



## Evelyn Louise Whitley

June 8, 1946 - February 23, 2023

A brilliant woman who served her community by educating generations of Portsmouth, Virginia children, Evelyn Louise Whitley was a renowned educator, mentor, and friend. She dedicated her life to public service as an educator for more than four decades.

Evelyn Louise Whitley was born on June 8, 1946, in Weldon, North Carolina. She was the second of seven children born to Clyde and Olivia Ellis. Both parents and two of her siblings -JoAnn Gadson and Dallas Scott Ellis, Sr. – preceded her in death.

Evelyn grew up in Weldon, North Carolina, and graduated as the 1964 Salutatorian at Ralph J. Bunch High School, Weldon, NC. She went on to attend Elizabeth City State University in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. During her time there Evelyn became a member of the Delta Chi Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and served as its chapter president from 1967-1968. In 1968 she graduated from Elizabeth City State University with honors with her Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education.

Soon after graduation, Evelyn met and married Albert Lee Whitley, Sr. on August 24, 1968. Two children were born into their union: Albert Lee Whitley, Jr., and Jonelle Leneé Leary. Albert and Evelyn shared a beautiful life of love, laughter, and friendship for 54 years.

In 1968, Evelyn moved to Portsmouth, VA with her husband, Albert, who inquired about an available position for Evelyn at Portsmouth Public Schools and secured an elementary interview for her. During the interview, she let her passion, energy, enthusiasm, and love for children resonate. She secured her first teaching position at Mt. Hermon Elementary School, where she taught 6th grade. In 1976 Evelyn went on to earn her Master of Education Degree from Virginia State University.

Evelyn was baptized at an early age at St. Peters Baptist Church in Weldon, North Carolina. Since 1969 Evelyn has been a member of Celestial Baptist Church. Despite her busy school schedule, Evelyn always devoted time to the Lord. Evelyn loved the Lord, Jesus Christ. She was an active member of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, Gamma Chapter, and served as chapter President from 2000-2002.

Evelyn was an outstanding classroom teacher; her talents and leadership skills were quickly recognized, and she was chosen to be a teacher trainer with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in 1986. She monitored and supported many new teachers, helping them transition from novice skills to proficient teaching abilities. She worked with each new teacher until tenure status was earned. Evelyn continued to pursue her dream of teaching and helping children while making a positive impact toward a better future. Evelyn was nominated by her peers and named Teacher of the Year at Lakeview Elementary School in 1987.

Evelyn had an earnest desire to help children learn; often investing extra time, money, and energy to assure that every student was successful. In 1989, she transitioned from being a

traditional education classroom teacher to a special education teacher at

Lakeview Elementary School. She set out to teach students who lagged in their scholastic ability. She developed and implemented Individual Educational Plans that strategically targeted the necessary basic skills for each student to learn. Under her tiered instruction, many boys and girls showed one to two grade level(s) of growth in one academic year.

In 1992, she became an assistant principal at Churchland Academy Elementary School, where she served for eight years. Her work ethic, professionalism, and leadership skills caught the attention of the Director of Elementary Education and the Superintendent. In 2000, she was offered the principal position at Highland Biltmore Elementary School. Eager to walk in God's call for her life, Evelyn willingly accepted the position and embarked upon new horizons. As a new principal, Evelyn proved that she had the fortitude to handle the at-risk student population with dignity, respect, and sustainability. Due to the city's declining population and school system rezoning Highland Biltmore was closed in 2001 and Evelyn was reassigned to James Hurst Elementary School.

Upon her arrival at James Hurst, Evelyn quickly realized that James Hurst was Provisionally Accredited because it lacked a sound research-based instructional program. She embraced the challenge and organized a strategic academic improvement plan. In 2005, Evelyn's hard work, commitment to academic excellence, and dedication to children paid off. James Hurst earned the top state rating of Full Accreditation for the first time in its history. Along with her leadership team, she forged forward working tirelessly to maintain Full Accreditation.

Under Evelyn's leadership, James Hurst Elementary School realized its highest achievement scores ever recorded by the Virginia State Department of Education; therefore, the school has received many awards, School

Improvement Award–2010; 100% SOL Accredited Award–2010; Competence to Excellence Award, by the Virginia Department of Education – 2007 & 2008; and the State Accreditation Achievement Award by Third Baptist Church, Portsmouth, VA.

During her 15 years of administration and leadership, Evelyn mentored numerous assistant principals and served as a role model of professionalism to all. Also, she personally received many awards and accolades. She was recognized as the Administrator of the Year-2004 by the Portsmouth Association of Educational Office Professionals and as Principal of the Year-2008 for outstanding leadership by the Portsmouth PTA Council.

