



## Dr. Charles A. Champion

August 20, 1930 - January 21, 2023

Charles Allen Champion entered a world on August 20, 1930, that was vastly different from the world in which he would live and from which he departed for his heavenly home on January 21, 2023. Charles was born at John Gaston City Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, a place where he would later work and make history. Charles was the bouncing baby boy of Minnie Lee Allen, a seamstress, and James Lee Champion, a Minister. He was later joined by his brother, James “Toots” Champion, and the two of them were reared in Greenfield, Weakley County, Tennessee by Minnie Lee’s parents, Viola (Mama Viola) and John Ellis (Papa) Allen. Later in life, Charles connected with siblings, Cynthia Champion Tucker, Anita Ryan, and Jackie, Steve, Jerry, and Gary Champion.

Charles had a happy childhood and carried fond memories throughout life of his growing up in Greenfield and his time at Champion’s Clubhouse Cafe operated by Mama Viola. From his time in Greenfield and from Mama Viola, he learned many of the principles that guided his life. Mama Viola created in Charles a burning faith in the Lord and he united with Johnson Tabernacle CME Church in Greenfield and remained a devoted and committed CME his entire life.

He attended elementary school in Greenfield and graduated Weakley County Training School in Martin, Tennessee in 1949. He enrolled at Tennessee A.

and I. State University Nashville, Tennessee in 1950 where he was elected Freshman Class Treasurer. He was also inducted into the Lampados Club of the Mighty Rho Psi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., but due to his later transferring to Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, which did not have an active chapter of Omega at the time, he never crossed “the burning sands” and thus became an “eternal lamp”.

At Xavier he developed a passion for pharmacy. Some of this desire was driven by his upbringing in a rural setting that included raising farm animals, growing farm crops and food, and relying on home remedies because access to traditional medicine was not readily available. Because the professional schools in his home state of Tennessee were segregated, he could not attend Pharmacy school in Tennessee. The silver lining of that segregation was the state of Tennessee PAID for him to attend a professional school outside the state as was the law and custom of the time. Thank you, segregation!!!!

Dr. Champion graduated from the College of Pharmacy in 1955 with a Bachelor of Pharmacy Degree. After graduation, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and spent two years serving his country at home and abroad, including serving in Germany as a Pharmacist for the Army.

After his honorable discharge from the Army, Dr. Champion returned to Memphis and began work at John Gaston City Hospital, making history as the first African-American to work as a pharmacist in a city of Memphis hospital. This was still the days of strict segregation, and although Dr. Champion was working as a professional, he could not dine in the eating facility at John Gaston used by non-African-American professionals. Consequently, he would take his lunch to the neighboring E. H. Crump Hospital cafeteria where the African-American employees dined. This act of fate led to the best thing that ever happened to Dr. Champion; meeting Carolyn Bailey, who was a clerical worker at Crump and was the daughter of Loree and Walter Bailey, the

owners at the time of the famed Lorraine Motel, which is now the National Civil Rights Museum. Carolyn and Dr. Champion married at the Lorraine Motel in 1958.

This union produced three daughters, Chandra Champion Walker, Drs. Charita Champion and Carol Champion; three grandchildren, Charles E. Champion, Jessica Michelle-Lynne Champion and Rikki Charee Brookins, and lovingly continued for sixty-four (64) years. Thank you, segregation!!!!

After his trailblazing days at John Gaston, he moved to the retail pharmacy world and again made history as one of the first African-American Pharmacists to work for a retail pharmacy chain in Memphis. He gained as much knowledge and experience as he could in his retail pharmacy days until he felt confident enough to venture out on his own. He did that in 1981, opening Champion's Pharmacy on Third Street in Memphis. He and Mrs. Champion later acquired a building and moved Champion's Pharmacy and Herb Store to its current location at 2369 Elvis Presley Boulevard.

Champion's Pharmacy was founded as a family business with a mission of serving the community. That goal continues today. Mrs. Carolyn Champion was a partner and co-founder of the business and served as the store manager. Their oldest daughter, Chandra Dianne Champion Walker, who preceded him in death, was a certified Pharmacy Tech and worked in the store until her untimely passing in 2014. Drs. Charita and Carol Champion, both licensed Pharmacists, worked in the store, alongside their father, after their time in the retail pharmacy world and Dr. Carol continues to operate the store. Granddaughter, Jessica, has taken over for her grandmother as Business Manager. Grandson, Charles E. Champion, and granddaughter, Rikki Brookins, are "on call" employees of the store.

Dr. Champion served generations of families at Champion's and that service continues. Dr. Champion's commitment and service to his community have been acknowledged and honored by so many that it is literally impossible to list all of them. He has been recognized and honored by virtually every national, state, and local pharmaceutical organization, every sorority and fraternity, by state, county, and local governments, including having a portion of a street near his residence renamed in his honor, and by numerous other organizations.

