

The Fultz Quadruplets – Part 2

The Fultz Quadruplets from North Carolina were the first Black identical quads born in the U.S. Part 1 of this series tells the story of the quads' birth, childhood, connection to Pet Milk advertising, their separation from parents and the move into the entertainment industry. The story continues today. Parts 1 and 2 are available at TheTandD.com.

In September 1952, the new chapter of the life of the Fultz Quads moved to the next level.

They enrolled in Caswell County Training School after an agreement was reached with the Caswell County Board of Education and the Pet Milk Company on the condition that transportation be provided from their home in adjoining Rockingham County, N.C.

On the first day of school, the entire student body was waiting to see how the quads would fit in their classes. Mrs. N.L. Dillard was their first-grade teacher and Nathaniel L. Dillard was the principal. They both said, "The girls are model students."

Then in April 1953, the North Carolina legislature honored the Fultz Quads, voting to make the girls honorary pagettes. They were nearly 7 years old at the time.

At this point in time, the evidence is quite clear that nurse Saylor was becoming a profound influence upon the girls in terms of who they were and what directions in life they would follow. In a subtle manner,

she was leading the girls down a path in which their future would be molded into music, entertainment and modeling.

When they turned 8 years old, the girls began to enjoy performing and being on the stage more and more. Their music teacher was Miss M.J. Harris, who was employed to teach them music three times a week. They took dance instructions once a week in Danville, Virginia.

"The Quads have shown marked improvement over last year in their attitude towards school," Nurse Saylor said. "They are now getting A's and B's. Mary Catherine and Mary Ann prefer spelling, while Mary Alice and Mary Louise like reading and art. Also, they love going to the beauty parlor and dressing up. The girls are feminine to the core and are already acutely sensitive about their looks."

On the event of their 11th birthday, their fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. H.D. Siddle, brought 32 of their classmates to help them celebrate. A frosty white two-tier birthday cake was placed in the center of a table with 11 candles. After making their wishes, the girls blew out all of the candles in one puff. From their smiles and the sparkle in their eyes, Anne, Alice, Catherine and Louise Fultz had a most memorable birthday.

Then in December 1959, the famous Fultz Quads, world's only identical Black quads, rode on a float in the 27th Orange Blossom Classic Parade in Miami. Miami's Mayor Robert King High presented the girls "keys to the city."



SPECIAL TO THE T&D

Mary Louise, Mary Alice, Mary Anne and Mary Catherine, the Fultz Quadruplets, are pictured.

In September 1960, the Fultz Quads were invited to attend the junior activities of the National Medical Association Convention. Mayor Joseph M. Barr of Pittsburgh presented the girls keys to the city.

Just like all young ladies growing up, when they reach the magic age of 16, it signifies a peak that leads them into the world of womanhood.

On May 23, 1962, the quads reached that period known as "Sweet Sixteen." Pet Milk made available autographed portraits of the girls for anyone wanting a copy.

Later on in August 1962, President John F. Kennedy greeted them in the White House garden. The visit was arranged by the National Association of Colored Women's Club.

The Fultz Quads graduated from high school in 1965 and started their college careers at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida. On July 24, the Pittsburgh Courier printed, "Begin First Term in College – Fultz Quads Eye Careers in Music – Bethune-Cookman College has a quadruple treat in its freshman class – the attractive and talented Fultz Quadruplets, from Milton, N.C."

"The four girls, just past their 19th birthday, registered recently, for B-CC's summer term. They were graduated, this summer, from Caswell County High School, Yanceyville, N.C."

"Music is the Fultz's talent and they have their own string quartet. Mary Louise and Mary Catherine played the violin; Mary Ann the viola, and Mary Alice the cello. All of the girls plan to be music majors, and to become music instructors. They have given several concerts in Virginia and North Carolina."

"Although some parents might shudder at the thought of having four daughters of the same age, their adopted mother, Mrs. Charles A. Saylor, who, with her husband, accompanied the girls to Daytona Beach, says she has enjoyed bringing up her four girls. The only problem, she said, was that all growing pains were multiplied four times."

In May 1966, the Fultz college girls were invited to be guests at the Daytona Firecracker 400 by

the only Black NASCAR stock car driver in America, Wendell Scott.

What appeared to be a clear path to a very successful and profitable career in the quads' future did not pan out. The Fultz Quads attended Bethune-Cookman College for only two years. They did not complete the necessary requirements to do to sickness and not attending classes.

In the November 1968 edition of Ebony Magazine, Charles L. Sanders wrote an article titled, "The Fultz Quads – Grown-up, disappointed and bitter – At sun up one morning last December, two cars – a blue Volkswagen and a gray Buick – pulled out of Milton, N.C., and began a 500-mile trip over snowy roads to Peekskill, N.Y."

"Elma Pearl Saylor was at the wheel of the Buick. Her husband, Charles, trailed in the Volks. Inside the cars, dressed in brown slacks, were four of the most famous girls in the world: Anne, Catherine, Alice and Louise Fultz – the Fultz Quads."

