



Verdia Ellaweese Russell

November 30, 1937 - December 3, 2020

Verdia Ellaweese (Collins) Russell was born on November 30, 1937 to the late Eugene McKinley Collins and Bertha Noelle (Schuler-Ross) Collins in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She was the only child born to this union. In 1953 the Collins family relocated to Detroit, Michigan for a job opportunity her father had with Ford Motor Company. Verdia was always considered a very bright and talented student and was known for her exceptional handwriting skills. She graduated from Pershing High School, Detroit, Michigan, in June of 1954, at the age of 16. Verdia received honors upon graduation and was also awarded a scholarship to attend Secretarial School.

Verdia met the love of her life at Ward Chapel AME Church in Little Rock, Arkansas when she was nine years old. Her future husband, Brewer A. Russell, was a close friend of her first cousin and best friend Lillian "Ozell" Mitchell and the son of the pastor at Ward Chapel, AME Church. Verdia and Brewer would become friends and walk to and from church and school as their love for each other grew. Verdia would confess to Ozell after meeting Brewer for the first time, that she was going to marry him when she was older. Verdia would be reunited with Brewer when he followed her to Detroit, Michigan in 1953, the year she graduated high school. Verdia accepted Brewer's proposal of marriage, prior to his Air Force Enlistment, and they married on December 28, 1955 at the Highland Park Courthouse in Highland Park, Michigan. Unbeknownst to Verdia, she would be immediately separated from her spouse as Brewer received deployment orders to South Korea the

day after they were married.

In 1957 Verdiana and Brewer would welcome their first child Micah Ricardo Russell. In 1960 the couple welcomed their second child Monya Rena Russell. As their family grew, Verdiana and Brewer set their sights on homeownership. They would buy their first and only home in 1961 and welcomed Verdiana's mother and father to live with them and the kids. From 1962 to 1965, Verdiana would take on caring for her niece Cynthia and nephew James because of her love of her brother and family. Many people thought she had two sets of twins because the kids were so close in age. During this time Verdiana was also the caregiver for her mother Bertha as her health began to decline. Verdiana navigated handling all the household management along with caring for the home and those she loved. During a visit to the hospital to see her mother, Verdiana would discover that she was pregnant with her third child Mishca Ranniella Russell who was born in 1966. In 1968, Verdiana would mourn the death of her mother, who taught her how to be resilient, problem solve and navigate life's challenges. Verdiana was an exceptional cook, planner, decorator, manager and independent thinker. She learned all of this by watching her mother who ran a boarding house and performed governess duties for various families.

In 1969 the family moved to Darmstadt, Germany and lived there until 1972. While overseas, Verdiana became enamored with European culture, design and antiques. She would travel to the surrounding cities and countries with the Woman's Auxiliary Organization for Military Spouses. During these excursions, Verdiana's love for drawing, sketching and painting would flourish. Verdiana was also an avid bowler holding membership to several bowling leagues. This 5'-3" woman was known to throw a mean 16lbs bowling ball with precision. Verdiana also enjoyed classical music and jazz. She was known for singing constantly while she cooked or when she was sitting outside on the porch. Family gatherings were very important to Verdiana, so Saturday and Sunday's were spent together watching tv, playing card games, going to movies, going on long walks in the woods and antiquing. Verdiana made it a

point to always be present during the kids sporting activities. This was mainly due to her love of all sports; from formula one racing, football, hockey, basketball, boxing, equestrian show jumping and even curling, to name a few. Verdia accepted Christ at a young age during a league meeting at Ward Chapel, AME Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. She would join Vernon Chapel AME Church- Detroit after she relocated to Michigan. While at Vernon, she became a member of the chancellor choir as a soprano, fostering her love of singing. Later she would join the Tuesday evening bible study group and the women's exercise group who practiced yoga and jazzercise. She participated in various Women's Retreats and loved going on bus and cruise trips organized by Rice's Travel Agency. Verdia always had a generous heart and enjoyed giving back to others. This was evident in her support as a tither to her church and supporter of many of the mission focused causes that pertained to children. Toys for Tots, Adopt-a-Family, St. Jude and Mothers' Against Drunk Drivers were some of her favorite organizations she gave to yearly.

