

Pillar of Harlem Community Sadie M. Winslow Dies at 88

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Published March 25, 2005

Columbia Daily Spectator

“She was the unofficial mayor of Harlem,” said Denise Liburd of her aunt Sadie M. Winslow, a Harlem activist and educator. In the course of her lifetime, Winslow was involved in everything from directing a nursery school in East Harlem to helping make the 125th Street subway station accessible to seniors. “The next time you use the escalator, think of Sadie,” Liburd said.

Winslow, a resident of La Salle Street, died of pneumonia at St. Luke’s Hospital on Friday, March 11. She was 88.

As a girl growing up in New Haven, Winslow was influenced by the meetings of the Marcus Garvey Movement she attended with her uncle. And just as Marcus Garvey is remembered wearing a flamboyant array of medals, Winslow’s memory is adorned with the dozens of community organizations to which she devoted herself.

“Sadie Winslow was an activist in every sense of the word,” said Duncan Harris, one of Winslow’s great-nephews, during the memorial service at Riverside Church attended by over 200 people. “An activist isn’t one who waits for the fight to come to them. They act—not react,” he said.

Winslow’s life was nothing if not active. She worked with more than a dozen community service organizations, including Community Board 9 and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. In her later years, she was a co-founder of Seniors Helping Seniors and co-chair of the Senior Citizen Issues Committee. In 1996, she joined the advisory council of the New York City Department of Aging, and in was reappointed in 2004 by Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Winslow received a B.A. in Education from St. Augustine College and later studied early childhood education at New York University and the University of Puerto Rico. She eventually taught education as an assistant professor at Hunter College and at William Paterson College in New Jersey.

One of her most well-known stories is rooted in her early education, when a teacher pointed out to her class that “American” ends with the words “I can.” Winslow would pass this on to students of her own but with a twist—“African,” too, ends with the same phrase, she would say.

In addition to Liburd of Philadelphia, Winslow is survived by her nephews Nelson Amory of London, Alvin Amory of Nevis, Frank Williams of New Haven, and nieces Dulcie Harding of Toronto, Gloria Harris of North Carolina, Phyllis Lindsay, Monica Spruill, and Debra Liburd of New Haven, as well as many great-nieces and great-nephews.