



Ruth Virginia Ellis

October 27, 1919 - May 5, 2020

Ruth Virginia Ellis, 100, of Hurricane passed away, Wednesday, May 6, 2020 at her beloved home with her sons at bedside. This is exactly the way she wanted it to be.

Born October 27, 1919 in Hurricane, she was the daughter of Charles Clyde and Alma Hodges Billups. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her brothers, Harry, Jennings and Buell Billups and sister, Clara Gibson. She was also preceded in death by her husband, Paul Edwin Ellis in 2013 after 71 years of marriage.

Ruth graduated from Hurricane High School in 1938 as its Valedictorian. After attending Marshall College for one year she started teaching in a one room school. This began an illustrious 40 year career with the Putnam County Board of Education. For 25 years she taught at Hurricane Elementary School. Later she worked with the National Teacher Corps. As Director of Elementary Education, she implemented the county's first kindergarten programs. Her zeal for learning lasted through her final days.

As a member of First Baptist Church of Hurricane she was active in Sunday school activities and sang in the choir for 40 years. She was proud to be its oldest member. She also belonged to the Hurricane Woman's Club, Putnam County Democratic Woman's Club, West Virginia Education Association and the Upper Vandalia Historical Society.

She and Paul loved traveling the state and country. They visited every state and West Virginia County Seat. They attended several World's Fairs, saw 13 European countries, and baseball games in major cities. That was her favorite sport. She enjoyed family members playing, going to Hurricane High School games and was disappointed when Major League Baseball was sidelined by the pandemic. Paul took her to political items shows. She took him to professional education conventions. Together, they shopped at flea markets.

She is survived by sons, Michael Ellis of Hurricane and Edwin Ellis and wife, Rebecca of Fraziers Bottom; grandchildren, Marian Smith (Gary), Reuben Ellis (Kathryn), Abe Ellis

(Laura), Ben Ellis (Savannah), and Laura Cummings (Lee); great-grandchildren, Blane Lewis (Alex), Weston Smith, Laurel and Loudon Cummings, Jayden, Cooper, Dehlia, Kaiya, Luke and Autumn Ellis; great-great-grandchild, Hudson Lewis.

She will be laid to rest beside her beloved Paul during a private service. You are encouraged to visit her tribute page at ChapmanFuneralHomes.com to share memories and offer condolences to the family.

Chapman Funeral Home, family-owned and located at 3941 Teays Valley Road, Hurricane is honored to serve the Ellis family.

CONTINUE READING THE BIOGRAPHY OF RUTH VIRGINIA ELLIS

The year was 1653 and George Billups of Milford Haven, Wales was interested in resettling in British North America. Virginia Commonwealth Governor Richard Bennett (1652-55) made him an offer. If Billups brought fifteen people with him, he could claim 750 acres in Matthews County. Located on the west bank of the Chesapeake Bay, Matthews was like much of coastal Virginia... prime tobacco growing land. The Billups family eventually moved west as over farming took its toll on the land. Franklin County in western Virginia was one stop. In time the family acquired a farm on Trace Creek about three miles north of Hurricane.

In 1855 C.C. "Willie" Billups was born and raised on that farm. When he was twenty-one, he married Alma Hodges. Given a 128-acre farm on Cow Creek the couple settled into the typical life of small country farmers. Raising chickens, hogs, sheep, and extra crops provided cash. Willie only worked one "outside job" in his life. For one year he lived in Huntington working on the railroad for \$1.00 a day. Most of the time he farmed. Alma cooked, gardened, canned, washed, ironed and did all the many tasks of a farm wife.

The family grew. Clara (1907), Jennings (1909), Buell (1915), Ruth (1919) and Harry (1926) were the couples' offspring. Harry only lived six months, dying of whooping cough. Ruth also contracted the disease but survived. She recalls her illness, saying the only food she was able to eat was canned sweet cherries. These berries came from the orchard of C.O. Ellis of nearby Peach Ridge. Her first known photograph was made as she recovered and shows a young girl who had been very ill.

