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Connellsville Canteen lady remembered, dies at 106

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Submitted Ida Mae Alsop of Connellsville died Tuesday at age 106. She is pictured with Dr. Twila Lee Wynn, her foster daughter and Highland Baptist Church pastor.

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Ida Mae Alsop lost her only child, Marlene, five days after birth in 1928, but she had an endless supply of mother’s love for others she helped to raise in the decades that followed.

Likely Connellsville’s oldest citizen at the time, Ida Mae died Tuesday evening at 106 in Harmon House in Mt. Pleasant.

“She was my foster mother,” said Dr Twila Lee Wynn, whose loving

more than a foster mother for me, truly.”



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p began in 1974. “But she was

Twila, who is Ida Mae's pastor at Highland Baptist Church on Eighth Street, lost her mother, Olivia Vaughn Wynn, in 1962, the result of an aneurysm that burst.

At 16, Twila came into Ida Mae's life.

"The caseworker took me to her on June 3, 1974, and she was sitting on her porch with her sister, Gertrude Allen," Twila recalled. "She said, 'You can call me Miss Ida or Aunt Ida, everyone else does."

"From that day to the last, I called her Aunt Ida."

The last day came peacefully, Twila said.

Ida Mae's death came from the effects of time, not any recent illness, she said.

"Right up to the end she was at peace and in her right mind," Twila said. "She went to be with God in a natural state."

Ida Mae was born July 4, 1914, one the 16 children of the late Lily Mae and William Meadows.

She married James Alsop.



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Together, they owned the former Alsop's Dinette on Crawford Road, said Twila, calling them trailblazers at a time when African American business ownership was not common.

James became Connellsville's first black police officer, and Ida Mae was employed for years as a Connellsville School District cafeteria worker.

Over the years, Ida Mae held many positions at Highland Baptist, including Mother of the Church, and was a Sunday school teacher until October 2019, Twila said.

"She was groomed to be a mentor from the time she was a teenager, and she was a mentor to many," Twila noted. "She served the community and the church and was dearly valued."

Community service included time volunteered at the World War II-era Connellsville Canteen.

During the war, about 800 area women, including Ida Mae, offered food, coffee and friendship to U.S. military personnel passing through Connellsville via train.

A story about Ida Mae was included in Summer Issue of Crossroads magazine, a publication of the Fayette County Cultural Trust, which operates the Connellsville Canteen and Museum on West Crawford Avenue.



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Resembling a train station, the Canteen includes a World War II museum and celebrates the original Canteen ladies.

Executive Director Dan Cocks said he cannot imagine any other Canteen ladies are still alive. The death of Ida Mae marks the passing of an era in the city.

Twila said she was one of seven foster children Ida Mae helped to raise.

Ida Mae was the actual aunt of four of the children, Joyce, Charlene, Joey and James Anderson. Their mother, who Ida Mae always called "Wee Wee," was the youngest of her siblings.

Twila said Ida Mae didn't try to be her mother, "but she gave me love just like she had birthed me."

And Ida Mae had plenty of it to spread around.

"That's what I know about this woman, and it will be part of my sermon Sunday," Twila said. "She has shown me what the love of Jesus looks like in a human being. I actually know because of her.

" ... She exemplified the love of Jesus Christ."

Twila said she has benefited from the wisdom handed her by Ida Mae.

"I am the woman I am today because of her love," she said. "I am what God meant for me to be, but without Aunt Ida's guidance and love, I could have been something less than what I am today."

The pastor equates being part of Ida Mae's life with personal success.



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"I am the foster child whose life was totally changed because of her," Twila said, her voice halting and unsteady. "When you ask if this is hard on me, I have not had a broken down-crying moment because I know she is with the Lord.

She said the cracking in her voice is out of joy.

"It is the memories that can never be taken away, the love in my heart," she said. "I have no regrets at all; mine is the total joy of knowing her."

Twila said Ida Mae's role as a foster mother was built on love. "I thank God for allowing the two of us to be put together," she said. "It had to be part of His plan and it's a gift."

Funeral arrangements are under the direction of the Vito C. Martucci Funeral Home.



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