

Celebrating a Life Well-Lived



La Fern Ruth Sally Lee Harris - Cunningham

SUNRISE 10 OCTOBER 1935

SUNSET 23 SEPTEMBER 2015

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

A Tribute to Our Beloved Mother

See You Later, Fern

*Your beaming smile and gracious hugs
Are what set you apart
You never met a stranger
God's love was in your heart*

*You ran life's race with dignity
And tried to do your best
You loved deeply, forgave completely
And set an example for the rest*

*When the clouds of life o'er took you
You didn't run or hide
You faced them all with courage
For God was on your side*

*The trials of life were sometimes hard
But you stayed on your knees
And Christ would come to comfort you
To put your soul at ease*

*You knew how to enjoy life
In spite of all the pains
Where others saw potential strife
You found potential gains*

*Lord knows you had disappointments
At points along your way
But your ebullient spirit
Made all of them give way*

*You left a living legacy
Of Love, of Strength, of Joy
That we will carry in our hearts
And not let time destroy*

*Thank you, Fern, for loving us
As only you could do
Take your rest, you did your best
You know we loved you too.*

*To my sweet friend, from Detroit Flanagan
October 2015*



Order of Service

Prelude

“Total Praise”

Greeting

Pastor Jordan Allen

Invocation

Rev. Danny R. Rich

Musical Selection

Be Thou Exalted
SACRED PRAISE CHORAL

Scriptures

Old Testament: Proverbs 31: 10-12 & 25-31, Min. Ronald Lyles
New Testament: 1 Corinthians 13, Ms. Gloria Carson

Musical Selection

Walk Together Children
SACRED PRAISE CHORAL

Special Word from Rev. Jesse Wall, Pastor - St. James Restoration Tabernacle, Riverside

Tributes

Congresswoman Diane E. Watson
Congresswoman Maxine Waters
Dignitaries

Reflections

Judge David S. Cunningham, III
Christiáne Chanel Harris
Lt Col. Michael J. Taylor

Obituary

Attorney Lynette Boggs Quintanilla

Musical Selection

His Eye Is On The Sparrow
Dr. Diane White-Clayton

Eulogy

Bishop Ronald M. Cunningham, Sr.

Musical Selection

What A Friend
SACRED PRAISE CHORAL

Acknowledgments

Ms. Helane Wilbourne

Tribute To Our Beloved Mother

Leslie J. Cunningham

Musical Selection

How Great Thou Art
Dr. Diane White-Clayton

Benediction

Pastor Jordan Allen

Celebrating a Life Well-Loved

*L*a Fern Ruth Sally Lee Harris-Cunningham (Fern) was born on October 10, 1935, in Teneha, Texas, the fourth of nine children, to Booker T. W. and Rebecca “Mother Dear” Harris. A “daddy’s girl”, Fern’s arrival so delighted her school teacher parents that her father took special pride and pleasure in giving her four names...one name just wasn’t enough. With the lure of better economic and educational opportunities, the family moved west to California, briefly residing in Indio and Palm Springs before finally settling in Riverside in 1944. Fern often joked that the family was headed for Los Angeles, but that’s where the truck broke down. After Fern’s youngest siblings were born in 1945 - her fourth grade class named the twins - the large, eleven-member Harris Family was finally complete.

Admiring her parents for becoming educators, Fern developed a remarkable lifelong love of education, attending Irving Elementary School, University Heights Junior High School, and graduating from Riverside Polytechnic High School in 1953. That same year, her father succumbed to a heart attack, further motivating Fern to pursue a college education with the goal to financially help her now-widowed Mother Dear. Completing an Associate of Arts Degree from Riverside Community College in 1955, Fern majored in Early Childhood Education at the University of California at Santa Barbara, earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree and Teaching Credential in 1958. Popular and outgoing, Fern attracted several friends with her warmth and ever-present sense of humor. She then returned to Riverside to help provide for her younger siblings.

Fern began her teaching career with Longfellow Elementary School in Riverside, quickly immersing herself in Civil Rights activities with the NAACP, participating in Park Avenue Baptist Church programs, and volunteering in the community. She soon met a tall, charming, ambitious Air Force soldier who played in a band with her younger brothers named David Cunningham, Jr. The couple married in 1960 and Fern became stepmother to David Cunningham, III. Fern and David produced two daughters: Leslie and Robyn.

While expecting her second child, Fern - with three-year-old Leslie in tow - joined David in the capital city of Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa during his career assignment in the 1960s. Giving birth in a Third World country was one of the many humorous stories Fern loved to tell about her life in Africa. Her favorite activity of buying local Nigerian handcrafts, art, sculpture, and cloth rapidly expanded Fern’s knowledge of Nigerian culture and customs. She quickly mastered skillful haggling and amassed an African art collection which in later years became featured in displays throughout Southern California. A teaching position at the American International School of Lagos opened up for Fern where she developed friendships with Ambassador H.G. & Lula Dawson, Attaché Randy & Arthuree Randolph, and The Gamble Family, heirs to Proctor & Gamble Corporation. Fern always said that her biggest thrill was the day she played tennis with Arthur Ashe when he stopped through Lagos and spotted Americans chatting on the tennis court. Her trademark ability to walk with kings yet never lose the common touch defined Fern’s personality.