For 48 years, Evelyn devoted her professional career to academic excellence with the Portsmouth Public Schools System. She was an outstanding classroom teacher, teacher trainer, and principal. Her hard work did not go unnoticed as Evelyn received some of the highest honors in education including Teacher of the Year from the Virginia Department of Education and recognition of her teaching excellence from the 44th US President Barack Obama.

Evelyn believed all children could learn and worked to ensure that the children she served had an opportunity to thrive.

Evelyn emanated class, integrity, and kindness. She was admired for her stylish wardrobe; she loved mixing prints, textures, and let's not forget her signature black and white polka-dotted dresses. In her free time, Evelyn loved arts and crafts, making floral arrangements, planning

many family events, hosting family in her beautiful home, and gardening. She was a phenomenal baker and cook. She loved chewing gum; and her favorite pastime most of all was shopping.

She made her transition on Thursday, February 23, 2023, after a long battle with dementia and stroke. She was 76 years old. She is survived by Albert Lee Whitley, Sr. (husband), Albert Lee Whitley, Jr. (son), and Jonelle Leneé Leary (daughter). Five grandchildren: Antonek Tyquasia Edwards, Jordan Kalis Leary, I'lasia Margaret Cannon, Khari Isaiah Whitley, and Aji Leneé Whitley. Siblings: Nellie Clemons Green (sister); (brothers) Clyde Ellis, Jr., Charles Frederick Ellis, Steve Ellis; and a host of nieces and nephews.

We will miss her greatly.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAR 1. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

J.T. Fisher Funeral Services  
1248 N. George Washington Hwy.  
Chesapeake, VA 23323  
(757) 487-3700  
info@jtfisherfuneralservices.com  
<https://www.jtfisherfuneralservices.com>

## Wake Service

MAR 1. 5:00 PM (ET)

J.T. Fisher Funeral Services  
1248 N. George Washington Hwy.  
Chesapeake, VA 23323  
(757) 487-3700  
info@jtfisherfuneralservices.com  
<https://www.jtfisherfuneralservices.com>

## Service

MAR 2. 11:00 AM (ET)

Celestial Baptist Church  
1439 Mount Vernon Avenue  
Portsmouth, VA

# Tribute Wall



“ *J.T. Fisher Funeral Services created a Tribute Video in memory of Evelyn Louise Whitley*



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**J. T. Fisher Funeral Services** - March 02, 2023 at 07:51 PM



“ *J.T. Fisher Funeral Services created a Webcast in memory of Evelyn Louise Whitley*

**CLICK HERE TO  
VIEW SERVICE**

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**J. T. Fisher Funeral Services** - March 01, 2023 at 03:55 PM

AM

“ To the family of "Evelyn Louise Whitley," I send my deepest condolences on the passing of your loved one. May the years of "Evelyn's" many accolades and vital contribution to the "Educational Arena" fill your hearts with knowing that she was a driving source to so many, whose lives were able to flourish academically, economically, intellectually, and socially. The path she helped to create made it possible for so many successes.



*I pray that in the coming days ahead, the road of cherished memories will sustain and keep you.*

Sorrowfully,  
ARLENE MATTAI - Portsmouth Public Schools Retiree (2019)

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**Arlene ANN Mattai** - March 07, 2023 at 09:25 AM

FC

“ What a lovely woman. I met her early on in my career at Mt. Hermon. She was helpful, kind and generous. She gifted my daughter with many beautiful coats that her daughter had grown out of what a blessing to have those gifts. She baked cakes for her birthday as well. Learned so much from watching her work with special needs children. Job well done, life well lived. May the family find peace in their memories.

*Fran Christian*

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**Fran Christian** - March 03, 2023 at 08:47 PM

SB

*In 2013 I met Evelyn Whitley at James Hurst Elementary School. She was a beautiful woman, person and lady. She was very nice to me 😊. I just learned she died and I wanted to make sure I said something to let everyone know that Mrs Whitley was a beautiful spirit. RIP Mrs. Whitley. You definitely made an impact on everyone and are definitely a bright star in my life.*

Sharon Elizabeth Brown - August 19, 2023 at 08:27 PM

SB

“ *Evelyn was my principal at Churchland Academy for a long time. She was a superior educator and superior person to work with. My condolences to the family.*

sue blake - March 02, 2023 at 03:30 PM

SH

“ *Mrs. Whitley, was always inspiring me when I walked the neighborhood we shared. Very nice women, she will be surely missed. She advised me in my educational journey and always said you got this. Well now you got this, your rest in God arms, your work speaks for you , well done. Shari Haynes*

Shari Haynes - March 02, 2023 at 08:08 AM



“ *Gold Rush Chocolate Gift Basket was purchased for the family of Evelyn Louise Whitley.*