He served on the Memphis and Shelby County Hospital Authority Board of Directors, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Theology by the Tennessee School of Religion, received the Dr. Henry L. Starks Distinguished Service Award, was designated a "Living Stone" by the CME Historical Society, was presented the Outstanding Service Award by the National Pharmaceutical Association, selected the Outstanding Pharmacist in the United States and presented the 1992 Bowl of Hygeia Award by the National Pharmaceutical Association, was named the First recipient of the "Dr. Charles A. Champion Good Shepherd Award" to be given annually in his name to a deserving pharmacist in the mid-south, received the "Living Legends Award" from the Shelby County Board of Commissions, was given a Seat of Honor in the Xavier College of Pharmacy, and many, many other awards.

Of all the awards, Dr. Champion was most proud of his service to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and expressed it in numerous ways but especially through his commitment and service to Mount Olive Cathedral CME Connectional Church. He was a life-long member and regularly attended the adult Sunday school class. He was known in the community for his weekly distribution of the Sunday school lesson. Dr. Champion, due to his strong faith, was often called upon to give prayer or say grace at church and other gatherings and was known for his colorful renditions and emotional delivery. "Lord, you know me, this is Charles, Minnie Lee's boy", was one of his favorite opening lines and

emphasized his strong personal relationship with God. Dr. Champion was strong, unwavering and devout in his faith and is now in his rightful place in Heaven. He will be fondly remembered by family, friends, the community at large and will be eternally missed by all.

Dr. Champion's daughter, Chandra Dianne Champion Walker, grandparents, parents and siblings, James "Toots" Champion, Anita Ryan, Jackie Champion Pamon, Cynthia Champion Tucker, Steve Champion and Gary Champion, all preceded him in death.

Left to cherish his memory and mourn his passing are his loving, devoted, and caring wife of sixty-four years, Carolyn; his two daughters, Dr. Charita Champion and Dr. Carol "Cookie" Champion; grandson, Charles E. Champion of Nashville, Tennessee; granddaughters, Jessica Michelle-Lynne Champion and Rikki Charee Brookins; adoptive mother-in-law, Mrs. Bernice Sullen; brother, Jerry Champion of Vallejo, California; nephews, Jeffery A. Champion of Lansing, Michigan and Daniel J. Kennedy of Columbus, Ohio; nieces, Leslie Basey of Charleston, South Carolina, Michele Rachal of Lansing, Michigan and Angela Spates of Seattle, Washington; two close and very special cousins, Robert Powell of Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Charles "Ricky" Powell (Sherry) of Indianapolis, Indiana; sister-in-law, Norma Champion Jones of Lansing, Michigan; brothers-in-law, Wayne and Jerome Bailey, the Higgs and Shane families of Greenfield, Tennessee, and other nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.

Thank You Dr. Champion For Loving Us All

# Cemetery Details

## Calvary Cemetery

1663 Elvis Presley Blvd  
Memphis, TN 38106

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JAN **29**. 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM (Cst)

Mt. Olive Cathedral CME Church  
538 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave  
Memphis, TN 38126

*In lieu of flowers. Memorials can be made to the Mt. Olive Cathedral CME or the Champion Family Foundation  
P.O. Box 16136 Memphis , TN 38186*

## Service

JAN **30**. 12:00 PM (Cst)

Mt. Olive Cathedral CME Church  
538 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave  
Memphis, TN 38126

*In lieu of flowers. Memorials can be made to the Mt. Olive Cathedral CME or the Champion Family Foundation  
P.O. Box 16136 Memphis , TN 38186*

# Tribute Wall

TN

“ *My prayers are to the family of Dr. Champion. I remember the first time my father introduced me to him. He was a kind and gentle spirit. He will live in my heart. Blessings. From: Charles Nolan and daughter Toya Nolan Columbus, Ohio*

**Toya Nolan** - January 30, 2023 at 10:18 AM

JH

“ *Dr. Charles Champion will forever be the cornerstone of our practice*

**Jerry Holmes** - January 28, 2023 at 10:53 AM



“ *Basket of Memories was purchased for the family of Dr. Charles A. Champion.*



January 27, 2023 at 08:21 PM

MF

“ *Mattie Jackson & Family purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Dr. Charles A. Champion.*



**Mattie Jackson & Family** - January 26, 2023 at 11:01 PM

CB

“ *Carl R. Brown purchased the Enchanted Cottage  
for the family of Dr. Charles A. Champion.*



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**Carl R. Brown** - January 26, 2023 at 03:58 PM