Soon she resumed the normal activities of a farm child. Working in the fields, gardens, orchards and barns; she developed the expectation of "hard work". She remembers a German Shepherd who had young pups and the only one "allowed" to handle them was

her. She walked to Adda Baptist Church (one mile away) and one roomed Adda School (one half mile way). When she came home from school each day her other had sugar cookies to eat. Ruth ate all foods except eggs. They were fine to cook with but not to eat alone. She never lost her distaste for them. In an effort to get her to eat eggs, Alma hard boiled one for her. This changed nothing, she still hated eggs. Taking the uneaten hard-boiled egg, she hid it in the ask bucket. Buell found it and told on her!

She frequently spent weekends at her sister Clara's house on Hurricane Creek. Clara was able to play the organ, one of which the family owned. With the advent of electricity, the family purchased a radio. Popular programs were "Amos n Andy" and "The Grand Ole Opry". Homecomings, church gatherings and visiting neighbors were significant social activities for the family. Ruth remembered regularly visiting one neighbor who weighed over three hundred pounds and another who was blind. The latter would ask to feel the little girl's hair and said, "oh it must be so pretty." Some neighbors were poor and she recalls the lack of food, clothing, warmth, and cleanliness in their homes.

The community church on Peach Ridge had a bell in a tall steeple. When someone died, it tolled. That sound always caused concern for those who heard. Ruth remembers it ringing for a man who had been murdered.

Among her early teachers was her brother, Jennings in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. She was a less than inspired student until her freshman year in high school. Jennings said, "did you ever think about being on the honor roll?" His question included the offer of a new fountain pen if she made it. Working harder, she made the grades, got the pen and was never off the honor roll for the rest of her high school days.

At Hurricane High School she had roles in several plays including "Rose of the Southland" and "Tom Sawyer". She sang in the operetta, "Cherry Blossom" while serving as class and student council presidents. Graduating in 1938 she was Valedictorian of her class.

In 1931 she was baptized in Hurricane Creek along with 48 others. At Adda Baptist she sang in the choir and taught Sunday School. She remained a member until 1947.

It was in that church that she earned her first money on her first job. As janitor of the church, she was in charge of sweeping, dusting, and maintaining fires in the wood stoves for services. She was paid one dollar per month. She also earned money for worming tobacco. Her father paid her a penny for every four worms she killed. Not liking to kill them, she put them in a jar to be counted.

As she grew older entertainment included county fairs, school activities, ice cream making, molasses making, pie socials, weddings and picnics. Occasionally she got to see a motion picture. Her favorites were "Gone with the Wind" and "Wuthering Heights". These were seen at the theater on Main Street in Hurricane.

While in the eighth grade during Christmas season she got an unexpected and prophetic gift. This was her last year to attend Adda School and as always, a Christmas tree was the center of attention. Hanging on one of its branches was a small wine-colored pocketbook. An accompanying note listed "Paul Ellis" as the author. And while they didn't "date" seriously until about six years later, there was an acknowledged and mutual attraction.

Being in high school meant having to walk much further. Poor roads and limited bus service resulted in the school bus traveling no closer than three miles from her home. After catching the bus, it traveled three more miles to Hurricane High School.

She especially enjoyed her French Class. One of its requirements was to correspond with a "pen pal" in France. She and Colette Loze wrote each other for decades and later visited each other in their respective homes.

The summer after her junior year, she traveled with Jennings to Marshall College. There she earned six hours college credit that year despite not having a high school diploma. A year later she moved to Huntington to study full time. Working as a waitress in the Marshall College cafeteria, her meals were provided. She was an associate member of Fifth Avenue Baptist Church. Her dormitory house mother made sure all girls going to church were dressed appropriately.... Gloves and hats being a must.

