

My Tribute to Rose Ferrell, a Great Mother-in-Law



Rose Cameron Ferrell, 1915-2011

For many, mother-in-law jokes have a ring of reality. But for me they don't. I had the perfect mother-in-law—Rose Ferrell who left us this week. In the 38 years I've been her son-in-law, we never had a cross word. It was well known in the family that she always sided with the in-laws if there was ever an argument.

She lived with Joy and me for the past 3-1/2 years. She was always independent and a pleasure to have in the home. She was a godly woman, and I would hear her praying for her six children, nine grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

Now she's gone. On Monday, at age 96, she breathed her last surrounded by family and friends. I had spent the night with her in the hospital on Friday, helping the nurses care for her. I fed her breakfast and she was doing so well I took off the next morning for the annual booksellers convention in Atlanta. But she had been hospitalized for congestive heart failure and Monday morning it was obvious it was a matter of hours until she died. As soon as I found out, I immediately flew home from Atlanta and arrived at the hospital in Altamonte Springs, Fla., an hour before her heart

quit
beating.

I know she's with Jesus who she loved and served all her life.

I've written the obituaries of many famous people and I've traveled long distances to attend the funerals of some great saints

like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin Sr., Frances Hunter and mentors like

Jamie Buckingham and Robert Walker.

But none of them had as much an impact on my life as Rose Ferrell

through her own life and the life of her wonderful daughter Joy.

While nearly everyone locally who knew me or Joy also knew "Big

Mama" (as we called her), she wasn't famous like those I just mentioned and most of you never heard of her. But I want to eulogize

her in my own way. (Of course the family assigned me the task of

writing up her life story and as I gathered information, I was gratified to learn a few new things I didn't know about her long life.)

Rose Ferrell was a teacher, an ordained minister and mother/grandmother/great-grandmother whose life touched thousands

through the ministry she shared with her husband, the many students

she taught and through the lives of her descendents.

She was known as "Miz

Rose," or "Sister Ferrell," but the grandchildren and I called her "Big Mama." Born Rose Esther Cameron on April 15, 1915, in

New Smyrna Beach, Fla., she was the middle of three daughters. Her mother, born in Canada, and her father, born in England, became early settlers in Florida. Her father, an electrician, wired much of Daytona Beach in the early 1900's, including most of the early buildings at Bethune-Cookman University.

Raised a Methodist, she attended a Pentecostal revival meeting at age 18 in Daytona Beach, Fla. It was there where she first saw Harvey Ferrell, a 20-year-old preacher from North Carolina, sitting on a platform. She heard a small voice say her husband was sitting on the platform, but she didn't know which one since there were several. She later found out Harvey had heard the same voice about the woman he would marry when he saw her. A few nights later he walked her home from the service and they started a whirlwind romance. They were married six weeks later on June 11, 1933, the day after Harvey turned 21.

Thrust immediately into a traveling evangelistic ministry, the newlyweds went on a missionary trip to Cuba three months later. A revolution that put Baptista into power closed down the country while they were there and they couldn't leave for several months. The trip left an indelible imprint on her and she loved to use the Spanish she learned then whenever she had a chance.

A year later the first

of eight children was born in Plant City, Fla., after the young couple also pastored a church in Key West en route home from Cuba.

It was a pattern that would mark her life—raising a growing family while helping her husband birth new churches or building a handful of people into a great congregation in cities such as Daytona Beach and Panama City, Fla., and Columbia and Spartanburg, S.C. The couple also started or pastored churches in New Zealand and Australia in the 1950's and '60s.



Joy, Chandler and I visited "Big Mama" on July 4, not knowing she'd pass away a week later. I sure did love my sweet mother-in-law.

During World War II she taught elementary school in Panama City, Fla. She did not have a college degree, but that was not required in those days. At age 48 she enrolled at Florida State University, majoring in history. She graduated at the top of her class and finished her four-year degree in only three years. She taught school for many years including teaching history in Sydney, Australia, when her husband moved there to pastor. She also taught special needs children in Jacksonville, Fla., for many years. Even in retirement she taught GED classes in Lakeland, Fla., well into her 80s.

In each church she worked closely with her husband, doing

whatever
was needed. For example,
she played the accordion and sang on a radio program in Panama
City,
Fla., during World War II, making them one of the first
religious
broadcasters in the United States. During the war, the
program was usually directed to encouraging the soldiers and
sailors
stationed in Panama City en route to being deployed around the
world.
Eventually their tiny church grew by the end of the war to
have the
largest Sunday school in the nation in their denomination—the
Assemblies of God.

Rose Ferrell, like her husband, was an ordained minister in
the
Assemblies of God for many years and she kept her ordination
active
until her death. In her later years she was involved in a new
church
started by her daughter and son-in-law and she attended church
for
the last time only eight days before she died.

She devoted her life to
her family and husband. She told people she felt she should
get her
teaching degree so she could support her family in order to
allow her
husband to travel as a missionary evangelist around the world
for the
last years of his active ministry. He suffered a stroke
in 1988 and she cared for him for eight years until he died.

Always active, she had many friends. *The Ledger* in Lakeland
once wrote a story on her because she took fudge every day to

the
employees at McDonalds near where she lived. She lived alone
after
her husband passed away, and she drove until she was 93. She
enjoyed
good health and was not on any medications until recently.
Doctors
discovered she had congestive heart failure six weeks before
her
death, but she told them she would live to be 100.

Of her eight children,
six are living: Rosella Ridings, Longwood; Dr. James F.
Ferrell,
Orlando; Dan Ferrell of Urbana, Ill.; Faith Rutter, Deltona;
Joy
Strang, Longwood; and Steve Ferrell, Jacksonville.

Rose has nine living
grandchildren: Dean Ridings; Kimberly Weld; Rob Rutter; Denae
Haas;
Cameron Strang; Beth Anderson; Chandler Strang; and James
Ferrell.
She also had 18 great-grandchildren.

This Saturday, July 16,
there will be a viewing at noon followed by a funeral at 1
p.m. at
Baldwin-Fairchild Funeral Home, 301 Northeast Ivanhoe Blvd.,
Orlando,
FL. Interment will be at 4:30 p.m. at
Lakeland Memorial Gardens.

In lieu of flowers, the family is asking for donations to be
given
in memory of Rose Ferrell to "Metro Hope for Kids," a ministry
started by her daughter Rosella Ridings to help
underprivileged

children in New York. Involved in this project is the renovation of a hospital to serve as the International Ministry Headquarters for Metro Ministries. One of the rooms will be renovated in her memory.

Send your tax-deductible gift to Metro Hope for Kids, P.O. Box 951616, Lake Mary, FL 32795.

There you have it—my recollections and the highlights of her life. If you read this far you must have loved her or you love Joy and me. We're not devastated by her passing. After all she was 96.

But because we loved her so much we will miss her terribly, and I just wanted to use this opportunity to honor her memory.