March 01, 2023 at 06:48 PM

MF

“ *In remembrance of Evelyn. I send my condolences to the family. She was one amazing elegant woman. I enjoyed knowing her for many many years. May the peace of God comfort and keep you all.*  
*Mary Hazward Fernandez*

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**Mary Hazward Fernandez** - March 01, 2023 at 06:16 PM

SR

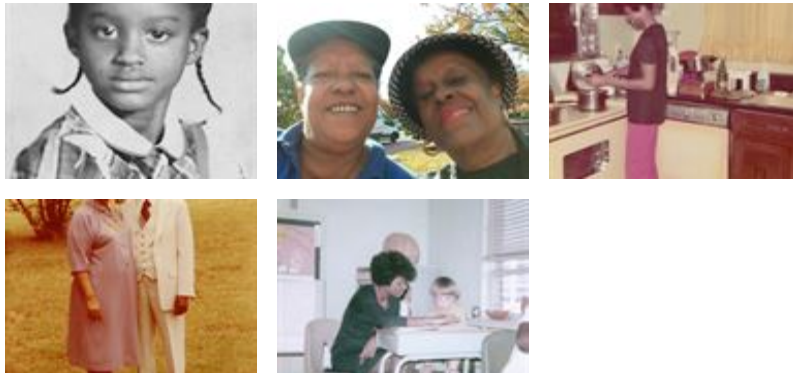
“ *Sending Love from New Jersey, I am sadden to hear the loss of Aunt Evelyn. She was an amazing woman and accomplished lots of achievements in this life. I am glad I was able to see her 3 1/2 years ago when I dropped my daughter off to college. She will always be in my heart. I can hear God saying well done Thy faithful servant.*  
*Love Sheila Ruffin and family!*

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**Sheila Ruffin** - March 01, 2023 at 04:29 PM



“ *29 files added to the album Life Tributes*



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**J. T. Fisher Funeral Services** - March 01, 2023 at 12:47 PM

SD

“ To the entire Whitley family from my mother Elsie Grant Murphy & I we send our love & much needed prayers at this difficult time. May God comfort & give u the extra added strength to get through this trying time. Mrs. Whitley was a very sweet & loving young lady inside & out & I remember her beautiful voice singing in the choir bringing my little Sunday school babies to church each & every Sunday at Celestial Baptist Church Albert Whitley & Jonelle Leary also prayers for her sister Mrs. Wilma Whitley , Zenda Whitley- Jones Sylvia Whitley Martinez & Cynthia Whitley my other three sisters. Luv u all to pieces. R. I. H. Mrs. Evelyn Whitley 🙏🙏🙏🙏



Sebrena Daughtry - March 01, 2023 at 12:07 AM

GC

“ Geraline Hinton lit a candle in memory of Evelyn Louise Whitley



Geraline Hinton Cox - February 28, 2023 at 09:48 PM

KM

“ Katrina Muhammad lit a candle in memory of Evelyn Louise Whitley



Katrina R Muhammad - February 28, 2023 at 06:16 PM

AG

“ *May God comfort the Whitley and Ellis families during this difficult time. Praying God will give you strength today and the days to come. The McNair family of Weldon.NC.*

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**Angela Green** - February 28, 2023 at 03:00 PM

VD

“ *My condolences to the Whitley family. May God give you the strength, guidance and assurance of His love and care. She was a super leader that required a quality education for our children at James Hurst Elem. She only wanted your best as she gave her best. May God Bless and Keep You in His Loving Arms.*



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**Valarie Dozier** - February 28, 2023 at 10:28 AM

RW

“ *To the family of Evelyn Whitley you are definitely in our prayers. Mrs. Whitley gave her all in whatever the task was. She was the epitomy of a Professional Educator. She dressed the part and was quite an asset to the Portsmouth Public School System. Mrs. Whitley extended a helpful hands to me whenever I needed her during my teaching career. My husband and his friends really enjoyed her restaurant specialties and her efforts to make each visit a pleasant one. We will never forget the way she touched our life. We salute a life well lived.*



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**Reginald & Fannie Wiggins** - February 28, 2023 at 01:44 AM

KM

*To the Whitley Family  
Our Prayers are with you all..*

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**Katrina R Muhammad** - February 28, 2023 at 06:19 PM

MP

*To the family of Evelyn Whitley. I knew Evelyn as an Assistant Principal, Principal. and faithful member of Delta Kappa Gamma, Gamma chapter. She was a wonderful person, always loving and smiling. I will keep your family in my prayers.*

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**Marilyn Peacock** - March 01, 2023 at 07:37 AM

MC

*We extend our sincere and deepest sympathy to the Whitley family. Evelyn was a wonderful person and will indeed be missed. May each of you take comfort in knowing that God will sustain you at this time and in the days ahead.*

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**Matthew & Shirley Coates** - March 01, 2023 at 09:11 PM