With one years schooling she began teaching the next school year (1939-40) at Oak Dale School. She won the confidence and respect of boys almost her size by playing baseball with them. She created a kitchen with children bringing various items. At lunch soup was eaten. She very happily taught there for four years. During the war she would knit socks to send to Buell stationed on the front lines in Europe as well as took Red Cross training which included "child-bearing", She delivered three babies.

A twenty-five-year tenure at Hurricane Elementary followed. During these years it became one of West Virginias largest grade schools. Going to night school she earned her BA and MA degrees. In 1960 the West Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs chose her as "Teacher of the Year". In 1961 she was initiated into Delta Kappa Gamma, an education honorary.

In 1968 she worked with the National Teachers Corps. This federally funded program took

college students into areas deemed “needy”. They worked in schools and took classes to earn degrees. The centers in Putnam County were Bancroft and Confidence. She became Putnam County Director of Elementary Education. One of her major accomplishments was the development of the counties first Early Childhood Education Program. The first kindergartens were at Hurricane, Winfield and Eleanor. Retiring in 1981 would end 40 years working for the Putnam County Board of Education.

Although living on nearby farms and always having at least some interest in each other, Ruth and Paul didn’t seriously date until the winter of 1940-41. Paul was drafted in July 1941. They married on one of his short furloughs (3days) May 19, 1942. They ate a wedding dinner at the Billups home and two nights later, they were “belled” at the Ellis home. Then they were apart until the war ended and he returned in the fall of 1945.

Housing was scarce in Hurricane after the war. The young couple lived in houses that served more than one family. Their first child, Michael was born in 1947 and at that time they lived on Putnam Avenue. Returning to the classroom in the fall she breast fed the baby before going to school. At noon she walked home for his next feeding. After watching the toddler run after a ball that rolled out into the street and eventually to the railroad underpass, the couple decided to build their own home. That house built in 1949 became their home for the rest of their lives.

Edwin was born in 1951 and the family; including milk cows “Flossie” and “Goldie”, dogs “Lassie” and “Stonewall” made Sunnybrooke their home. Ruth and all the family gardened. She canned and froze various food items. Not only did they raise the typical vegetable garden, but also had strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, gooseberries and melons. Paul transferred his church membership from Mt. Vernon and Ruth from Adda to the First Baptist Church of Hurricane. Both were active in Sunday school, choir, and served as clerk, deacon, and Sunday school teachers. She belonged to the Hurricane Woman’s Club, Putnam County Democratic Women’s Club, West Virginia Education Association and the Upper Vandalia Historical Society. Working with that last group, she and Paul volunteered for five years. Their project was cataloging cemeteries of Putnam County. They hiked to some very obscure and challenging sites on this mission. In 1998 they received the History Hero award from the society.

She watched the boys play baseball in Hurricane and Teays Valley. The family attended professional baseball games in Charleston, Cincinnati, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Washington. and New York. She and Paul loved to watch the grandchildren play. They attended Hurricane High School games until very late in life.

She was a devoted Democrat, winning awards for her service. She attended meetings,

conventions, rallies, etc. for Democratic politicians. Her passion was less than Paul's, but her loyalty never faded.

In the hospital recently a therapist wanted to measure her alertness and memory. He asked several questions including, "Who is President, now?" She replied, "That guy I didn't vote for, Hillary should have won."

She and Jennings drove to California and back in 1941. They visited relatives and ventured south into Mexico. On their return they stopped in Denver, Colorado, spending a few days with Paul, stationed nearby. Once established, she and Paul traveled often. His hobby of taking pictures of state capitols (he got all fifty) and West Virginia county seats (got all fifty-five of these), took them on many trips.

Another reason for travel was the professional conventions Ruth attended. In 1955 she was in Chicago with the National Education Administration. In 1970 a Delta Kappa Gamma convention took her and Paul to the Greenbrier. An International Reading Foundation Workshop in 1974 saw her back and three years later the group met in Miami, Florida. She and Paul flew there with a group of Kanawha County Teachers. She attended an Early Childhood Education Convention in Denver in 1979 and in San Francisco in 1980.

