

Vantrease Little Russell-Fond Memories

Aug. 2004



Little Family

Vantrease Little Russell was born in Eagleville, Tennessee on August 20, 1913. She weighed two pounds and was not expected to live. Her grandmother Sheffield fed her with her mother's milk suckled through cheesecloth. Charlie and Mae Little, her parents, lived on the Nashville

Hwy across

from Mary Jean Haye and, next door to the McCords. She had one sister, Helen Howell of Columbia, Tennessee, who passed away in March of 2003. She also had a brother, Urban Little, who passed away in 1989.

Vantrease graduated from Eagleville School and then attended Murfreesboro State Teachers College. She then went to Nashville to teach at the Tennessee Industrial School where she met James Scott Russell. They married and moved to Orlando in 1934. They had five daughters and two sons.

We have great memories of the summers we spent in Eagleville as children. We went to the movie theater

where we loved the ice cream cups with the pictures of movie stars on the lid. We also liked to pop tar bubbles on the road.

I, for one, remember the stories she shared of her fond childhood memories and friends. She told us of traveling to school in the spring wagon and how chickens were kept at the school. As school children, they would gather the eggs. She also told us of the first toll road on the Nashville Highway in Eagleville. She said they rolled a log across the road and you paid a nickel to Mr. McCord, who was the operator, before you could pass through.

Our mother, Vantrease, was one of the pioneers in establishing a home for physically and mentally impaired children. She received the first license issued by the State of Florida in 1951. She cared for over 1,500 disabled children during her lifetime and was known as a modern day Mother Teresa.

In 1964, with the help of her minister of the First United Methodist Church of Orlando, she incorporated her own home as a Non-Profit Home for Atypical Children. She received no federal, state or local funds. She had faith in the goodwill of her community and, tremendous trust in God, in knowing the needs for the children would be provided.

Today 26 children reside in the home, including the first child Vantrease took into her heart and home in 1950, when the child was three. She recently celebrated her 59th birthday.

The home continues to rely solely upon the friends of the community, churches and organizations.

Vantrease is recognized throughout the United States and today we receive private donations from individuals wanting to help continue our Mother's mission. She be-

lieved in providing a home for these special children, giving them the quality of life she felt they so deserved.

Vantrease received numerous awards, one of which is the National Caring Award she received in Washington, DC along with Rosalyn Carter, when received her award for Mental Health Services.

Our mother passed away in June of 2003 at the age of 89. We, her daughters, are committed to continuing her mission of love in caring for these special children. We would love to hear from anyone who has memories of our mother and her family. If you should visit the Orlando area, please stop in and see us. Our home is open 24 hours, seven days a week. We are located at 510 Holden Avenue and can be reached at 407-855-8063.

