

Dimetra Shivers

Madison's "First lady of Jazz", Dimetra Clarise Shivers, passed away peacefully at Meriter Health Care Center on Monday, Sept. 10, 2007.

She was born to James and Lela (Evans) Taliaferro on Feb. 6, 1912, in Brownsville, Tennessee. The entire family moved to La Grange, Illinois, but soon settled in Kewaunee, Illinois, the place Dimetra considered her hometown. After graduating from Kewaunee High School in 1930, she followed her oldest brother, Odell, a student at the University of Wisconsin, to Madison, where she attended the UW School of Nursing.

While attending, she was introduced to Stanley M. Shivers in 1932. Dimetra and Stan married on Feb. 15, 1934, and were blessed with a son, S. Michael Shivers, born March 20, 1935.

Dimetra was a working wife and mother, progressive both inside and outside the home. She worked as a switchboard operator for the YWCA, and did clerical work for the United States Armed Forces Institute. She was involved in many civil rights issues, both locally and nationally. She was one of the founders of the local chapter of the NAACP, and involved with the Urban League of Madison. She, along with others, pressured the USO at the Truax Field Army base to end discrimination against African-American soldiers in the 1940s. She participated in a sit-in at the state capital to push for fair housing legislation in Wisconsin. Dimetra also participated in the famous "March on Washington" in August of 1963, which was for federal civil rights legislation.

Her years of activism were recognized in October of 1978, when she became one of the first recipients of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award in Madison. An artist, as well as an activist, Dimetra learned to sew from her mother Lela, a professional milliner, and became an accomplished seamstress herself. She was a longtime member of the Blessed Martin House sewing club and kept in touch with fellow members for years.

It was her love of music, however, that most inspired "D", as she was known to many. She raised her family and worked part time as a jazz singer throughout the Midwest, and is often credited with being the first person of color to front an all-white jazz orchestra. Although she never achieved national acclaim, her sweet, clear voice and ladylike demeanor impressed both jazz musicians and fans alike. This culminated in Dimetra being proclaimed Madison's "First Lady of Jazz" by the Mayor and Common Council in 1988.

The last of her generation of Taliaferro, Evans, and Watts offspring, Dimetra leaves as a legacy her fighting spirit, courage, toughness, honesty, and compassion. These qualities garnered her many, many friends throughout her life.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her brothers, Odell, Emory, Curtis, and Wayne; and her sisters, Mercedes and Gail. She was also preceded in death by her beloved husband, Stanley; and grandson, Steven. She is survived by her only child, son, S. Michael (Jacklyn) Shivers; and her

grandchildren, David Shivers of Madison and Julie (Luke) McGuff of Seattle, Washington.

There will be a memorial service at the First Unitarian Society Meeting House at 900 University Bay Drive at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 6, 2007. The family has requested that, in lieu of flowers, donations instead be made in Dimetra's name to the local chapter of the NAACP, the Urban League of Madison, the Madison Jazz Society or the Meriter Foundation.

Heartfelt thanks go to the Meriter Health Care Center staff for their years of love and care to "D".