



Ancella Radford Bickley

July 4, 1930 - February 16, 2026

Ancella Radford Bickley was born July 4, 1930 in Huntington, West Virginia to Willard Radford and Lillian Angus Radford. Lillian Radford. Born in Jamaica, became a naturalized American citizen after marrying Willard Radford, whom she met when they were both working in Cuba. Lillian had two sons in Jamaica, Robert and Albert, and three sons with Willard Radford: Henry, William (Billy) and Harold. Ancella was the youngest and only girl.

Ancella (Cill) attended college at West Virginia State College (now University), graduating with a Bachelor's degree in English with high honors in 1950. She later earned a Master's degree from Marshall University in Huntington, WV, where she was Marshall's first full time black student. When she decided to pursue a Doctorate in Education, Ancella encountered hurdles because of race at West Virginia University, yet graduated in 1974 with the support and advocacy of a faculty member who became a lifelong friend, Dr. Judith Stitzell.

While at West Virginia State College Ancella met the love of her life, Nelson R. Bickley, Jr. Nelson was in ROTC in college and immediately went into the Army upon graduation. Ancella's life as an "Army wife" began at that time, following Nelson as he was moved from Savannah, GA, to Fort Bliss in El Paso, TX, Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, Ft. Meade, MD and Frankfurt, Germany. She and Nelson had two daughters, Renée, the oldest, and Ancella, Jr., also nicknamed "Cill". During Nelson's stints in Korea, Ancella and the two girls

resided with their mother in Institute , WV near West Virginia State College, where Ancella worked as a professor.

Once Nelson retired and the family became stationary, Ancella's career blossomed. She moved from a faculty member at West Virginia University, to a faculty member at West Virginia State College, to Vice President and Provost at West Virginia State College.

After retirement from college life, Ancella then went on to a second career as historian, specializing in West Virginia black history. She scanned old newspapers and magazines, researching stories and persons hinted at in articles. Among other projects, she wrote a book on educator/activist Memphis Tennessee Garrison, a book entitled *In Spite of Obstacles: A History of the West Virginia Schools for the Colored Deaf and Blind 1926-1955*, and edited *Our Mount Vernons: History Register Listings of Sites Significant to the Black History of West Virginia*. She also wrote various black history articles which were published in *Goldenseal*, *The Journal of the Greenbrier Historical Society*, and the journal of *West Virginia History*. Ancella became the voice of West Virginia black history, giving numerous talks and interviews on radio and around the state as well as fielding phone calls from all over with questions about various aspects of West Virginia black history.

Ancella also had a creative side, writing plays such as *Tangled Threads* with her dear friend Maureen Crockett, and as a solo artist, composing the *Gathering*, and an additional play performed by a troupe in Ocala, FL, called, *Two Saint Say*. "It was a privilege and a joy to be in the writers' group with her," recalled Colleen Anderson, award-winning writer and founder of *MotherWit*. "I wish she hadn't been so shy about her short stories, which deserved to be published."

A few of the many accolades that Ancella received are the National Education

Association's Carter G. Woodson Memorial Award, 1980; West Virginia Woman of the Year, 1984; West Virginia State College Alumnus of the Year, 1988; Rockefeller Foundation Scholar at Marshall University, 1999. She gave the commencement speech at Marshall University in 1990 and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Pedagogy. Her papers, full of material on black history and culture, are housed at West Virginia University.

Ancella is survived by a large and loving family of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and nieces and nephews: her daughters, Renée (Oliver, deceased), Ancella (Charles Anthony, deceased); grandchildren Maia, Jamaa, Lateef (Melanie), Akil (Cathryn); great-grandchildren, Jelani, Julian, Jaden, Amari, and Kai Ancella; nieces Valarie, Elaine (Harri, deceased), Angela, deceased (Paul), Gay, and Lynn; nephews Michael (Carole),

Albert, William (Denise), Willard (Armilenta), Kim (Lily), and Mark (Toni), as well as grand-nieces and grand-nephews. She also has two adopted daughters: Peri Lynne Johnson, Esq. and Robin Johnson, MD.

Ancella was happily married to Nelson for seventy years, until he passed in 2021. She took great joy in the weekly Jazz Night at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, VA and her nightly ritual of peanuts and jelly beans. She was endlessly curious and loved jigsaw puzzles, insisting that each person who came into her house put a piece into the puzzle. And she reminded her children to pause and see the beauty in the clouds.

There will be a gravesite service in Spring Hill Cemetery in Huntington, WV on Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026 at 1:00. This will be followed at 3:00 by a "Celebration of Life" get-together honoring both Ancella and Nelson Bickley at the DoubleTree Hotel, 1001 3rd Avenue, Huntington, WV at 3:00. Ferrell-Chambers Funeral Home, Huntington, WV are entrusted with arrangements.

Online condolences may be expressed to the family at www.ferrell-chambersfuneralhome.com

Special and profound thanks to Scotts Funeral Home in Richmond, VA and Ferrell-Chambers Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Huntington, WV.

Previous Events

Service

FEB 28. 1:00 AM.

Spring Hill Cemetery
Huntington , WV

Celebration of Life

FEB 28. 3:00 PM (ET)

Double Tree Hotel
1001 3rd Avenue
Huntington, WV

Tribute Wall

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“ I am so very sad to hear about Ancella's passing. She was a wonderful, beautiful, and intelligent leader and friend. I met her in the 1980s when we were on a committee together and hit it off. Together, we served on many committees, researched the Underground Railroad, and even put together a National Park Service proposal to locate an Underground Railroad Museum in Cabell County. We went to Washington DC with Dr. Alan Gould and Mike and Marline Sheets to present the proposal to our Congressional representatives. We both sat on the Carter G. Woodson Memorial Foundation Board of Directors. I have missed seeing her since she moved to Florida, but we kept in touch by email until after she moved to Richmond. I last saw her at Nelson's graveside service, but I did not get to talk with her. The world is a lesser place without her in it. I pray that her family and friends receive comfort.

Karen Nance - February 26 at 03:21 PM