



Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer

October 31, 1933 - October 26, 2025

AYER: Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, transitioned from this life, in the wee hours, Sunday, October 26, 2025. at Leominster Hospital, after a brief illness.

Arblia was born in Clayton, LA, October 31, 1933. Known by her family as “Sister” and later as “Bea” by friends, she was the eldest daughter of three children (siblings, the late Henry Neal and Ida Bowman) to the late Abe and Mary Neal. She was baptized September 1946 and became a longstanding member of St. Mark Baptist Church, before finally joining New Hope Community Church in 1994. In 2023, she was asked to serve as Mother of the church until her death. She was famous amongst the congregation for her pastoral encouragement of “Tell the truth.” Many of her friends in the community, having preceded her in death, asked that she provide watch-care for their children and she was more than honored to do so.

On January 14, 1951, she married the late James Tennessee and traveled the world as an army wife, before settling in Ayer, in 1972. She spent a good portion of her life as a wife and homemaker but decided she wanted to make ‘her own money,’ She took a job working for Injlectronics Corporation in Clinton but later went to work for and retired from Foster Grant in Leominster.

Arblia is survived by two sons; Roosevelt Proctor (Dorothy) of Leominster, Oliver Tennessee of Ayer, two daughters; Olivia Tennessee of Lithonia, GA

and Brenda Burwell of Ayer, a godson, Sebastian Turner, of Caraco, LA and a goddaughter, Candice Terry of Fayetteville, N.C. Known as “MaMa”, she delighted in the love of 17 grandchildren, 36 great-grandchildren and 11 great-great grandchildren. She is survived by a sister-in-law, Jessie Neal of Clayton, LA, a devoted and steadfast friend of more than 50 years, Mae Francis Reeves, several cousins, numerous nieces, nephews and a multitude of beloved friends.

She is preceded in death by her husband, James and two sons, Ronald Tennessee and Thomas James Tennessee Sr.

Arblia’s family will receive relatives and friends at calling hours from 4-7 PM Friday, November 7, 2025 at the Anderson Funeral Home, 25 Fitchburg Road, (Rte 2A) Ayer.

Her funeral service will be held 10 Am Saturday, November 8, 2025 at New Hope Community Church, 139 Sandy Pond Road, Ayer. Interment will follow at Woodlawn Cemetery, Ayer.

Cemetery Details

Woodlawn Cemetery

Harvard Road
Ayer, MA 01432
info@andersonfuneral.com

Previous Events

Calling Hours

NOV 7. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Anderson Funeral Home - Ayer
25 Fitchburg Road ~ Route 2A
Ayer, MA 01432
(978) 772-2355

Funeral Service

NOV 8. 10:00 AM (ET)

New Hope Community Church
139 Sandy Pond Rd.
Ayer, MA 01432

Tribute Wall

CT

“ I’m going to miss calling and exchanging recipes with you most, in those conversations you would speak lessons and knowledge that I didn’t know I needed to hear. Every time we spoke you would touch my spirit and heart. For that I will FOREVER be grateful. Continue to speak knowledge to me and continue to show me the lessons I need. I love you dearly.



Candice Terry - November 08, 2025 at 11:52 AM

ST

“ Dearest godmother,
You were truly a blessing. Thank you for your kindness and gentle presence. I will always cherish the wonderful times we shared. Rest peacefully.
Your loving godson,
Sebastian and Cheryl Turner



S Turner - November 06, 2025 at 01:14 PM

MF

“ Michael Grinnell & Family purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.



Michael Grinnell & Family - November 06, 2025 at 08:37 AM

TR

“ I remember mama Tennessee when I was stationed at Fort Devens, MA. While singing with the male and Gospel Choirs after church services she would invite me to have Sunday dinners at her house. I always looked forward to the meals at her home. She is/was a beautiful spirt and a true woman of God. May you rest in Heaven, forever. Love you ma then in person and now spiritually woman of God.

Theodore Robinson - November 05, 2025 at 03:27 PM

PP

“ Pastor and Prophetess Palmer purchased the Lavender Reflections Spray for the family of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.



Pastor and Prophetess Palmer - November 04, 2025 at 11:05 AM

PP

“ Pastor and Prophetess Palmer planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.

Pastor and Prophetess Palmer - November 04, 2025 at 11:05 AM

AF

“ Angela F. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.

Angela F. - November 03, 2025 at 09:39 PM

BH

“ I'm so glad our paths crossed on this journey called life. You were real as can be I will miss our " check in" phone calls. Thank you for the soul food you would cook and invite me over. I loved how positive you were and your never gossiped. Love you always

Barri Haskins - October 30, 2025 at 08:41 PM

LM

“ Oh my heart is broken, you've been a part of my life since I was four years old. I can remember walking over to your door to introduce myself you opened the door and said Hey as you always did wearing a white dress with light blue pinstripes and house shoes. I'm sad you have left this world but you're in a better place with your loved ones and will miss you dearly. Thank you for being a wonderful friend to my parents and always having a kind heart and know our families will always be ONE. My love and condolences to the family and anyone whose life was impacted by your passing. I'll love you always and will smile every time I think of you. Rest in heaven because you earned it were and awesome Lady, Queen, Wife and Mother! Rest in peace forever. 🙏

Lisa M. Terry - October 30, 2025 at 07:51 PM

SH

“ Soniai H. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.

Soniai H. - October 30, 2025 at 05:56 PM

MF

“ I'm sure going to miss my fishing buddy, love you always, see you out on the Banks Nael, Condolences to Family &Friends!



Michael Felix - October 30, 2025 at 04:43 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.



October 30, 2025 at 04:30 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Arblia (Neal) Tennessee, 91, of Ayer.



October 30, 2025 at 08:36 AM

LB

“ Grandma,
I miss you already. I'll miss our talks so much — you were such an inspiration to me and to everyone who knew you. I was really looking forward to planning this year's Thanksgiving menu together. You always had such a beautiful way of organizing and making everything special.
I'm grateful knowing you're no longer in pain. Please keep watching over all of us. You'll always be in my heart.. i will always love you!
- Laphine Nicola Brown-Smith

Laphine Brown-Smith - October 29, 2025 at 09:49 PM

OM

My husband and I will miss your beautiful greeting with your beautiful smile and warm personality. God has your mansion ready for you.
Rest in peace.
SGM Earl & Ottoway Marshall

Ottoway Marshall - November 02, 2025 at 03:42 PM

TF

Mrs. Tennessee, you had a beautiful heart and were a blessing to so many! You will be missed. We are thinking about your family, sending our condolences, virtual hugs, love, and prayers, to the family and all of those whose lives you touched for so many years!
Rest in Peace!
The Mahoney Family!

The Mahoney Family - November 07, 2025 at 05:46 AM