In 1973, Verdia and one of her best friends, enrolled in a short-handwriting class sponsored by Kelly Services. Verdia excelled in the class and was encouraged to apply for a secretarial position at TACOM in Warren, Michigan. Verdia was hired and reported to one of the few Black Cornels in TACOM. Verdia's ability to handle deadlines and work ethic prompted her boss to recommend her for the upward mobility program which he chartered. This placed Verdia on the path to become one of the few black females trained as an Equipment Specialist for Large Defense weapons. She would have a 20-year career with TACOM reaching a GS15 level. Were it not for her decision to retire early to spend more time with her family, she was being considered for a promotion to a GS16.

Verdia was happiest when family gathered at the dinner table with lots of good food. Christmas was her favorite holiday as she enjoyed setting up historical Christmas village scape's, decorating multiple Christmas trees and hanging

lots of Christmas lights around the house. Holiday meals would always be followed by telling stories as family sat around the dinner table, remembering events from the past that made everyone laugh and creating new memories as the family grew. In her later years she found great joy in being a grandmother (Oh-Ma) to Malcolm and Marcus.

Verdia departed this life on Thursday, December 3, 2020 with her daughter holding her hand at her bedside. She is preceded in death by her parents, her brother James Ross, her son Micah and her husband Brewer. Verdia leaves to cherish her memory and continue her legacy; loving daughters Monya Rena Dillard (Victor), Rev. Mishca Ranniella Smith (Micheal) and daughter-in-love Elizabeth (Liza) Russell, grandsons Malcom Xavier Louis Smith and Marcus Brewer Russell Smith along with her nephew and niece and a host of cousins and friends.

Tribute Wall



“ *Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services created a Webcast in memory of Verdiana Ellawese Russell*



Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services - December 21, 2020 at 11:53 AM



“ *Verdiana Ellawese Russell*

September 27, 2022 at 08:40 PM



“ *Verdiana Ellawese Russell*

September 27, 2022 at 06:52 PM



“ *We only had the pleasure of knowing Mrs Verdiana for a few short months but I knew she was someone special from the moment I met her. She would hum songs to get people in a good mood. She would make jokes that would incite laughter in the whole room. Her beautiful spirit will be greatly missed.*

ALC Hospice family

Marwah Nasr - December 21, 2020 at 12:19 PM



Mishca Smith

Thank you and the rest of the staff for your love and care for our mother. You made her transition to heavenly reward peaceful. Bless you for the work you and the rest of the ALC Hospice family offer.

Mishca Smith - December 21, 2020 at 08:47 PM



“ I am the son of Lillian Ozell Mitchell and didn't know mom introduced our cousins as children, well it was a great matrimony and love story. We used to love to visit Detroit as kids and spend the night with our cousins and have some of those Sunday morning breakfast. Back in the late 70's Verdia attempted to get me employed at Tacom. You were loved and will be missed. Tell everybody we said hello.

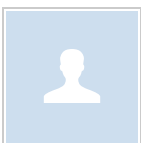
Mark Fisher - December 21, 2020 at 10:23 AM



MB

“ I thank God for the years we spent together as children. I treasure the time I spent with you and Brewer before his passing. Love and prayers to your family”

Maxine Butler - December 20, 2020 at 08:52 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Verdia Ellaweese Russell.



December 18, 2020 at 09:51 PM

TH

“ I will SO miss you! Thank you for always welcoming me into your home and the honor of calling you Mom. You were indeed a second Mother to me. I love you... Always. RIH...

Theresa Hudson - December 18, 2020 at 09:11 PM

JM

“ Thank you for one of the most beautifully written obituaries I have ever read. You really captured what a wonderful soul Mrs. Russell was. She was so kind and generous to my family and me. When my mom was in the hospital, Mrs. Russell went to visit her and asked my mom if she wanted to pray together. My mom had not been asked that by any other friend or family member, and it meant the world to her! They prayed the Lord's Prayer together and it brought tremendous comfort and healing to my mom--on that day and on every day when my mom recounted the love and kindness she was shown by Mrs. Russell. We may have lost an angel on earth, but we have definitely gained one in heaven! May the love and faith that Mrs. Russell brought us, live on in our hearts and get passed on to those around us, to bring healing and peace on earth.

Janet Mantovani - December 15, 2020 at 12:40 PM

RV

“ What a remarkable life! It is beautiful to read about Mrs. Russell's great love for family, creativity, connection, God, and the world around her. May her memory and legacy of love be a blessing.

Rev Ally Vertigan - December 14, 2020 at 12:42 PM