



File photo: Big As Life Photos

Ruth Ellis, 101, matriarch to community dies

By JASON MICHAEL

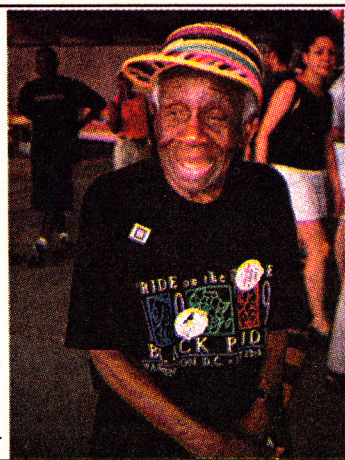
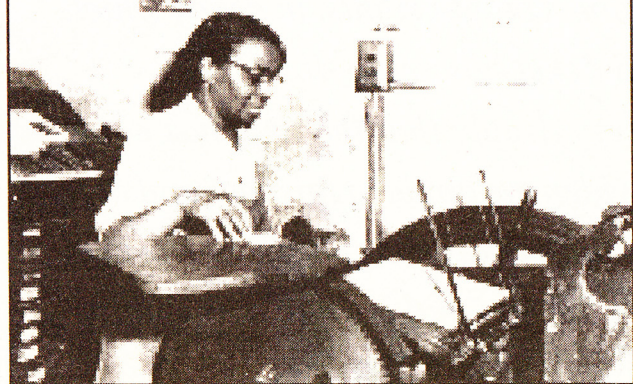
DETROIT – She inspired us all with her drive, her warmth and her capacity to love. Ruth Ellis, centenarian, humanitarian and matriarch to Detroit's LGBT community, has died. She was 101.

Born July 23, 1899, in Springfield, Ill., Ellis recalled hiding in her home during the Springfield race riots of 1908. Later, she fell in love with her white gym teacher, who held her hand to complete a class circle when other students wouldn't.

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Remembering Ruth...



THE MASTERPIECE

in an image of obscure sorrow
picture the positive energy that i am
and not the limited shell that i was

and afterwards
look around and see
the many souls that sculpted sweet memo-
ries

a timeless collection a string of pearl
thoughts
that entomb the very essence of a life
encased in rose petal pageantry

can you sacrifice the dressings
bask upon the many blessings
painted upon this canvass humanity

a living breathing masterpiece
of silly whims and maniacal ends
with tragic love amongst the staggering
still

a place where my love for life
was limited only by the fences
of my wired imagination

a wild brush that strokes of life
with beams of light that braid
into a beautiful quilt upon tapestry

and afterwards
i will prance into the light
upon the strengths your eyes did share

the bear hugs your life gave with care
sweet tears of joy shall nourish me there
as i reflect

and afterwards i will smile
as i paint another masterpiece

by Johnny Jenkins, Jr.
...for Ruthie

Ellis dies

continued from cover

Encouraged by the promise of better wages, Ellis moved to Detroit in 1937, where she watched over a young boy in Highland Park for seven dollars a week. Soon, however, she put the printing press knowledge she had picked up in Springfield to work and secured a position with Waterfield and Heath, where she worked until opening her own press some years later. Ellis ran her business out of the West Side home she shared with Ceciline "Babe" Franklin.

The couple became known for their weekend house parties, a haven for young lgbs. Ellis was said to have even helped a few through college before retiring and moving to a senior citizen's complex downtown. Franklin, meanwhile, moved to Southfield, but the two shared keys to one another's resi-

dences and the relationship continued until 1975, when Franklin suffered a heart attack on her way to work.

"I don't think it was love," Ellis once said, reflecting on her 30-year relationship with Franklin. "[But] she was good for me. She taught me how to take care of myself."

Ellis remained active after the loss, taking up photography and bowling. She traveled often and began helping out other senior citizens who lived nearby, running errands for them and picking up their groceries.

In the late 1980s, Ellis was attending a self-defense class when she met Jay Spiro, who she correctly identified as a fellow lesbian. The two had dinner and Spiro began introducing Ellis around. Soon, crowds were lining up to dance with Ellis at parties and social functions, where she developed a reputation for repeatedly wearing out dance partners on the floor.

The awards and accolades began at about the same time, as the public took notice of the remarkableness of Ellis' life, her entrepreneurial skills and the assistance she had provided to younger lgbs for several decades. Lifetime achievement awards, resolutions from the mayor and various other officials and even an honorary doctorate ensued.

But the greatest recognition came as her 100th birthday drew near. Ellis was written up in virtually every major lgbt publication across the country as "Living With Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100," the documentary-style telling of her life, won top honors at several major film festivals. The exposure brought Ellis to the forefront, resulting in profiles in *Essence* and *Ms. Magazine*. Ellis eventually tired of the attention, though. Her failing health caused her to cut down her traveling schedule, and she even turned down the chance to appear on Oprah.

Finally, Ellis was hospitalized late this summer, dehydrated and exhausted. She

struggled to hold on until she had made it back home, however, where she wanted to make her transition. Ellis died in her sleep in the early morning hours of Oct. 5.

Often amazed at her own celebrity, Ellis frequently asked why everyone was making such a "fuss" over her. Those who had the pleasure of knowing her, however, would never ask such a question.

"Ruth positively touched lives across North America," said Johnny Jenkins of Detroit Black Gay Pride. "Her spirit touched the essence of our humanity."

A memorial service for Ruth Ellis is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 21 at the Central Methodist Church located at 23 East Adams in Downtown Detroit. Ellis asked that donations be made to either the Downtown Senior Citizens Center, the Ruth Ellis Center for lgbt youth or the Full Truth Fellowship of Christ Church.