Following the start of the civil war in Nigeria in the late 1960s, Fern, David and the girls departed for the United States, going on a first-time tour of Europe through Rome, Geneva, Paris and



La Fern Ruth Sally Lee Harris Cunningham

London. Fern often joked that she had tea with the Queen-- the Queen had tea in her palace while she had tea across town in the hotel. However, that brief stint through Europe ignited a passion for travel that would later shape Fern's future in an incredible way.

Settling back in Los Angeles in 1969, Fern landed a teaching position at the 52nd Street Elementary School, where she quickly established a tight knit group of colleagues and friends, while David built a management consulting firm and political network. A strong commitment to grassroots political involvement led to Fern supporting the political campaigns of friends like Tom Bradley, Diane Watson, Maxine Waters, Bob Farrell, and of course, her husband David.

Newly single, Fern earned a Master of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education from Pepperdine University in 1976, then immediately received a teaching position, along with her baby sister Dolores, with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS). Her first teaching assignment in Wtirzburg, Germany, launched an incredible opportunity of international travel with her daughters while building a global network of family, friends and colleagues. Fern opened her overseas home to a steady stream of family and friends where everybody knew there would be a bed and a plate ready.

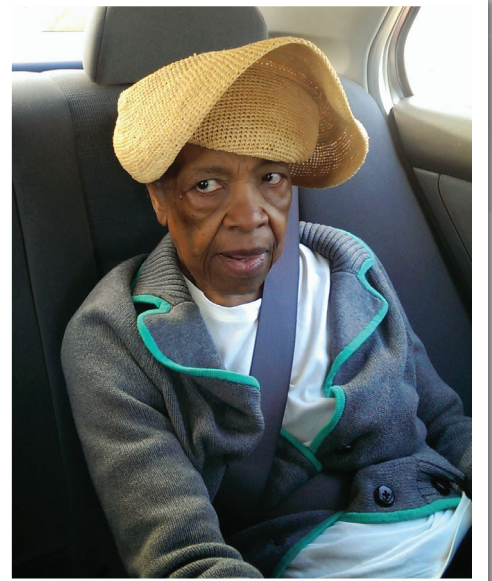
In 1985, Fern went on sabbatical, graduating from California State University at Dominguez Hills in 1986 with a Specialist Certification in English-as-a-Second Language. Fern returned to Germany to teach in Pirmasens, then transferred to Okinawa, Japan in 1988. Fern was joined by Dolores teaching in Japan where she served as President of the Phi Delta Kappa education fraternity, served as a 9-time delegate to the National Educators Association Convention, served as Teachers Union Representative and traveled with family throughout Asia, Australia, and the Americas until Fern retired from DoDDS in 2001.

Fern received Christ at an early age, growing up in Park Avenue Baptist Church in Riverside, where she sang in the choir, played the piano, and served in youth activities. She affiliated with the CME Church when she married into the Cunningham Family and actively served at Amos Memorial CME Church in Los Angeles until she moved to Africa. She served at Lewis Metropolitan CME Church in Los Angeles until she moved to Germany. Fern retired to her childhood hometown to help with the daily care for Mother Dear until her death in 2003. She went on tours and cruises and road trips. She got involved in the community, joining the Order of Eastern Star- Fidelity Chapter #28, and serving as Vice

President of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior Citizens' Club, raising money for scholarships, and volunteering to distribute food baskets. Fern became a member of Faithful Central Bible Church in 2013.

La Fern Ruth Sally Lee Harris-Cunningham passed Wednesday, September 23, 2015 at the age of 79 at Riverside Community Hospital. She was preceded in death by her sisters, Nettie Felecia and Dolores, four brothers, Booker T.W., Jr., Huey, Lawrence, and Johnny, and two Godchildren, Carolyn Freeman and David Jacobs. She is survived by two brothers, Quinn and Donald. Her full and rich life will be remembered by her two children, Leslie J. Cunningham and Robyn E. Cunningham; one stepson, David III; grandchildren, Christiáne Chanel and Surmier; great-grandchildren, Lola Elise Chanel and Lily Pearl Chanel; Godchildren, Belynda Magby Harris, Ronald Cunningham, Jr., Kyem Morton; cousins, nieces, nephews and many beloved friends.







Active Pallbearers

Mr. Surmier Cunningham

Mr. Ronald Cunningham, Jr.

Mr. Nathan Freeman

Min. Ronald Lyles

Rev. Danny Rich (Capt. USMC-Ret)

Mr. Michael Taylor (LtCol. USMC-Ret)

Mr. Robert Bruce Woodard, Esq.

Honorary Pallbearers

Judge David Cunningham, III

Mr. Bobby Magby, I

Mr. Michael Anderson

Mr. Anthony Wilson

Mr. James Daniel DeVeaux

Mr. Theodore Short

Mr. James Pruitt

Mr. David Park

Rev. William Minson

Mr. Kevin Seeley (dec.)

52nd Street Elementary School Teachers

DoDDS Teachers



We are grateful for the kind support of family and friends during this time of sorrow. We would like to thank you for such an incredible outpouring of kindness and love.

**Lovingly submitted,
The Family of La Fern R. Cunningham**

A REPAST WILL BE HELD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SERVICES AT
FAITHFUL CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH WEST WING NORTH

INTERMENT - WEDNESDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2015 AT 10:00 AM
PIERCE BROTHERS CRESTLAWN MEMORIAL PARK
11500 ARLINGTON AVENUE, RIVERSIDE, CA 92505