

# Mildred Peppers keeps going after column

## Cancer fighter gives up Sunday School Lesson

BY FELECIA PIGGOTT-LONG  
FOR THE CHRONICLE

For the past 17 years, Mildred Peppers, a seven-year cancer survivor, prepared the Sunday School Lesson column for The Chronicle. But her column has been missing from the newspaper since Oct. 15.

Her absence has caused consternation among Chronicle readers.

One called The Chronicle frantic about not seeing the column. The reader attends Goler Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church. She said her church used the same Sunday school lesson and church members used her column to help them understand it better. She also said Peppers' column was "very biblical."

"We enjoyed her presentation of it," the reader said.

Peppers used the Scriptures from an international Sunday school lesson product to reach across denominations. She retired from writing the column when she began undergoing a new round of chemotherapy.

Peppers recalls that she began writing her column in 1999, when Winston-Salem hosted the CIAA Tournament. She was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2009.

In 1999, she said, a friend asked her to share her Sunday school lessons with the community.

"I asked my husband, Ronnie, if he thought I should do it. He said, 'You know you want to do it. Girl, go ahead and write the article,'" Peppers said. "I decided that I would present a slightly different perspective than what the author had written in the traditional Sunday school book. I wanted the readers to know that the Lord will reveal truth in different ways. I don't want them to be closed because some person with a Ph.D. shared a certain interpretation."

Peppers continued to explain. "I have thoroughly enjoyed writing the Sunday School Lesson. It was never a burden to me. I did not want to give it up, but during this second round of chemo, I was so sick. I was finding it hard to meet the deadline," she said. "I thought that the people deserved better than this. Several people have asked me when I am going to start back writing the column."

[The column will resume in this issue of The Chronicle on the Religion page with a new columnist.]

While Peppers goes through her cancer treatment and recovery, she does not mind sharing her story because her words might help somebody else. She is grateful for her family and their support. She has three daughters — Frances Peppers, Blanche Sawyer and Joniece Pledger. She and her husband, Ronnie Peppers, were married 34 years before his death.

Peppers is grateful for the Health and Wellness Ministry at Emmanuel Baptist Church because it sponsored a six-week session on colon cancer at



Peppers

church. Following the sessions, she had her baseline colon screening. Later the cancer spread to the breast and the lung.

First Lady Sarah Mendez has been a great encouragement to her, she said, as she and Peppers walk the common road of breast cancer. Her new chemo cocktail has presented a challenge to her, but she will continue to walk by faith and live the life she wrote about.

Although Peppers is retiring from the column, she still loves Sunday School. She has been a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church for 40 years, where the Rev. Dr. John Mendez is her pastor. She has served as the intermediate Sunday school teacher of teens and as the superintendent. She also taught adult Sunday School classes and many special Christian Education programs.

"Sunday School is the fertile ground for leaders. That's where you can groom them. They can see themselves in the Scripture and apply it to their lives," said Peppers. "I don't mean indoctrination. The Scriptures don't mean anything unless you can apply them to your life. You can

read the Christmas story over and over, but unless you see yourself in the story, what does it mean to you?"

Peppers sees herself in the person of Mary.

"I went through the ostracism of having babies and not being married. I remember the things people said about me. In those days, single, pregnant girls were put out of school and they were put out of church," Peppers said. "They did not care where you went because you were a bad influence."

Peppers also sees herself in Jesus.

"Jesus was an outsider. Because of his maneuvers, he became an insider. Society threw me to the outskirts, but Jesus drew the circle bigger," she said.

According to Peppers, writing the column usually would take about four hours. She would usually read the lesson in the book and in three different types of Bibles on Monday. She would wait until the Spirit led her to write the lesson.

"I get excited when the lesson is in the New Testament. I like to read that part of the Bible that says 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.' This verse keeps me going. It keeps me humble. Sometimes church folk can get real holy. This verse helps me keep my feet on the ground," Peppers said.

"I usually taught teens in Sunday school. My goal was to make the lesson real for them. I tried to make the Scripture real for them. I let them know that they

did not have to wait to get real old in order to love the Word. I let them know that they can embrace all of it and still keep their 'cool points.' I guess today, they would call it 'swag.'

"Sometimes I would stop and read what I had written, and it was saying absolutely nothing. I had to go back to the drawing board," Peppers said. "The editor Kevin Walker was patient with me. I told him I am a dinosaur in the age of computers, but I will learn. When Veronica Bitting, another church member, taught me how to email my articles, I thought I was something special," she said.

Managing Editor  
Donna Rogers contributed to this article.

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## Moore becomes WSFD's first black female battalion chief



Photo by Todd Luck

Fire Battalion Chief Shirese Moore with the SUV that District 3 battalion chiefs drive.

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

When Shirese Moore became a battalion chief for the Winston-Salem Fire Department (WSFD) last month, she became the first African-American woman to hold that rank in WSFD history.

Moore, who was born and raised in Winston-Salem, was in her 30s when she decided to try firefighting. She had worked as a medical secretary for more than ten years and found the job had become too predictable. She had a friend who dreamed of being a firefighter and who she was helping train for the profession's physical entry tests. She said hearing about the profession made her want to try it. She applied with the WSFD and in 1999, passed the agility test and the other requirements to become a firefighter. She said that although it didn't pay as much as her old job at the beginning, it was far more rewarding. She said she liked the unpredictable challenges of the job, never knowing what will happen next. But ultimately it's helping others that has kept her in the profession.

"One thing we do know is when we go, we're needed," she said.

Moore was first assigned to Central Fire Station One, a two-company station located on North Marshall Street. She said it

was an adjustment to suddenly live and sleep under the same roof as nine white males during their 24-hour shifts.

"No one talked like me, no one acted like me, no one looked like me," she said.

The fire captain gave up his sleeping quarters and bathroom to give her some privacy. She said that with more modern fire stations, there are separate rooms and bathrooms that female firefighters can use.

She said she was one of only seven females in the WSFD at the time and there were no accommodations made on the physical demands of the job. She was expected to pull her weight just like the other firefighters.

"It was truly the first time that it hit me, that it slapped me in the face, this is a man's world," she said.

Though she had three months of training, she said she still had a lot to learn. She said the firefighters at her station took her under their wing, teaching her something new every day.

She climbed through the ranks becoming a fire engineer and then a captain, a position she held for more than nine years. She applied for battalion chief this year because she wanted to be more involved in the direction of the department. There were 25 applicants and several months of assessments and tests for the position. Only four

were chosen as battalion chief.

While she's the first black female battalion chief in the WSFD, she's only the second woman ever to hold that position with the department. She said it's not just how few females there are in the department, but how long they last, as it takes many years of experience to become a battalion chief. She said the job can be taxing both mentally and physically, especially for women with families.

"A challenge for females is enduring that job for that length of time," she said.

As battalion chief, she works a 24-hour-on and 48-hour-off schedule, beginning at 7 a.m. She visits each of the nine stations in District Three in northeast Winston-Salem. For a structure fire or some other types of emergencies, she'll drive to the scene in a special SUV, equipped with computers and communication equipment that will let her coordinate the response and call in additional resources if needed.

Moore regularly mentors young women at the Winston Lake YMCA and always encourages women to consider a career in firefighting.

"You can be beautiful, you can be the female you want to be, but also have that toughness: mentally and physically," she said.

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