Meetings, workshops, and conventions took her all over West Virginia. She attended activities held at Marshall, West Virginia and Ohio Universities, among other schools. Meetings were held at North Bend State Park, Oglebay Park and Pipestem Resort.

The family traveled frequently. In 1953 they went to Niagara Falls. Virginia battlefields, Presidents' homes and Washington D.C. were toured in 1958. In 1960 they traveled through the Great Smokey Mountains and in 1962 went to Philadelphia, Gettysburg, and Valley Forge. A special trip was in 1964 to New York City and the Worlds Fair. She, Paul and Edwin went to Florida in 1971 and the next year, the couple while traveling the west, visited Edwin in Colorado where he was stationed. In 1973 they stopped at many sites on their way to Texas and back. Williamsburg, Jamestown and Richmond were visited in 1974. In 1975 they went to the pacific Northwest and the nest year to midwestern states. They returned to New England in 1981. Another Worlds Fair was seen in Knoxville (1982), Alaska and Canada were toured in 1984, an Amtrak train took them to the west in 1985. Back to Texas in 1986, they went to Nova Scotia in 1988. In 1990 she, Paul and Michael visited thirteen European countries.

Through all these ventures, she and others went to flea markets in Washington Court House and Springfield Ohio. When Paul went to political items shows, she went also.

Church camps, retreats, and meetings took her to several states. Political rallies, train stops, museums, mansion tours and other activities saw her in attendance.

One of Ruth's retirement gifts was a quilt. Each of its thirty blocks were made by a different kindergarten teacher in Putnam County. Quilting became a retirement hobby for her. Most of the work was done a frame her father bought from a Peach Ridge blacksmith for \$1.00 in the early 1900's. Various designs and types of quilts were given to all family members. She made one of denim and other heavy material. Its nickname was "The Iron Blanket". Two of her quilts won prizes. Certainly, the most unique creation was a "family quilt" which contains name and birth dates of all family members.

Among her many skills and talents was a gift for cooking. With eye to nutrition, she insisted on menus that were healthy and she managed to make them tasty. She had the special ability to feed whomever the boys bough home a delicious hot meal on little notice. Delightful dinners often prepared for numerous family members and others were impossible to forget.

Her greatest pride lay in those very fortunate beings for whom she gave so much and loved so dearly. Family came first all else followed.

Tribute Wall



“ *Ruth Virginia Ellis*

October 06, 2023 at 08:41 AM

FA

“ *I first met Mrs. Ellis at a Lion's Club picnic when her husband and my father-in-law, William, and my husband, Bill, were all active club members. Later I came to know of her influence at Hurricane Elementary when I began teaching there. She was also one of Bill's elementary teachers. It was always a pleasure to talk with Mrs. Ellis and her husband after church and catch up on their numerous community endeavors. She has left a lasting legacy and will be truly missed by many. Prayers of comfort to all the family. Fran Allen*

Fran Allen - May 14, 2020 at 10:37 AM

KD

“ *A wonderful Lady! Sending condolences to the Ellis Family. First met Mrs. Ellis at Hurricane Elementary. She was over the kindergarten program but, was always so kind to everyone in the school. She will be missed. Karen Dolin*

Karen Dolin - May 12, 2020 at 08:07 PM

BJ

“ *Sorry for your loss.*

Barbara Johnson - May 12, 2020 at 07:42 AM

RS

“ *Mrs. Ellis was my sixth grade teacher a long time ago, but she was the best teacher I ever had. I still have very vivid memories of her class. She and Mr. Ellis also did very special work inventorying the cemeteries in Putnam county probably 35-40 years ago. That was a very important and difficult thing that they did. I moved from the state in the mid 60's, but the memories are still there and have kept up with a lot of people from my old home where I grew up. The world is a better place because of both of them. My deepest sympathy to the whole family and Gob bless you all. -Ray Stringer*

Ray Stringer - May 11, 2020 at 07:55 PM

AB

“ Ruth was my third grade teacher and a wonderful influence at First Baptist Church in Hurricane. It was an honor to know this remarkable woman. Deepest sympathy to Michael, Edwin, and families.

