



Irma Jean McIntosh Coleman

September 17, 1938 - December 16, 2024

Irma Jean McIntosh Coleman: A Life of Service, Love, and Legacy

On December 16th, 2024, the Lord called home Irma Jean McIntosh Coleman, a remarkable woman whose vibrant spirit, trailblazing contributions, and deep love for family and community have left an indelible mark on all who knew her. At the age of 86, Irma Jean was welcomed into heaven, where she was reunited with her beloved parents, Laura Celesta McIntosh and Prince Joseph McIntosh, and her dearly missed brother, Prince Joseph Jr.

Born on September 17, 1938, in Jacksonville, Florida, Irma's life was one of purpose and passion from the start. A proud alumna of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), she earned a degree in education in 1961, a journey that would lay the foundation for a career dedicated to uplifting others. Irma was deeply inspired by her hero and friend, forerunner and pioneer, Mary McCloud Bethune, but it was her own exceptional talents as an educator that caught the attention of a superintendent all the way from Phoenix, Arizona, who hired her immediately upon graduation. It was in Phoenix that she met and married Austin H. Coleman, and together they welcomed their son, Austin H. Coleman II and daughter, Sonja Celeste Coleman.

The family eventually made their home in Minneapolis, MN, where Irma and Austin added their third child, Laurie Denise Coleman, to the family, and where Irma earned her Masters and Education Specialist degrees from St. Thomas University. Irma's professional and personal life would become a testament to her unwavering commitment to education, equity, and community service. She made history as the first African American teacher and later as the first African American principal in the Bloomington Public Schools, where her influence shaped generations of students.

Irma's excellence did not go unnoticed. Her work, intelligence, and radiant personality (always complemented by her impeccable style - regal outfits, elegant hats, and furs) caught the attention of Governor Arne Carlson, who appointed her as the Assistant Commissioner of Education for the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning. In this position, she became a beacon for educational progress, leaving an imprint on the learning experiences of countless children across Minnesota. Irma was also honored with the prestigious Bush Educational Fellowship, which included an exclusive

invitation to the White House, where she had the privilege of meeting President Bill Clinton.

Irma's impact did not stop there. After completing her work for the governor, she became a principal at two more schools in Minneapolis, she touched the lives of hundreds of young people, many of whom became lifelong friends. Even after retiring from her position as principal, Irma's passion for education continued. She ran for and won a seat on the Hopkins Public School Board, a position she held for two terms, with her pride and joy in seeing her eldest grandson, Princeton, attend the very schools she worked to improve. After stepping down from the school board in 2019, she redirected her boundless energy to church and community pursuits, always with a heart full of love for others.

Irma leaves behind a family who adored her and a community that will forever cherish her. She is survived by her sister, Lorraine (Harvey) McIntosh Witherspoon and her loving children: Austin (Melissa), Celeste (Adefola), and Laurie, as well as her eight grandchildren: Princeton, Felecia, Elisha (Tristhen), Isaiah, Sophia, Josiah, Gabriella ("Gigi"), and Isabella, all of whom were the light of her life and the subject of endless pride and joy.

Irma's legacy is one of unwavering devotion, boundless love, and deep faith. Her roots in the AME Church ran deep, and her commitment to St. Peter's AME was evident in the many roles she embraced-serving multiple terms as a Trustee, as President of the Grant Missionary Society, and as Director of the Young People's Department (YPD). She was a guiding presence in the church, a Godmother to many who walked through its doors. Irma's influence extended far beyond her church family; she was honored with a Golden Life Membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and a Life Membership in Jack & Jill of America, where she served as President of both local chapters. Her passion for civic engagement was demonstrated through her work with the League of Women Voters, where she encouraged students to register to vote, and as a dedicated poll worker during numerous elections. Irma's contributions to education, community leadership, and the church earned her a plethora of awards, evidence of her tireless commitment to making the world a better place.

Irma was more than an educator; she was a mentor, a leader, a gatherer, a friend, and most of all, a beloved mother and grandmother. Her warmth, wisdom, and love will forever remain in the hearts of those who were fortunate enough to know her. We honor her beautiful life with deep gratitude, knowing that her spirit will live on in every life she touched.

Irma Jean McIntosh Coleman was a beacon of light during her time on earth, and now she shines with brilliance as she beholds her Lord, her Savior, Jesus Christ!

