



Esstoya "Toy" Whitley

May 4, 2015

Toy Whitley, 95, gifted educator, devoted matriarch, and friend to all, died Saturday, May 2, 2015 of natural causes at Terrace Health & Rehabilitation Center in Gainesville, FL. She was born January 23, 1920 in Mars Hill, NC to the late Claude Willis and Cordelia Davis. Her passion for childhood reading education propelled her career to international recognition. A towering presence in the classroom, she guided hundreds of young minds across several generations at the University of Florida's former P.K. Yonge Laboratory School. She had an intense focus for teaching students one-on-one. During her tenure she pioneered the Adopt-A-Grandparent program, in which first and second-graders visited and developed relationships with elderly residents in healthcare facilities. The highly successful program was eventually adopted by the Inter-Generational Conference in Washington, DC from which she received an award.

Raised in a rural mountain community, Toy was the oldest of six children and the first from her family to seek higher education and a life "off the farm." That desire took her on a lifelong adventure in education and she eventually accepted an offer from UF in 1958, where she taught school until her retirement in 1984. She was a faithful member of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, as well as the Gainesville Woman's Club.

She was preceded in death by her husband Edward J. Whitley and son

Edward J. Whitley Jr. She is survived by sister Geneva Faw (Wiley), son William Trantham Whitley (Ruth), granddaughter Susan Whitley Koch (Stephen) and great granddaughter Samantha Whitley Koch.

Funeral services will be conducted Friday, May 8, 2015 at Forest Meadows Funeral Home in Gainesville at 11:00am, followed by burial at Forest Meadows Cemetery. Visitation will be Thursday, May 7, 2015 at Forest Meadows Funeral Home at 6:00pm. All are welcome to attend and share with the family.

Tribute Wall

CW

“ *Love you the most.*

Cornelia Whitley - May 15, 2015 at 01:24 PM

SG

“ *Toy was the most amazing teacher I ever had. Her influence on me is forever. May the world of education be transformed by her students who became educators. We were all blessed by her love and devotion.*

Steven Chance Gornto - May 09, 2015 at 10:32 PM