Ada Boggess - May 11, 2020 at 05:37 PM

CQ

“ My condolences to the Ellis family. 🙏🙏 I've appreciated the efforts of Ruth and Paul among others for all the hard work in documenting the cemeteries in Putnam County! That was a huge and daunting task. Their work has helped me on so many different occasions including finding a family cemetery that no one in my family knew existed. Truly thankful for her commitment to our genealogy society! Again, my condolences.
Craig Quick

Craig Quick - May 11, 2020 at 01:55 PM

TS

“ On behalf of all the members of the Putnam County Democratic Women's Club, we are sending you and your family caring thoughts and wishing you peace, comfort, and lots of love in this time of sorrow.

Tonya Shuler - May 11, 2020 at 10:00 AM

DK

“ Mrs. Ellis was one of my very favorite teachers. She was so kind to me. She took a real interest in her students.

Donnie Chapman Kirby - May 10, 2020 at 02:48 PM

RF

“ Sorry to hear about your loss. She had a full and rewarding life. Thoughts are with you Michael, Edwin and Becky, and family

R. Welker / Mount Dora FI - May 10, 2020 at 01:47 PM

CH

“ Mike and Edwin,

Sorry to hear of the passing of your wonderful mother. She was always a pleasure to be around, as was your father. The last time I saw her was 3 years ago at your 70th birthday, Mike. A very kind, loving person who will be sadly missed.

Clay Hinkley

CLAY HINKLEY - May 10, 2020 at 01:24 PM

LH

“ *I will never forget Mrs. Ellis - my 6th grade teacher. She was one of a kind. She was the perfect teacher - always encouraging, approachable and professional. I always admired her because of her love of Hurricane, Putnam County and West Virginia. I remember she and her husband did a lot of work inventorying our Putnam County cemeteries. She was such an inspiration to so many. She will be sorely missed.*

Linda Taylor Harshbarger - May 10, 2020 at 11:40 AM

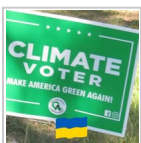
GB

“ *As a first grader the first act of kindness by a teacher shown to me was by Ruth Ellis. I cried every day and each day I was terrified that I would miss my bus. How it actually transpired i'll never know but Ruth allowed me to sit in her sixth grade class with my aunt Judy for the last few minutes every day thus ensuring I wouldn't miss my ride. I've admired her all my life. She was always very kind to me.*

My condolences to Michael, Edwin, and their families.

Greg Barringer

Greg Barringer - May 10, 2020 at 11:08 AM



“ *We were glad to have known her! In recognition of just one small part of her talents, I am gratified to remember the work she and her husband accomplished in the recording of data from the small cemeteries in Putnam County. She was a multi-faceted person and a real role model.*

Cindy and David Ellis

Cynthia Ellis - May 10, 2020 at 08:56 AM

BS

“ A wonderful and special teacher and beautiful lady. Many memories. Prayers for comfort during this time. She will be remembered fondly

Belinda Keeling Stevenson - May 10, 2020 at 07:28 AM

JB

“ Ruth was such a dear sweet lady in all aspects. I first met her in 1978 at Conner Street Elementary during one of her frequent visits. She didn't know me but upon greeting me, I felt as if we were already friends due to her warm nature. She was definitely a 'knows no stranger' person. We met again in the late 80's when I became librarian at her alma mater. There I got to know her son Mike (as colleague and later administrator) and his son Reuben (as student and later colleague). The Ellis family became friends of mine who are true examples of what a friend should be.
Having lived to the age of 100 is a testament to a life blessed by God. We will all miss you, Ruth. I regret I cannot visit Mike and Reuben and give them a big hug! Maybe we'll meet again when this pandemic is over!

