

## In Memoriam

## A Present For Uncle Raleigh's Christmas Stocking

By Rodney Sumler  
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He didn't make it 'til Christmas. Only God knows why, although we prayed extremely hard that he would. Now he's in God's hands. He bravely battled the cancer that had attacked his body, and God's will has been done. I didn't get a chance to say a final goodbye, but he knew just how important he had been in my life. So, this is my tribute to a Black man who was a strong role model for me.

Raleigh Johnson - Uncle Raleigh - was one of the last three surviving children of thirteen - he, my mom Hazel, and Aunt Ruby. A lot of the choices I've made have been because of the admiration I have for him. He graduated from Howard University, so when I made my decision to attend college, I enrolled in Howard, also, for my initial years.

My love and respect for the land probably come from my Uncle Raleigh. He did his share of farming, raising vegetables, chickens, and hogs for the family and for market. While he and his wife, Innis, never had any children of their own, his nieces, greatnieces, and nephews were his children - his extended family, as were the offspring of others he called friends.

As a former school teacher, Uncle Raleigh touched the lives of many children in his zeal to share the wonders of science, his specialty, with them. Even after his retirement, he never tired of sharing his God-given talents with others, especially the young.

Always avidly interested in scientific advances, he knew the limitations of modern medical science in curing the ills of his condition. But, he also knew that



Raleigh and Innis Johnson shared their love with many over their years together.

God's plan always supersedes man's. The prayers and caring of his family and friends and his own deep, abiding faith in God kept him clinging tenaciously to life and comforted him until his death.

All through my life, he was like a father to me, a role model, taking the place of the one who left me at an early age. Christmas is a time of giving gifts, sharing love, and commemorating the spirit of God's ultimate gift to the world - his only begotten Son. So, it is most appropriate that I give to Uncle Raleigh the best gift of all - the acknowledgment of my love,

gratitude, and prayers for his new life in a far better place and for my family to thank God for letting us share his life here.

"Give me my flowers while I can still smell the scent," a friend of mine once said to me. And that is significant. If you have done all you can for those you love, then death holds no sting or sorrow. It becomes, in fact, a celebration of life - a life that is far better than anything that can be imagined on earth. Or as grandmother, "Aunt Gerti," his mother would say, taking a cue from her favorite gospel hymn, "He'll be 'Dwellin' in

Beulahland."

The Reverend Carlton Eversly referred to my uncle in his eulogy as a "Black man coming on strong." Uncle Raleigh was a strong Black man. During all my college years and other academic pursuits, he was my standard for achievement. For the balance of my life, my uncle will be my standard of strength for a Black man, as I ask God to allow me to grow with ever-increasing knowledge and wisdom.


Uncle Raleigh knew the effect he had on my life and the lives of others. So, his passing will not go unnoticed. Thank you, Uncle Raleigh, for all you have meant to me. I only hope I can be as exemplary for my family and for the others I meet in my lifetime.

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