**Addie Mae Collins**

Addie Mae Collins and two of her sisters would go door to door every day after school, selling their mother's handmade cotton aprons and potholders.

The trio collected 35 cents for potholders and 50 cents for aprons. The bibbed aprons netted 75 cents.

"Addie liked to do it. She looked forward to it," said sister Sarah, now Sarah Rudolph. "We sold a lot of them."

When she wasn't selling her mother's wares, Addie liked to play hopscotch, sing in the church choir, draw portraits, and wear bright colors.

The Hill Elementary School eighth-grader loved to pitch while playing ball, too. "I remember that underhand," said older sister Janie, now Janie Gaines.

She also remembers Addie's spirit. "She wasn't a shy or timid person. Addie was a courageous person."

Addie, born April 18, 1949, was the seventh of eight children born to Oscar and Alice Collins. When disagreements erupted among the siblings inside the home on Sixth Court West, Addie was the peacemaker.

"She just always wanted us to love one another and treat each other right," Mrs. Rudolph said. "She was a happy person also, and she loved life."

The routine was the same every Saturday night at the Collins household - starching Sunday dresses for church. Sept. 14, 1963, was no different when Addie pulled out a white dress. Older sister Flora pressed and curled Addie's short hair.

"We thought it looked pretty on her," said Mrs. Gaines.

When Addie died in the explosion, Mrs. Rudolph lost her right eye. "I feel like I lost my best friend," said Mrs. Rudolph. "We were always going places together."

Four broken columns in Birmingham's downtown Kelly Ingram Park and the nook in the basement of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church are both memorials to the four girls killed in the 1963 church bombing.

For 29-year-old Sonya Jones, that is not enough. In January, she renamed her 1-year-old youth center in memory of an aunt she never knew.

Every second and third Saturday, children file into the Addie Mae Collins Youth Center in an Ishkooda Road church to build positive attitudes, develop talents and learn to deal with adversity.

"Not only will it be a memorial to her but also we'll be helping other kids who are dealing with tragedies," said Mrs. Jones, whose mother is Janie Gaines.

**Cynthia Wesley**

There were times when Cynthia Wesley's father came home weary after a night of patrolling his Smithfield neighborhood for would-be mischief-makers. Or worse, bombers.

Claude A. Wesley was one of several men who volunteered to ensure another peaceful night on Dynamite Hill, nicknamed for the frequent and unsolved bombings in a former white neighborhood that was increasingly a home to blacks.

The Wesleys tried to protect their daughter from segregation's brutality.

"We were extremely naive," remembers friend and playmate Karen Floyd Savage. "We didn't really discuss things in depth like that."

The first adopted daughter of Claude and Gertrude Wesley, Cynthia was a petite girl with a narrow face and size 2 dress. Cynthia's mother made her clothes, which fit her thin frame perfectly.

She attended the now-defunct Ullman High School, where she did well in math, reading and the band. She invited friends to parties in her back yard, playing soulful tunes and serving refreshments. She was born April 30, 1949.

"Cynthia was just full of fun all the time," Mrs. Savage said. "We were constantly laughing."

It was while the two girls attended Wilkerson Elementary School that Cynthia traded her gold-band ring topped with a clear, rectangular stone for a 1954 class ring that belonged to Mrs. Savage.

"We just sort of liked each others' rings and we just traded with no question of wanting it back," Mrs. Savage said.

Cynthia made friends easily, talking often to close pal Rickey Powell. On Sept. 14, 1963, she invited Rickey to church the next day for a Sunday youth program. Powell accepted, only to reluctantly decline when his mother wanted him to accompany her to a funeral.

"We were like peas in a pod," Powell said. "That was my best bud."

When Cynthia died in the church blast, she was still wearing the ring Mrs. Savage gave her when they were younger. Cynthia's father identified her by that ring when he went to the morgue.

The death of the four girls crushed Mrs. Savage.

