



Eunice Stripling Toms

August 10, 1920 - October 8, 2013

Eunice Stripling Toms, 93, of Wauchula, passed away on Tuesday, October 8, 2013 in Sebring with family members by her side.

Eunice Eugenia Stripling was born in Gray, Houston County, Georgia on August 10, 1920. She was the third of four children born to John Robert Stripling, Sr., and Estelle Greene Stripling. In 1925, her family moved to Hialeah, Florida. The 1926 hurricane that transported Eunice and her mother an entire city block was a harbinger of economic and political tragedy, but in the midst of gathering storms, a good future was on the way.

As a University of Miami student, she met a young and handsome aviation cadet at the base of the staircase leading to the grand Ballroom of the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, starting a romance that would last over sixty years. That cadet, Russell David Toms, and she married on August 14, 1942. Over the course of their 58 year marriage, they would move frequently, serve numerous congregations, experience many challenges, and celebrate many joys.

With World War II raging, the couple traveled across the country while the newly commissioned Russ taught air navigation at numerous Army Air Corps training installations. After Russ deployed to serve in the Pacific Theater, their family began with the arrival of their first child Eunice Eugenia (Jr.) who was

followed by Rosalyn Dale, Russell David, Jr., and Melissa Estelle.

After the war, Russ, a University of Miami grad, served for a short time as a civil engineer and then responded to the call to become a Presbyterian minister. A woman of deep faith, Eunice was her husband's partner in ministry in each church served. This journey of faith took them to seminary in Georgia, student pastorates in Alabama, and pastorates in many cities across southeast Florida, before they settled in Wauchula in the early seventies. Russ "retired" from the ministry in 1985 but their ministry continued as they began new churches.

Eunice embodied the strength of a "Steel Magnolia", bolstering that strength with her faith, using it to guide her family as it grew, and to help others in tough times. A consummate Bible teacher, many individuals and groups sought her out for her insights, counsel, and instruction. When asked which version or translation of the Bible she would recommend for new believers, she sagely advised, "The one they will read".

In addition to teaching, her ministry included tangible help in time of need. An example of this was her response to Hurricane Andrew. She organized the collection of relief supplies, filled a semi truck and arranged for distribution with churches in Miami.

Eunice was preceded in death by her husband, Rev. Russell David Toms, Sr., her sister, Ann Stripling Boyd, and her brother, John Robert Stripling, Jr. She is survived by her sister, Ruby Stripling Swezy; four children, Rev. Eunice "Junior" McGarrahan (J. Richard), Rosalyn Dale Moore (Robert), Russell David Toms, Jr. (Leslie), and Melissa Estelle Toms (Steven McGowan); twelve grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren; and her weekly prayer group "girls".

The world is a better place for having Eunice here with us. She will continue to live in our hearts and memories. Eunice touched many lives in many ways, enriching them with the love of God that she felt and shared. She will continue to nurture our lives from fond memories. The family gives special thanks to the extraordinary care by Good Shepherd Hospice in Sebring.

A private service will be held at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida on October 18, 2013, where she will then be interred with her husband. A reception will be held at her home at 7:00 p.m. Thursday, October 17th.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Good Shepherd Hospice, 1110 Hammock Rd., Sebring, FL 33870, or Faith Presbyterian Church, 114 N. 7th Ave., Wauchula, FL 33873.

Tribute Wall

BK

“ So very sorry to learn of Eunice's passing. Although I only knew her for a short time she always had a happy smile and kind word for me when I attended the Presbyterian Church in Wauchula before moving to Sarasota. I looked forward to seeing her sitting in the pew every Sunday and know she will be missed by all her family and friends. We can take comfort in knowing she's with the Lord now.
Bonnie Kiger

Bonnie Kiger - October 14, 2013 at 01:43 PM

DW

“ I was one of "her girls" as she called us and words cannot express how much she meant to me and my family. One thing I know for sure, she would not want accolades to herself but would want her Lord and Savior lifted up. When we would be all upset about straying members of our family she would say... "Don't talk to them about God...talk to God about them" and when we were having a struggle with loving someone...she would say.... "Ask God to give you the love you don't feel...and He will"...and He didmany times...she taught us to love the Word and to pray about everything....I look forward to the day I will see her again....I remember as a new Christian feeling so inadequate because I knew nothing about the Word....she told me.... "God counts faithfulness" and I still remember thinking....I can be faithful and I will try with His help....I was truly blessed by the family for including her girls in the obit....love you all and will continue to pray for you as she asked us to.

Didi

Didi White - October 14, 2013 at 12:56 PM

JH

“ I have always called Mrs. Toms my spiritual mother. She taught me to read and study the Bible and she taught me to pray and keep on praying. My daughters have often heard me say, "Mrs. Toms always said...", so they are blessed by her teaching and Godly example too.

She has touched the lives of so many young people with the gospel and her legacy is remarkable and distinguished.

I know Jesus and a great crowd of witnesses welcomed her home on Tuesday and it was a joyful time in heaven.

David, Junior, Dale and Missy, your are in my prayers always as your Mother taught me to pray. God bless you and your families.

Jeri Hash - October 13, 2013

Jeri Hash - October 13, 2013 at 08:29 AM

MR

“ For more than 18 years on Tuesday at noon at her home, Mrs. Toms taught a small group of women the truth of the Scripture and how to love God, our families and our fellowman more fully. She was so loving yet stern in her teachings; she would never let us get away with anything! When I once complained about a situation, she admonished me by saying "And how do you think Jesus feels when you treat him that way?" Needless to say, I said no more. She was the most influential woman in my life after my mother. I loved her dearly. She is with her Lord today! Praise the Lord! My love to all the family. Mary Rollins

Mary Rollins - October 10, 2013 at 07:41 PM

PN

“ During our membership and service to God through Faith Presbyterian Church we grew to love Eunice and Russ. Eunice was our Sunday School teacher and we respected her so much for her knowledge and understanding of God's word, Her memory will live on in our hearts and we rejoice knowing we will be together again in glory. May God comfort you during this special time.

Gordon & Phyllis Norris

Phyllis Norris - October 10, 2013 at 07:31 AM

ER

“ Rev. and Mrs. Toms were an inspiration to me and I've loved them dearly. So sorry for your loss. She made the most beautiful gingerbread houses.

Edna Roberts - October 09, 2013 at 02:49 PM

PS

I have never met Mrs. Toms, but wish that I had had the privilege. I am sure that I could have learned much from her as a pastor's wife. My sympathy to you, Eunice, and to all in the family.

Peggy Bell

Peggy Bell - Mrs. B. Clayton Bell, Sr. - October 13, 2013 at 01:09 PM