**This is the story of Eugene Purvis**

**At 97, Reverend Dr. Eugene Purvis is frail & in need of physical & material supports that aren’t easily available. He lives a large, decaying house with his elderly wife, Sylvia, now under treatment for cancer. The future is precarious. To add to their distress, one of their three sons has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s Disease & also needs help. They try to send money, which requires additional sacrifice. They are determined to remain at home & like all parents, wish to leave whatever they have to their sons.**

**Born in 1923 to a poor tenant farmer & respected preacher in rural South Carolina, Eugene was the first of thirteen children. His parents raised him with love & strict Christian values.**

**Drafted at 18 into the U.S. Army air Corps, he was mustered in Charleston & sent, with a large group of young colored men, to the South Pacific on a freighter. The freighter was unlighted as Japanese air attacks were a constant threat.**

***“They were all babies. Nobody knew where they were going or why. Most of them cried for their mothers.”***

**They arrived at the Island of Saipan where Eugene was trained as a gunner. The young soldiers were made to dig foxholes, to use during frequent air raids*.***

***“I was always obedient. When the commanding officer shouted ‘into the foxholes’ we jumped in. Eventually the order became so frequent that most ignored the command. Since I always obeyed orders I became the sole survivor of my unit”***

**The cook was among those killed & Eugene was told to assume that position.**

***“I didn’t know how to cook but I learned quickly. My fried turkey was such a success they all came to shake my hand.”***

**Eugene was jailed and almost court marshaled when he brought food the soldiers didn’t like to the civilians instead of to the dump, as instructed.**

***“They were starving. Because they were Asian, they were assumed by our soldiers, to be the Japanese enemy. So I gave them the unwanted food.”***

**Eugene was always aware of human suffering. Some of us recall documentary footage of Saipan women, some holding babies, hurling themselves off cliffs, some with babies in their arms, as they fled Japanese & American soldiers.**

**Following discharge, Eugene went to work for the railroad, doing cleaning & maintenance. When he learned that a white man, with identical qualifications, was paid $20 more than he, he called his uncle, a Pullman Porter in the north. (The job of “Pullman Porter” was one of very few “dream jobs” open to negroes & the uncle had some clout.) He moved & began to improve his condition.**

**Always wishing to be a minister, he worked, went to school & received his PhD in Theology. He also became an optician and worked for years in that capacity.**

**In his forties he met a pretty Philippino girl with long dark hair. Already an optometrist, she was twenty years his junior but he plied her with flowers. Impressed with his manners, they married and had three sons.**

**Eugene became pastor of a Long Island AME Zion Church & provided support & spiritual counseling to many people. During this time, he & Sylvia established a Montessori School in Freeport, which they operated successfully for many years. Both recognized the importance of early education & the controversial Montessori approach attracted them. Many Freeport residents benefitted from this unique approach which emphasizes self-esteem, often lacking in minority populations**

**We have established a “Circle of Support”, dedicated to improving the circumstances of the senior Purvises. Many individuals and entities have been working together to provide comfort to this deserving couple in their final years.**

**Care to join us?**