

Nana's 95-Year Journey

By Teri Miller Barker
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"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength, they be fourscore years..." ~Psalm 90:10



Lois Taylor and Teryn Barker

In Psalm 90, Verse 10, the Bible tells us, essentially, that you're given 70 years on this earth, and if you're a strong person, you may even make it to 80. So there's a lot to be said about Lois Taylor, who just celebrated her 95th birthday. Strong, self-reliant, determined, wise, and above all, abundantly blessed.

She was born Lois Curtis in Seymour, Indiana on May 12, 1911. At the time of her birth, President William H. Taft was in office, and the National Urban League was a newly formed organization that was starting its mission to secure equal housing, employment and education for Colored people. Also born that year were Ronald Reagan, who went on to become the United States' 40th president, and Tennessee Williams, one of America's greatest playwrights. She was two years old at the time of former slave and Underground Railroad conductor, Harriet Tubman's death, and four when civil rights activist, Booker T. Washington passed away.

Ms. Taylor was too young to remember those icons and events of American and Black History, but vividly remembers when soldiers returned home from World War I between 1917 and 1918. "I was about 6 or 7 years old at that time," recalls Ms. Taylor. "I can remember seeing the men who came back from the war riding the train on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B & O) that passed my home. The blacks and whites were in separate cars." At that time, Jim Crow was the dominant force that influenced the oppression and discrimination of African American people.

Orphaned at age 13 as a result of her mother's death, she lived with her grandmother until she was 18 years old. In 1929, she moved to Dayton, Ohio to live with her Aunt Ethel and Uncle Ernest. During that time she met Clark Taylor, a young man who shined shoes at Turner's Hat & Shoe Shop, where her uncle was also employed. Four years later, the couple married and started a family of their own. They had two daughters and a son, LaVonne, Doris and Richard. She became a widow after 53 years of marriage.

During her early adult years, she cleaned the homes of wealthy White or Jewish people, while her husband worked at Inland, a division of General Motors. After spending years working for other people, she decided that she wanted to start a business of her own. She opened Nana's Jollytime Nursery, one of Dayton's first black-owned daycare centers, on Delphos Avenue in 1967. The daycare became a family operation that remained open for over 35 years. Given the

name from her oldest grandchild, Eric, a toddler at the time, the name caught on, and to this day, she is affectionately referred to as “Nana.”

Not one to sit around being idle, Nana gets up every morning and reads her Bible. She stays updated on current events by reading the daily paper, and keeps herself polished by getting her hair and nails done regularly. And at Christmas time, she gets everyone together by hosting the annual family dinner at her home.

At age 88, she came out of retirement to keep her great-granddaughter, Teryn, 7, who is now a second-grader at Corpus Christi. They share a special bond that has been both, rewarding and educational. “Nana is my angel,” said Teryn, with a wide smile on her face. “And plus, she never spansks me.” The two of them spend time reading books and magazines, and reciting Mother Goose Nursery rhymes to each other.

Nana has lived to see 17 presidents, major accomplishments in civil rights, and remarkable advancements in medicine and technology. As the matriarch of a huge, ever growing family, she has been blessed to see four generations of her descendents. She has three children, thirteen grandchildren, twenty-one great-grands, and three great-great grandchildren. Her children LaVonne, Doris and Richard, are proud of her strong will and determination to achieve her goals, and say they thank her for “leading us as children, always carrying more than her share, and for lifting the spirits of all those around her.”

Although she never drank or smoked, Nana attributes her rich, long life to paying her tithes in church, and simply “loving, helping, and caring about other people.”