"The Saylor, who adopted the girls 12 years ago, had simply boarded up their wood and brick home in Milton, crammed the cars with as many things as they could and struck out toward Peekskill, N.Y. The only people they knew there in Peekskill were Mrs. Saylor's sister and brother-in-law, Janie and Willie Lownes."

"The move, the Saylor had thought, would let them give Anne, Catherine, Alice and Louise just one more chance. The girls were grown up, and despite the sensation they'd created as 'the world's only Negro identical quadruplets' and the years they'd spent as Pet Milk Co. babies on posters and in ads, they were, at the moment, poor."

"For no matter what the public thought, the highly publicized Pet Milk advertising contracts had brought in just enough money – \$350 a month -- to keep the Fultz Quads off North Carolina's welfare rolls."

"Now there was an emotional crisis: the girls had spent two years at Bethune-Cookman College, had been unable to adjust to campus life and had been advised to leave the school."

"They settled in an apartment and have lived there in Peekskill all the months since in half-secrecy, making almost no friends, allowing no photos or interviews, living with a certain bitterness, trying to forget the disappointments that have somewhat scarred their lives."

"But Ebony was allowed to breach their shield of anonymity because, Mrs. Saylor says, 'I guess it's time we stopped hiding the truth. We wanted so desperately for people to think that everything was all right and that we didn't have any more problems than the average family had. But we do, and we've lived with them a very long time. Maybe if we talk about them, it will help the girls.'

"I'd studied photos of the girls: the bay pictures taken in Annie Penn Hospital in Reidsville, N.C., where they were born on May 23, 1946, the pictures of them with their seven brothers and sisters, their mother, Annie, and their father, whose name is James, but whom white folks in Rockingham County, N.C., still like to call, 'Ole Pete Fultz.'

"There were the 'growing up' pictures and the debutante ball ones and some of them in their high school graduation caps and gowns. Since college didn't work out for them, they feel that show business is what they'll have to use to make it in the world. Louise turns on the little Thomas electronic organ that a company in Greensboro is threatening to repossess if the payments aren't made."

"Alice hooks up the electric guitar that a promotions man gave her for a birthday a few years ago. The girls play, sing and dance for an hour, and before the first song is over it's apparent that somebody has missed the boat on the Fultz Quads."

"Their act is a natural: four young, attractive look-alike sisters who can each play several instruments-piano, organ, guitar, violin, viola, cello and four times over. The stress of it all has resulted in most of the disappointments the girls have lived through; it sustains the bitterness they live with now."

"25 years after the quads were born, in 1971, they were living in

Westchester County, New York, with their eyes set on a career in music, modeling and medicine. In May, they graduated from the Bar-bizon School of Modeling.

"The quads also studied at Lake-land Music Center Conservatory in Peekskill. They also worked nursing jobs while they waited on modeling and music engagements."

Unfortunately, the adult life of the most famous Black quads to be born in America did not bring fourth and produce the end results of their dreams and ambitions. Their pursuit of musical entertainment and modeling careers never really got off the ground.

Facing the reality that life must go on, they all decided to move into the career of nursing and follow the same path that their adopted mother Mrs. Saylor lived.

On October 5, 2018, the News & Record in Greensboro, N.C. reported: "Catherine Fultz Griffin -- among First African-American Quadruplets Born in U.S. Dies -- Mary Catherine Fultz Griffin, the last of the famed 'Reidsville Quads,' died Tuesday at age 72."

From 1947 to 1968, the four girls traveled the country, promoting Pet Milk, modeling for magazines and appearing in parades. They met presidents Truman and Kennedy, tennis player Althea Gibson and boxer Floyd Patterson.

Griffin's three sisters all died of breast cancer -- Louise at 45, Ann at 50 and Alice at 55. Griffin also battled breast cancer, but died from cancer in her spine and chest.

"We used to play dirty tricks on the guys," said Griffin in 2001. "We'd play dirty tricks on the teachers, too."

"It seems weird," she mused. "We all came into this world together. I was the last one born because I was hiding behind Alice's back. Now, one by one, we've died and I'm the last one here."

The demise of the family started with:

- James "Pete" Fultz, father, April 28, 1977
- Elma P. Saylor, adopted-mother, April 10, 1989
- Annie Mae Fultz, mother, September 9, 1989
- Charles A. Saylor, adopted-father, December 22, 1990
- Mary Louise Fultz Teague, April 1, 1991 at age 45
- Mary Ann Fultz, 1996 at age 49
- Mary Alice Fultz, October 7, 2001 at age 55
- Mary Catherine Fultz, October 2, 2018 at age 71

As to the seven other children, a thorough research of their lives has not been conducted.

The story of Pete, Annie Mae, the seven children, the Saylor Family and the Fultz Quads could easily be considered a hidden historical happening of Black history in America. Stumbling upon this, I find it to be one of those intriguing events that did not capture the attention of Blacks or whites across our nation.

Therefore, it became the story of an unknown Black history event that happened in North Carolina, Florida and New York in Black America.

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