

# Mother's love washed over family like a warm tide

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**J**anie Aiken Grant's life stretched 93 years on Hilton Head Island, where she stood steady at the bank while the tides rushed in and out around her.

She was born in an era of kerosene lamps and plows behind horses. Her mother sewed sails so her father could tack the winds and currents to get island produce, turkeys and chickens to market in Savannah.

Janie Grant's life ended in a much different world Wednesday, just three weeks before her 94th birthday. She was matriarch of the Aiken family, which dates its history on the island to an



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escape from slavery, and will hold its 50th reunion in June. She was scheduled to be recognized today as mother of the First African Baptist Church, where she and James Grant Sr. were married when she was 18.

Janie Grant was most familiar as the spry lady in the wooden vegetable stand she operated beside her home on William Hilton Parkway since the 1960s. She perched by the ever-increasing roar of the highway, surrounded by tomatoes, sweet potatoes,



File • The Island Packet  
**Janie Aiken Grant is shown in 2006.**

squash, cucumbers, onions and butterbeans she shelled and okra she canned.

She sold handmade quilts and spirits in a liquor store her husband built next door.

Janie Grant learned responsibil-

ity early, being the oldest of 14 children raised near Broad Creek off Marshland Road. Her days also were touched by joy, like the good times she had with

**Please see LOVE on 4A**

the old Orange Blossom Social Club for women in the Gullah community.

But of all her days, Mother's Day of 1981 remains circled in red.

On that day, Rosa, her baby, graduated from S.C. State University.

James Grant didn't live to see this dream come true, but the rest of the family was there.

James and Janie Grant had gotten all the formal education offered to them on their remote sea island. Schools went through fifth grade and met only several months a year to dodge the growing season.

But long before there was a bridge, a high school or a library, James and Janie Grant were determined that all nine of their children, and the grandchild they raised as one of their own, would graduate from college.

When Rosa walked across that stage in Orangeburg in cap and gown, their improbable dream came true.

Nine of the children became educators. Most got advanced degrees. And in the new generation of 16 grandchildren, all but one has a college degree. One is a dentist. Another was a lawyer.

"My husband and I worked hard and lived simply to put all our children through

school," Janie Grant told The Island Packet in 1981.

## ENTREPRENEURS

James Grant said he had two marsh tacky horses because he had two sons. Moses and Joseph helped him plant 50 acres, and by the time James Jr. came along, they were into the tractor era.

James Grant also sold fish he caught. And he built things. He helped build his own home, which he contracted to an islander for \$28, a sum he said seemed like \$50,000.

He was a carpenter for the earliest construction companies on the island, primarily Robert Graves.

He did some cooking for a hunt club on the land that is today Palmetto Dunes Resort and Shelter Cove Harbour. There, and later at Honey Horn Plantation, Janie sometimes worked alongside — she serving and he cooking.

Janie Grant planted a garden, canned vegetables and sewed clothes for all the children with her own patterns, a skill she learned from her mother and taught to her daughters. James built a fabric store for three daughters — Annie, Genevieve and Laura — where they made sewing a business.

Through it all, there was never a hint the children wouldn't go to college.

"Our mother and father set high standards; we expected

to meet them," said daughter Margaret "Marge" White, whose three children all earned engineering degrees from Clemson University.

Moses Grant recalls the wisdom of his father, who died in 1979.

"He always pressed on us that we could get money, or land or material things, but all that could be taken from us," he said. "But education — 'something in your head' is the way he put it — can never be taken from you."

Their first teacher was their mother.

Before they went to school, she had taught them to read, write, tell time and to do multiplication.

Janie Grant was taught by the Rev. Solomon Campbell. And being the oldest child, she was given the responsibility of family record-keeping, including paying property taxes. She did the same with her husband, and at age 90, banged her cane on the ground to emphasize how important it is to keep property records current.

Her detailed knowledge of family and island history was displayed in the 1988 book by Moses Grant, "Looking Back: Reminiscences of a Black Family Heritage on Hilton Head Island."

## FAMILY

The Grants remain a close-knit family. They helped each other get through school. They've always gravitated to

the family home on Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons.

They helped each other in the terrible tragedy when Moses lost a daughter in a wreck. She was a young lawyer. Her husband was an educator. They were both killed en route from Atlanta to Hilton Head, but their baby survived and is being raised by her family.

Another grandson, Ashley, who works for AT&T in Charlotte, said his generation was strongly influenced by Janie Grant.

"She would always give us \$5 before we left to go back to college," he said. "Every Christmas, she would give us \$5. It meant so much that here was someone who was only able to get a fifth-grade education and did all she could to sell vegetables along the roadside, yet was able to give to us."

Her funeral will be at 11 a.m. Tuesday at First African Baptist Church, followed by burial in the Joe Pope Cemetery. It's a beautiful and quiet place beside the Piggly Wiggly supermarket on William Hilton Parkway. Janie Grant will rest right up the street from her vegetable stand, which her children say will remain in business.

Her grandfather told Janie she would be the steady one. As others left home to seek opportunity, James Aiken said, "You see the tide come and go, but the bank stands."