Cemetery Details

Hillside Crematory

2610 19th Ave NE
Minneapolis, MN 55418

Tribute Wall

NM

“ You were an inspiration to our entire family. We remember the many family reunions and that beautiful surprise birthday party in Jacksonville Florida. We arranged our vacation so we could attend. We were happy to share that day in Dr. McIntosh’s home. We got to see many of the family that we had not seen in years. Your vibrant personality made you such a dynamic person. We shared pictures and everyone got to introduce themselves. We love and will miss you. We love you but God loves you more. You have earned your wings. I can hear them saying at Heavens gate. “ Well done my good and faithful servant “. You have completed a job on earth and now you will start a remarkable life in Heaven. Deepest love and sympathy
James and Nettie McIntosh

Nettie McIntosh - December 28, 2024 at 06:10 AM



“ I met Irma this year at Life Time fitness, Water aerobics. we had coffee several times at Caribou coffee. Then Irma invited me to have coffee at her house . when I came, she had a full breakfast made not just coffee and cookies. I asked about her family. so I was given a tour with pictures of children and grand children..she was very proud of everyone and their education..she also had photos with the Obama’s ..She had so much of her own accomplishments to be very proud... lovely lady..,I will miss her..I owe her coffee at my house.

Mary Lou Peterson - December 27, 2024 at 02:56 PM



“ Linda Lang Hullett (61yr) 😊 5th - 6th Cedarcrest School 1974-1975

December 27, 2024 at 12:27 AM

BP

“ Mrs. Coleman was my 6th grade teacher at Cedarcrest Elementary in Bloomington. I believe it was her first year teaching there. I remember her with warmth, and I remember how she encouraged me with my love of reading.

I have read the full obituary of Mrs. Coleman's life and remember how much I liked her as a teacher. Now I realize even more what a special soul she was.

My sincere condolences to the Coleman family. May you find peace in your memories. God bless.

Bonnie Polk

Bonnie Polk - December 26, 2024 at 09:20 PM

DO

“ Back in the '60s Irma Coleman was my teacher in grade school. She had a true love for her students. She helped inspire and instill the trades of hard work, fairness and the love of learning. Decades later her impact is still felt. She made me a better person. Sending love, prayers and strength.

Dr. Walter Ohrbom - December 26, 2024 at 07:49 PM

RD

“ Irma Coleman is forever in the hearts of our family knowing her as the most passionate teacher/educator in Bloomington public schools. She was a teacher for one of my sons and every time Iran into her for many years she always greeted me with “How is my boy?” Checking up on how he was doing - never forgetting him! She left a great imprint on him and our entire family! Condolences on the loss of this great lady!

Ruth Dickey - December 26, 2024 at 11:43 AM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Irma Jean McIntosh Coleman.



December 23, 2024 at 06:27 PM

DJ

“ My Condolences to the family during the loss of such a beautiful person. Praying for the family during the loss of such a wonderful friend. Really remember the times we worked in the Sunday School, Christian Board of Education and Plays for Christmas and Easter Programs. it was such a pleasure working with your mother. God has another Angel. Laurie, Celeste and Austin may God bless you and your family . David Jackson

David Jackson - December 22, 2024 at 10:30 PM

A(

Condolences to the family ❤️ We cherish many memories of this family. She was our class leader at St Peter's when we moved to MN. Showed my family love like family. Prayers for you all.

Angela Brumfield (Barnett) - December 25, 2024 at 11:13 AM

SM

such a wonderful woman. she was my grade school teacher & I remember being in awe of her. she had such style, class & flair. even at my young age it was obvious to me how much she cared about me as a student individually & everyone else in the class too. she really left a lasting impression on me. may your memories comfort you in this time of loss.

susan mccarthy - December 27, 2024 at 09:07 PM

LK

I met Principal Coleman only once, but that morning changed me. I was new to Bloomington Public Schools, and public schools in general, and, trying to make a connection, spent summer mornings training to try to join the high school Cross Country team by running through the park near Ridgeview Elementary School. I needed a bathroom one morning, and Principal Coleman invited me into the school to use theirs. She kindly and easily engaged me in conversation, not only inviting me into her office to see her African elephant collection, but to learn more about me and why she saw me outside so many mornings. We talked for almost an hour. Principal Coleman, in one conversation, took a timid, displaced young girl and invited her into the Bloomington Public Schools family, gave her an ally to return to, and the encouragement to show up in high school with dreams and goals and confidence. One easy conversation truly changed me and the way I approached public school. Thank you, Principal Coleman, for your kindness to me that day.

Since then-

I was captain of the cross country team my senior year

I am a secondary teacher in Bloomington schools

My two sons attended Ridgeview

I still think of Principal Coleman when I visit Ridgeview

Lisa Kiner - January 07, 2025 at 10:29 AM