

### Mortician in the Making

Some things are worth waiting for. On Monday, March 5, 2007, I interviewed Mrs. Juanita Sellers Stone at Sellers Brothers Funeral Home on Martin Luther King Drive in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been in the family owned business for over forty years. Mrs. Stone could have been anything she wanted to but she didn't want to let her family down. She inherited the business from her late uncle and chose to accept the responsibility of the funeral service and not knowing what was in store for her. What will a woman do in a male dominated profession?

Mrs. Stone went to school to learn about allied services because the funeral home does not make caskets so they have to buy them from casket makers. Next, she became an apprentice under her uncle's supervision. She learned how to prepare and embalm a body as well as organize funerals. Leadership qualities, scientific skills and accounting skills are a must in this business. Sometimes she has to hire people for the different positions of the trade.

It became a bit challenging once she had to run the business by herself. There were many obstacles that she had no control over such as the florist and the musicians arriving on time for the service. At first she didn't have a salary because of the family business. It is a twenty four hour job and she doesn't have much time for her personal life but she still reaps the benefits of helping others at a time of need.

The funeral business has changed over the years. Did you know that wakes occurred in people's homes? They didn't use to put the prices on the caskets until the Federal Trade Commission changed the policy. Even with funeral programs, people

are using collages of pictures and caskets that come in a variety of colors. Back in the day, only pine boxes were available.

Mrs. Stone enjoys her job because it is a people-person job. Unfortunately people are grieving and you get them at their worse but she had to learn to accept this and later in life you get your reward when a family calls back to thank you and say they couldn't have made it without your service.

She meets many interesting people and recalls planning Jean Childs Young, former mayor Andrew Young wife's funeral. The family had prearranged everything but Jean held on for many months before making her transition. The only problem was that the church was too small. The funeral had to be held at the Civic Center and the wake at the church.

Mrs. Stone remember hilarious times in the business when two deceased ladies were accidentally put on each other's dress and one family liked the wrong dress while the other family was upset. They had to run around the funeral home looking for the woman. They finally found her and changed the dress.

The funniest story of all was about a newborn body being misplaced. The night mortician forgot to tell them he placed the precious body in the bottom drawer so when the mother asked to view the body, everyone was running around like a chicken with their head cut off looking for the baby and one worker was outside in the dumpster. Everyone forgot to tell him the body had been located.

Mrs. Stone says that the funeral business is rewarding even working in a male dominated profession because of the many people you come in contact with and knowing you are making final preparations for a family's love one.