"I was so young. I never realized someone would hate you so much that they would go to that extent. In a way, that was sort of the death of my own innocence."

**Denise McNair**

Denise McNair liked her dolls, left mudpies in the mailbox for childhood crushes and organized a neighborhood fund-raiser to fight muscular dystrophy.

Born Nov. 17, 1951, Carol Denise McNair was the first child of Chris and Maxine McNair. Her playmates called her Niecie.

A pupil at Center Street Elementary School, she had a knack of gathering neighborhood children to play on the block. She held tea parties, belonged to the Brownies and played baseball.

"Everybody liked her even if they didn't like each other,"said childhood friend Rhonda Nunn Thomas. "She could play with anybody."

She and Rhonda would dream of husbands, children and careers. "At one point I would be delivering babies and she was going to be the pediatrician,"Mrs. Thomas said.

At some point in her young life, Denise asked the neighborhood children to put on skits and dance routines and to read poetry in a big production to raise money for muscular dystrophy. It became an annual event. People gathered in the yard to watch the show in Denise's carport — the main stage. Children donated their pennies, dimes and nickels. Adults gave larger sums.

The muscular dystrophy fund-raiser was always Denise's project — one that nobody refused.

"It was the idea we were doing something special for some kids,"Mrs. Thomas said. "How could you turn it down?"

A relative always thought the girl with the thick, shoulder-length hair and sparkling eyes would be a teacher because she was "a leader from the heart."

Friend and retired dentist Florita Jamison Askew remembers Denise as a child who smiled a lot, even for the camera when she lost her baby teeth.

"She was always a ham,"Mrs. Askew said.

"I bet she would have been a real go-getter. She and Carole (Robertson) both. I just wonder sometimes."

**Carole Robertson**

Smithfield Recreation Center's auditorium became a dance school every Saturday afternoon when eager girls arrived for lessons in tap, ballet and modern jazz.

Carole Robertson, wearing a leotard and toting black patent leather tap shoes and pink ballet slippers, was among the crowd.

"We didn't have any problems getting our chores done so we could get to dancing class on Saturdays,"said Florita Jamison Askew, who attended classes with Carole and Carole's big sister."Nobody ever wanted to miss them."

Students worked hard on their ballet and shuffle steps in preparation for the annual spring recital, where they got to wear makeup and dance with their hair down."It was a lot of fun,"Mrs. Askew said.

Born April 24, 1949, Carole was the third child of Alpha and Alvin Robertson. Older siblings were Dianne and Alvin.

Carole was an avid reader and straight-A student who belonged to Jack and Jill of America, the Girl Scouts, the Parker High School marching band and science club. She also had attended Wilkerson Elementary School, where she sang in the choir.

Carole walked fast and with a smile.

"She moved through the halls rapidly, not running, but just full of life,"said retired Birmingham teacher Lottie Palmer, who was a science club sponsor."She was a girl that was anxious to .¤.¤. succeed and do well.

Carole grew up in a Smithfield home that was full of love, friends and the aroma of good cooking, especially her mother's spaghetti.

"There was a lot of warmth in the house. The food was good and the people were kind," Mrs. Askew said."That was kind of my second home."

Inside the one-story home with the wrap-around porch, Mrs. Askew and the Robertson girls practiced dances such as the cha-cha and tried out different hairstyles — often on Carole, who didn't mind being the model.

Carole once told Mrs. Askew, now a retired dentist, about her desire to preserve the past.

"I remember a statement she made — she wanted to teach history or do something his­ torical. I thought how ironic it was that she would remain a part of history forever."

In 1976, Chicago residents established the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, a social service agency that serves children and their families. Named after Carole, it is dedicated to the memory of all four girls.

Members of the Jack and Jill choir were scheduled to sing at Carole's funeral Sept. 17, 1963, at St. John AME Church."Of course, we didn't do much singing,"said choir member Karen Floyd Savage."We cried through it."

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