.

Given that the Smith's oldest three children were girls, Dorothy and her sisters handled many of the farm tasks usually given to boys. They milked cows in the morning before school, fed livestock, chopped and picked cotton and worked in the other fields, veget-

able gardens and truck patches.

In good natured fun, Dorothy's siblings crowned her the slowest churner in the south. But she took it as a challenge: The more her family teased her, the more aggressively she churned and the better the butter was. She found an added benefit: She became faster at almost everything, and Dorothy credits this early-learned- and -earned discipline as catalyst for much of what she achieved later in life.

Though many strong women influenced Dorothy, her mother and Nola stand out. She not only admired Clara's sense of style, homemaking skills, kind nature and calm demeanor, but also her ability to stand her ground and to perform manual labor with seeming ease. Dorothy was especially amazed at how well Clara could take the least of things and make the best of things.

Nola kept Dorothy and her siblings in awe when she balanced pots of water on her head walking uphill from the spring, started fires from rocks, taught them to gather and prepare poke salad (sallet) and told them stories of days gone by. It never crossed their minds that she was simply living her cultural history.

In school Dorothy closely observed her teachers, marveling at the way they cared for so many children and were able to impart their knowledge and skill. Three made indelible impressions: Sara James, Elvira Jackson and Henrienne Williams. Though other career options were opening for black women, these teachers inspired Dorothy to follow in their footsteps.

Even though these were lean, substandard times

in schools for Mississippi blacks, Dorothy still had fond memories of the many activities she took part in – field days, dramatic productions, oratorical contests and choral music competitions. These provided an outlet while fostering personal development, cooperation and competitiveness.

Among the most enjoyable times were those when all the schools in the county gathered, and she held numerous positions and participated in several ministries over the years.

However, she still serves as secretary, teen Sunday school teacher and a deaconess. She keeps busy serving on committees, boards and consulting among other things. Dorothy loves to read and encourages others, young and old, to read as well. Some of her other hobbies are watching DIY shows and attempting some of the features, cooking and writing.

She and my father, Nathaniel, have been married for 51 years and have two grown children, my brother, Kevin Erlander, and me, Syreeta Latrice. They have two grandchildren.

Looking back on her youth in comparison to milestones over the years, my mother is marvelously amazed by God's grace, and continues to celebrate His mercy and favor in her life.

started teaching in Coffeeville in August. Dorothy joined her husband's family church, Pleasant Grove Baptist in Coffeeville's Bryant Community where she held numerous positions and participated in several ministries over the years.

She and my father, Nathaniel, have been married for 51 years and have two grown children, my brother, Kevin Erlander, and me, Syreeta Latrice. They have two grandchildren.

Family members even older than her sometimes ask, "How do you remember when that happened?" "I don't," she tells them. "I remember hearing 'them' retelling it while we were eavesdropping outside." Years later, after graduating from Central High School at the top of her class, she would put these skills to use.

Dorothy remembers the year she graduated from Alcorn State University - 1967 - as a busy one. She graduated in May, got married in June and

## Thirty-Ninth Annual Watermelon Pageant

Saturday, April 13, 2019  
at 5:00 p.m.

The Thirty-Ninth Annual Watermelon Pageant, sponsored by the Junior Auxiliary of Water Valley Inc., will be held Saturday, April 13 in the Water Valley Civic Auditorium at 5 P.M.

All contestants must be a resident of Yalobusha County. Formal wear is not required. Contestants will be judged solely on stage personality. Early-bird entry is \$25.00. The required date is Saturday, March 30, 2019 by 5:00 P.M. All entries after this date will be \$35.00 and must be turned in by Saturday, April 6, 2019 at 5:00 P.M. No late entries accepted.

### THE WATERMELON QUEEN WILL RECEIVE A \$1,000 SCHOLARSHIP!!

Contestants will also have the opportunity to compete in Most photogenic. The fee is \$10.00 and is limited to one photo per contestant. Contestants will also have the opportunity to compete in People's Choice, where the audience will choose their favorite contestant in each category by donating money to JA. These donations may be collected before the pageant if the contestant chooses to do so. The money will be put into the contestants People's Choice bag on pageant night.

Practice for Petite Miss - Miss Teenage will be the morning of April 13, 2019 from 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM. Watermelon Queen contestants will practice from 10:30 - 11:00 AM. Each Watermelon Queen candidate will be asked to introduce herself and answer a question. Contestants cannot be married or have been married and/or have children.

Return applications & fees to one of the following locations: Hair Trentz, Family Hairloom, GG's Flowers & Gifts, South Main, or mail to Water Valley Junior Auxiliary, Attn: Pageant Chairperson, P.O. Box 92, Water Valley, MS 38965.

### CIRCLE YOUR CHILD'S CATEGORY

#### GIRLS

3-4 Years Old - Petite Miss  
5-6 Years Old - Tiny Miss  
7-8 Years Old - Little Miss  
9-11 Years Old - Miss Pre-Teen  
12-14 Years Old - Junior Miss

15-17 Years Old - Miss Teenage  
18-25 Years Old - WM Queen  
(17 if High School Senior)

#### BOYS

3-4 Years Old - Petite Mr.  
5-6 Years Old - Tiny Mr.

### Official Entry Form

Contestant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Photogenic: Yes or No

Contestant's Hobbies: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Remember you must be a resident of Yalobusha County.  
No Entries will be accepted after 5:00 P.M. on Saturday, April 6, 2019

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

Contestants will be categorized according to their age as of April 13, 2019

PETITE MISS \_\_\_\_\_ TINY MISS \_\_\_\_\_ LITTLE MISS \_\_\_\_\_

MISS PRETEEN \_\_\_\_\_ JUNIOR MISS \_\_\_\_\_ MISS TEEN AGE \_\_\_\_\_

WM QUEEN \_\_\_\_\_ PETITE MR \_\_\_\_\_ TINY MR \_\_\_\_\_



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