Jim Barr - May 10, 2020 at 07:05 AM

BH

“ Michael, Edwin & family, prayers and deep sympathy to all. Your Mother was a beautiful awesome lady! Barbara (Cottrell) Harper

Bobbi Harper - May 09, 2020 at 11:43 AM

RM

“ Mike, I am so sorry to hear of the passing of your mother. She was a beautiful lady in so many ways. Praying for peace and comfort for you and all your family.

Ruth Ann (Byus) Maynard - May 09, 2020 at 06:01 AM

HC

“ We would like to offer our condolences to the Ellis family and offer our thanks for the many years during which she spent countless hours helping the Hurricane Women's Club on various projects. Her time and ideas will be greatly missed.

HURRICANE WOMEN'S CLUB

HURRICANE WOMEN'S CLUB - May 08, 2020 at 07:51 PM

NH

“ Ruth was an amazing woman. She and Paul left a lasting legacy in their community. Definitely a life well lived.

Nancy Howell, Knoxville, TN

Nancy Howell - May 08, 2020 at 05:50 PM

LM

“ I remember the first time I met her. She welcomed me into her home and when I left gave me a hand written recipe for cabbage soup! What a wonderful lady who will be missed by many. Condolences to the entire Ellis clan for your loss.

Leah Minshall - May 08, 2020 at 02:42 PM



“ Ruth was a very special lady for sure! Dwane and I enjoyed lots of good times with your mom and dad. We are sorry for your great loss, but happy for her reunion with Paul. Love and sympathy to all of you. Dwane and Peggy

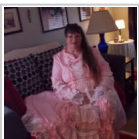
Peggy Bush - May 08, 2020 at 02:39 PM

TM

“ Ruth and Paul were 2 of the most intriguing people we knew. So full of history, wisdom, kindness and most of all a great love for our Lord. Our visits were not as many as they should have been but when we did have the opportunity we always left with a sense of gratitude to have spent time with such remarkable, knowledgeable, loving people. Ruth especially beamed with pride when she spoke of her family. Rest well Ruth you will be missed and your example will be one that is cherished. 💕💕💕



Tom and Kim Mack - May 08, 2020 at 09:51 AM



“ Sorry for your loss she was my teacher she will be missed



Phyllis Call - May 08, 2020 at 09:19 AM

JS

“ We just saw this , sending prayers for the Ellis family. She lived a long life, even though we do not want them to go, in our hearts we know they are in heaven, where they longed to be. May God hold you close through this difficult time.

John and Debbie Smith - May 08, 2020 at 09:05 AM

BB

“ Michael, I am so sorry-to your and your family-prayers...for the loss of your wonderful mother, one of my favorite teachers. She will be missed. She touched so many lives; we loved her. A true matriarch, educator, and all around good lady...I loved having her in 4th and 6th grade; I enjoyed getting to be with her at church when I returned to WV...love to all.

Brenda Burke - May 08, 2020 at 08:48 AM

HB

“ Harold And Sue Bennett lit a candle in memory of Ruth Virginia Ellis



Harold and Sue Bennett - May 08, 2020 at 08:31 AM

LK

“ Lionel & Jill Kozee lit a candle in memory of Ruth Virginia Ellis



Lionel & Jill Kozee - May 08, 2020 at 12:14 AM

AB

“ Deepest condolences to her family & friends.

Annette Billups - May 07, 2020 at 11:30 PM

BR

“ Mrs. Ellis was a wonderful teacher and woman! She was a Godly example for so many. Our family has been acquainted with her and also Mike through school and sports! It is always a pleasure to talk with them anytime! We will miss her but are so grateful her passing was as she wished. She lived a wonderful life! Condolences to the family. We pray for comfort and peace!

Becky Robertson - May 07, 2020 at 09:12 PM

SH

“ Sleeve, I'm so sorry for your loss. She was a wonderful person. You did such a great Job of taking care of her. God will bless You. She's in a better place.

Scott Henderson - May 07, 2020 at 06:41 PM