

BIOGRAPHY OF RUTH JONES HARRIS



Ruth Jones Harris was the first of six children born to the late Daniel and Novella Jones on February 1, 1925 in Dendron, Virginia. At the age of two, she moved with her family to Hopewell, Virginia. Ruth attended the Hopewell Public Schools and was elected president of her senior class at Carter G. Woodson High School. In 1943, a year after finishing high school, she graduated from the Virginia State College of Beauty Culture and Cosmetology, Petersburg, VA. She later studied social work at Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA and took Business Administration and Early Childhood Development courses at Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA.

On February 20, 1946, Ruth uttered her wedding vows and took Curtis West Harris as her lifetime partner. Ruth and Curtis resided in Hopewell and parented six children---Curtis, Jr. (Fayetteville, GA), Kenneth (Hopewell, VA), Michael (Ft. Washington, MD), Joanne (Virginia Beach, VA), Karen (Fayetteville, GA), and Michelle (Waldorf, MD). After 65 years of marriage, the Harris Connection, as the family proudly calls itself, has grown to also include three daughter-in-laws, one son-in-law, 23 grandchildren, 32 great grandchildren, and 3 great-great grandchildren.

Her appetite for business was fed for the first time when Ruth opened the Harris and Young Beauty Salon on Wednesday, March 25, 1953 at 10:00 a.m. Four years later, she replaced her cosmetology career with a family restaurant when she and her husband opened the Harris Snack Bar in 1959. As manager and head cook, Ruth transformed the Snack Bar into a wholesome part of the community. It became a meeting place---Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. even stopped in during the thrust of the 1960's civil rights movement.

Ruth confessed Christ at an early age and was dedicated to a spiritual life, but her role in the church changed when her husband entered the ministry in 1957. By 1966, she was First Lady, simultaneously, at First Baptist Church, Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield, VA; Gilfield Baptist Church in Ivor, VA; and Union Baptist Church in Hopewell, VA. Through the years, Ruth took on the roles of Sunday school teacher and superintendent, president of the Missionary Circle, a

Bible study instructor, a Deaconess Board member, chairperson of the finance committee and a leader in the church's observance of Women's History Month. As an extension of her Christian service, she was a founder of the Usher's Union of Hopewell, Petersburg, and Vicinity; Past Worthy Matron of the Lily of the Valley Chapter #44 Order of the Eastern Star; and participated on the local, state, and national levels of the International Association of Ministers' Wives and Ministers' Widows.

In September of 1972, Ruth and Curtis opened Union Day Care Center, Inc. Ruth was once again in her business persona---she went back to college and joined professional organizations such as the American Childhood International, the Southside Association of Early Childhood Education, and the Virginia and National Association of the Education of Young Children. As director of the Union Day Care Center, Ruth created a unique situation when she decided to start a senior citizen program across the hall from the children in the center. She was eventually appointed by the Hopewell City Council to serve on the Senior Citizens Commission from 1981-1985. In 2000, Ruth retired from the day care industry taking with her 28 years of warm memories that would delight her for a lifetime.

"Ms. Ruth," as she was fondly referred, was a pillar in her community as well as in her home. She was a Girl Scout leader, a member and officer in the Moses Life Insurance, a volunteer at the Hopewell Food Pantry, a member of the Parent Teacher Association, and a grade mother in her children's school. Acknowledgement of her many accomplishments humbled Ruth when she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the Virginia University of Lynchburg in 1986. As a foot soldier in the on-going battle for racial and social justice, she was selfless in her responsibilities as a wife and mother when the urgency of the Civil Rights Movement required her husband to be away from home. On August 8, 2007, Ruth became one of the first recipients of the Faithful Servant Award. The National Southern Christian Leadership Conference presented the award during its First Lady Award Celebration in recognition of her contributions to the Movement.

On Sunday, May 22, 2011, the "quiet warrior" went home to be with God. The residual of Dr. Ruth Jones Harris' remarkable compassion for people and unstoppable faith in God are the cornerstone of her legacy. Ruth's sincere testimony for life is captured in the poignant lines of the 121st Psalm: *"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord..."*