Evelyn Gwinn

November 3, 1917 - March 1, 2012

FORREST CITY - Evelyn Gwinn, teacher of many generations of St. Francis county public school childen, devoted mother, grandmother, churchgoer and gardener, died March 1 after a brief illness. She was 94.

Mrs. Gwinn was born Nov. 3, 1917, in Graves County, Kentucky. As a very young child, she, her mother, father and sister moved to Craighead County, Arkansas and settled near the small community of Apt.

Her father, Grover Ernest Jones, was a farmer. Mrs. Gwinn had memories of driving to town with her father to sell vegetables off the back of their truck, of life without electrical power and of learning to kill a chicken for dinner.

Mrs. Gwinn's mother, Getrude Sheridan Jones, was a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse (grades 1-8). Because baby-sitters were in short supply, Evelyn went to school with her mother, started early and graduated early, in 1933. In an oral history, she remembered her high school years as "not a happy time. It was during the Depression - I was the youngest person in my class. However, the teachers were good and I had a good G.P.A."

She began college at Arkansas A&M College (now Arkansas State University in Jonesboro) - again, the youngest person in her class (she would eventually earn a masters degree in education at ASU). After graduation she moved to

Marked Tree, Arkansas, to start her first teaching job. It was there that she met Lawrence Baird Gwinn, a young pharmacist-in-training from Tennessee. They married in 1938.

Evelyn and Lawrence Gwinn eventually moved to Forrest City. Their first daughter, Jennie Belle Gwinn (Cole), was born in 1941 - their second daughter, Mary Ann Gwinn, in 1951. Lawrence Gwinn opened a drug store, and Mrs. Gwinn began a teaching career in the St. Francis County public schools that would last for almost forty years. She was legendary as a "tough" teacher - she had high standards - for classwork, grammar (written & spoken) and behavior. Former students also recalled that she knew how to have fun. She once wrote that her greatest accomplishments in life were "my children and some good reports of my teaching from former pupils."

Mrs. Gwinn retired in her early 60s to take care of her ailing husband. After Lawrence died in 1984, she threw herself into activities: volunteering at her church, at the local hospital, at the musical coterie. She taught a Sunday school class for many years at First United Methodist Church in Forrest City. She volunteered at the local library. She made a home for three dogs, all dachschunds, all great friends. She loved to read, and could quote Tennyson at length. She had a fierce attachment to her home and her garden, primarily roses, and they were often a fixture at local musical and church events. At trips to Wal-Mart she would regularly encounter former pupils - some in their 70s and 80s - who reminisced with her about their time in her classrooms. She resisted moving out of her house and managed to stay in her home until a week before she passed away.

British prime minister Winston Churchhill famously said to the British public during World War II: never, never, never give up. Mrs. Gwinn had a similar determination: to hold fast to her home, her family and her God.

Mrs. Gwinn was preceded in death by her parents; her sister, Wilma Ernestine Jones Harrison (a principal at Brady Elementary School in Little Rock); and her husband.

Survivors include her daughters and sons-in-law Charles F. Cole, Jr. and Steve Dunnington; grandchildren Sheridan Cole Chadwell, Leslie Cole Tanquary, Mary Cole Wells, Samuel Gwinn Dunnington and Jackson Gwinn Dunnington, and six great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to First United Methodist Church in Forrest City, the Forrest City Public Library or the St. Francis County Humane Society.

There will be a visitation from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Monday at Stevens Funeral Home in Forrest City, and a memorial service at 11 a.m. Tuesday at First United Methodist Church in Forrest City. Visit online registry at stevensfuneralhome.net. Under the direction of Stevens Funeral Home.

Tribute Wall

JS

A very GREAT lady. She left a lasting impression on me that helped shape my life. I only regret that in later years I never went back and told her so.

Jerry Shipley - April 12, 2013 at 08:29 AM

JA

In setting high standards in the classroom, Mrs. Gwinn taught us to set high standards for ourselves. She helped instill in me a love of language that has influenced my career as a journalist. We are keeping her family in our thoughts and prayers.

John Arwood - April 12, 2013 at 08:29 AM

ST

I'm so sorry about your loss. Your mom was a wonderful person who did so much for our church and community. I'm thankful to have known her and your family.

Stuart

Stuart Towns - April 12, 2013 at 08:29 AM

RH

Such a great teacher, but not only was she feared, but respected. So sorry for our loss to Forrest City.

Regina Gay Hill - September 23, 2012 at 12:00 AM

She will be missed at the Forrest City Public Library.

March 14, 2012 at 12:00 AM