

Longtime educator shared gifts - Omaha World-Herald (NE) - March 1, 2011 - page 01E

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My favorite group of public employees is educators. It is not only because I was one, but because I was able to witness up close the caring they exhibit.

When I hear educators unfairly criticized, I often want to scream. Many of them go so far beyond the call of duty that it is unbelievable. I have seen teachers regularly spend their own money on extra teaching aids for their classrooms. I have observed teachers bringing warm winter clothing to school for needy children. Some educators take part of their lunch breaks to help children with schoolwork or personal problems. And there are teachers who have mentored students from grade school until adulthood. This is all in addition to their classroom duties.

Administrators also have helped children far beyond what's in the job description. Counselors, para-professionals, school secretaries and other school staffers have a heart for children. Most teachers don't go into the profession for pay; it takes a special kind of person to work with children all day, every day. And unfortunately, far too often it is a thankless job.

Bertha Myers, who died Jan. 7 at age 89, was a very special educator. She was a gifted organist, pianist, arranger and guidance counselor for Omaha Public Schools. She used her gifts to honor the Lord.

Bertha was born in Omaha, graduated from Central High School in 1939 and graduated from Northwestern University in Illinois with a bachelor's degree in music education. She continued her studies in various venues including the Chicago Conservatory and the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts. In later years, Bertha attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha and received her master's degree in guidance and counseling.

She taught in the Detroit Public Schools for eight years before returning to Omaha. She married Robert L. Myers, former co-owner of Myers Funeral Home. He preceded her in death. Robert, a widower, had two young daughters, Janet and Karen. Bertha adopted his daughters and became a devoted stay-at-home mom.

Teaching, however, was Bertha's passion. But no matter how qualified she was, she faced a daunting task in the mid-1950s trying to get a teaching position in Omaha as an African-American. Her first big break came when she was able to substitute for an ill music teacher at **Howard Kennedy Elementary** School. Within days, she had the children singing in three-part harmony. The superintendent of the Omaha Public Schools came to see the children perform. Bertha then was offered a job as a music teacher.

She taught full-time in the inner city as a traveling music teacher until she was assigned to the newly built Horace Mann Junior High School in the late 1950s. The choir there sang in strong four-

part harmony under her direction. She was proud of her 10-voice bass section and Horace Mann's choirs became known throughout the city.

Her choirs presented many musical productions, including operas and operettas. On Dec. 6, 1959, The World-Herald wrote about her students: "The Mann 40 is the best junior high chorus in town. Mrs. Myers' voice is clearly authoritative, her fingers snap, and she gets results."

She challenged her students to reach their potential and expected nothing less.

Bertha was a petite whirlwind. She was a church pianist, organist and choir director. She and her husband, a tenor/baritone, volunteered for many church and civic functions. She gave several classical piano concerts, receiving outstanding reviews. In 1960, Bertha and Grace Burt Taylor composed and published an anthem, "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes."

Bertha also was a guest pianist, organist, accompanist and director for choirs throughout Omaha. She received numerous honors and awards. She eventually became a guidance counselor at Horace Mann and later became Central High School's first black guidance counselor.

Bertha Myers was a phenomenal person and an inspiration to many. Many people will miss her, but they will long remember her legacy of music and love.

CITATION (APA STYLE)

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