



Alton's Lula Simms turns 100 in style, she gives thanks for her long and beautiful life

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Sunday was a special time for a well-known Alton citizen, Lula Simms, who marked her 100th birthday at Open Door Fellowship Church.

Simms taught in Alton Schools for 42 years before retiring in 1986.

Lula's answer to living such a long and beautiful life was summed up "by serving God."

"God means everything in the world to me," Lula said. "He was my teacher and my everything and is my keeper."

Ruby Madison, another area resident, said Lula has inspired her for much of her life.

Madison said Lula said a lot of prayers to reach the age of 100 and now has made it.

"She is like my grandmother," Madison said. "I was telling someone I was looking at her and she reminds me of my grandmother. My grandmother has been gone for years, but was a lot like Mrs. Simms. Mrs. Simms reads and is still really active. She isn't able to be active in the community anymore, but she loves people and would do anything for anybody. She has a beautiful spirit about her."

Lula was born on October 8, 1917, in Redwood, Mississippi, near Vicksburg. Her parents were Ruben and Ledora Henderson. When she was just a year old, her aunt and uncle Pearl and Edward Singleton adopted her and by age 4 they moved to Alton. Her uncle and his cousin opened a barber shop and she stated she has been in Alton ever since then.

She received her education in Alton schools and is a graduate of Alton High, so the Alton community has a deep place in her heart. She attended and graduated from a Junior College in Quindora, Kan., and then the Pittsburgh Kansas Teacher's College where she received her degree in education. She was married to not one but two Tuskegee Airmen. Her first husband was Beryl Wyatt, who was injured in line of duty, died and was buried in Italy. The second husband, Staff Sergeant Leland Simms, married Lula in 1946. She returned to Alton in 1950 with a teaching position and never looked back.

With teaching having many opportunities and her main priority, she did have other interests; she sang in musical groups: Opera in the Barn, The Koraliers, The Luther Ingram Singers and The Allen singers. With much delight she shared the "thrill of her life" opera experience as the lead singer in "Die Fiedermaus" in Waterford, Ireland.

“I met Mrs. Lula Simms in 1956 at Central Elementary School where I was a third-grade student,” Joyce Henderson said. “Mrs. Edith Brewer was my teacher. But I could always hear this sweet, kind, patient and motherly voice when I stood outside her classroom and listened as she spoke to her students. Some teachers at the school were so forceful in speaking and scared us. But Mrs. Simms always spoke with encouraging authority. She was not my classroom teacher, but I have always looked up to her for life coaching advice. Her life has brought such enrichment to mine and others. Her life has been filled with many challenges and hardships to overcome.”





