



CORNELIA MEDLEY

After that life changing event, Cornelia and her sister moved to New York City and joined The Abyssinian Baptist Church at the urgency of her aunt, member, Margaret Braxton. Medley was impressed by Abyssinian's ministry and mission musing that "It was professionally run... We stood out: Affordable housing, food pantry, credit union, transitional housing, the Exodus Ministry for those previously imprisoned. Name the churches that have done what Abyssinian has done over the years. There's no match." Cornelia immersed herself in Abyssinian's ministries, joining the Sanctuary Choir in 1990, and becoming active in the Bible Study, and Exercise ministries. "You go to church to have your battery recharged, and my spiritual battery is always recharged at Abyssinian," she says.

To this day, Cornelia Medley remains inspired by Abyssinian's ministry work in support of its Youth. "Abyssinian meets the mission for our young people – Sunday School, Rites of Passage, Vacation Bible School, Liturgical Dance, and platforms for creative expression. A church that doesn't have activities for children has no growth. We have to leave footprints for our children who are the future."

Sister Medley earned her B.A. in Music Education, and a Master's Degree in Administration and Supervision from Columbia University's Teachers College. At Columbia she met and married Philip Earl Medley of Roxbury, MA. Phillip, a Tuskegee Airman, became an accomplished songwriter ("Twist and Shout," Patti Page's "Music Show," and "A Million to One").

An avid lover of music with an exquisite voice, Cornelia Medley had a desire to be an opera singer. Reflecting on her life and career she said, "Your goals aren't always realistic." However, Cornelia enjoyed opportunities to travel the "Chitlin' Circuit" singing in *Porgy and Bess*, and in concert at the YWCA.

By God's grace, the Medleys purchased a home on NYC's Upper West Side when securing a mortgage was difficult for black musicians. Their union produced three children, who were all blessed at Abyssinian.

Retired from the NYC public school system after 33 years of teaching, Cornelia presently enjoys time with her family, friends, and fellow Aby church members. She smiles as she remembers receiving the 2015 Abyssinian Honorary Doctorate Degree of Goodwill for her "magnanimous spirit of compassion and kindness to encourage harmonious living among all humankind while walking upright before God and this community of faith."

The historical encasement outside Abyssinian's sanctuary entrance displays a gold tribute brick that reads, "Dedicated by Philip and Cornelia Medley" -- a true tribute to their generosity and love for The Abyssinian Baptist Church.

And that is the story of Abyssinian member, Cornelia Medley. She is an Abyssinian.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

A SERIES DEVELOPED BY THE ABYSSINIAN ARCHIVES & HISTORY MINISTRY THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE WONDERFUL PEOPLE WHO CONTRIBUTE TO "THE STORY" OF OUR CHURCH.

WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE OF ABYSSINIAN.

Devoted Abyssinian member, Cornelia Medley, seems unassuming as she quietly sits among the Cathedral Choir preparing to sing on Sunday mornings. Most see her regal countenance, but don't know that her fascinating story began in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, PA, during the Great Depression.

Born Cornelia Mae Kinsey in 1927 to John Kinsey, a bricklayer, and Postal Worker; Katherine Kinsey, Sister Medley and her five siblings were raised to respect all people, and they led very disciplined lives, always taught to say, "Yes Ma'am" and "No, ma'am." Education was a major part of her family's life as many hours were logged by the Kinsey's in the library -- the foundation of Cornelia's learning experience.

Cornelia grew up in a racially mixed community. Reflecting on the World War II Era, she remembers, "*our white neighbors were poor just like we were.*" Summers for the Kinsey's were filled with two-mile walks to Vacation Bible Study and Saturday afternoons at the movies.

After graduating high school in 1945, Cornelia visited family in the South. It was there that she encountered Jim Crow laws of the segregated South. It disappointed and upset her to see Black people living under such conditions. That experience stirred within Cornelia the pursuit of excellence, and a constant recall of her parent's encouragement to, "be your best self."

