

## Everett and Blanche

### If This Isn't Love, It Will Have to Do Until the Real Thing Comes Along

Their fathers, William Asa Graves and Ernest Wilson, were acquainted. That, however was not unusual among Black folk in Seattle, Washington in the '30's. It's a safe bet; however, that neither man had any idea their children would one day meet and subsequently marry. They, Mr. Graves and Mr. Wilson, weren't friends -- what, one wonders, would they have had to say to each other and to their children. History is silent on this subject.

Everett and Blanche shared mutual friends who thought they should meet. That was enough to convince each of them that such a meeting wasn't worth the trouble. At the District Conference held at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Spokane, Washington in March 1942, fate truly intervened. Everett was scheduled to sing. When he saw Blanche in the audience, the only song lyrics he could think of were: *"If this isn't love, it will have to do until the real thing comes along."* Once her regained his composure, he sang a stirring rendition of *"Water-boy."*

Blanche, equally impressed, confided to her close friend, the late Florence Hildebrand Woods, that she was going to marry the fine young tenor. She was not unmindful that her own parents had met at a social in Spokane in 1920. Their budding relationship unfolded quietly, much like a beautiful plant whose tiny buds promise beautiful blooms.

Everett was pastoring a circuit of two A.M.E. Churches, Bailey Chapel, in Everett, Washington and Ebenezer in Bremerton, Washington while also attending classes at Seattle Pacific College (now Seattle Pacific University).

Blanche entered Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina in the Fall of 1942. She and Everett conducted a long distance romance, seeing each other only during the summer when she returned home to Portland, Oregon.

Everett proposed marriage during the summer of 1944. Blanche accepted and a tentative date for the summer of 1945 was set. That same year, Everett wrote in her autograph book:

September 5, 1944

Dear Blanche,  
May the fullness of God's manifold blessings, the abundance of human love and companionship, and the crown of achievement in your every ambition be yours throughout life.

Sincerely, your friend Everett

Having made the decision to marry Everett, Blanche thought it best to get her "B.A." first and then her "M-R-S." So they set their wedding date for August 24, 1946.

The wedding ceremony took place on Saturday Afternoon in the parsonage of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Portland, Oregon. The late Rev. Cornelius Austin, Jr. officiated. Lurlene Gibbs Sang *"Because."* Blanche's maid of honor was to have been Juliet Hilliard.

Juliet worked for the late DeNorval Unthank, M.D. and his wife, Thelma, refused to let her have the afternoon off, so Miss Bennie Gragg was drafted into service. Best man was James Monroe Moore, from Statesville, North Carolina who was at that time stationed at the Puget Sound Naval Yard in Bremerton, Washington.

Guests included Mrs. Mary Jackson and the five Austin Children. Carol, the oldest, was five years old at the time and candidly offered to Blanche, "I hope you don't have too many children like my mother has." (Carol and her husband, Richard Gordon, have eight children.)

Blanche wore a two-piece gray suit, a tiny Black hat and black pumps. Everett wore a suit but can't recall any other details!

The newlyweds spent their wedding night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Locke. The next morning, Everett preached at Bethel, Portland. On Monday morning, August 26, 1946, Everett, Blanche and J. Monroe Moore set out for Quindaro, Kansas where Everett was going to attend Seminary. The two men drove Everett's car a Nash, and Blanche sat in the back seat with the luggage. This trip took them to San Francisco, California, where Rev. and Mrs. Chester D. Toliver put them up in a hotel. From San Francisco, they traveled south to Los Angeles where they visited with Rev. and Mrs. Browning C. Allen and their family, Browning, Jr., Jimmy, and Florence.

Once they arrived in Kansas City, J. Monroe Moore left them and headed out to North Carolina. Blanche and Everett stayed with Rev. and Mrs. L.R. Hayes.

Rev. Hayes invited Everett to stay and work with the your at Bethel A.M.E., Kansas City, but he declined. They went on to Quindaro, Kansas where Everett matriculated at Western University. He completed the three-year program in one year!

From 1947-48, Everett pastored St. Paul A.M.E., Olathe, Kansas. From there they moved to Iola, Kansas. While there, the opportunity arose to join his twin brother, the late Rev. Edward P. Williams, Sr. in Kentucky. They moved to Richmond, Kentucky where he pastored St. Paul A.M.E. Church. He was transferred back to the Fifth Episcopal District in 1949 and was sent to Bethel A.M.E. Church. Yakima, Washington.

Yakima was a double blessing, for there on January 1, 1950, Alyce Theresa was born; and on December 16, 1950, Everett, Jr. was born.

From Yakima, Everett, Sr., Blanche, Theresa and Everett, Jr. moved to Tulare, California where Everett, Sr. pastored Brooks Chapel A.M.E. From Tulare, the Williams family moved to Stockton, California where Everett, Sr. pastored Ebenezer A.M.E. It was there, on January 14, 1956, that Allen Louis made his debut.

Their ministerial and marital partnership has taken them all across the Fifth Episcopal District: California, Washington, Arizona, and back to Missouri where they now enjoy their retirement.

In August, 1971, Everett, Sr. and Blanche celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary at Johnson Chapel A.M.E., Santa Ana, California. Rev. Austin again officiated as they renewed their vows. They observed their 40<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary at Carter memorial A.M.E. Church, Fresno, California.

When Blanche and Everett married in 1946, they could not have anticipated the joys that 50 years together can bring. This year they have celebrated Blanche's Golden Anniversary College Reunion with her sister Belles at Bennett College. Their first grandchild, Kamilah Madelyn Bennett graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School on June 4, 1996 and now in the presence of family and friends, Everett, Sr. and Blanche are renewing their sacred covenant of fifty years of marriage. God has truly blessed them and their family.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** This is the original text of the biographical sketch I wrote for my parents' Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary Booklet, August 24-25, 1996, Bethel A.M.E. Church, Kansas City, MO.