



Bessie Mae Pryor

May 27, 1923 - April 8, 2016

Bessie Mae Ledbetter Pryor, 92, died April 8, 2016, peacefully at her home with her loved ones at her side in Searcy, Arkansas, and was carried into Heaven to be surrounded by her Lord, Jesus Christ, and a host of dear family and friends.

Bessie Mae was born May 27, 1923, in Shelbyville, TN, to John T. and Bessie Mae (McClanahan) Ledbetter, and lived there with her siblings, John T. and Laura, until she attended David Lipscomb, a junior college in Nashville where she was honored as "Miss Lipscomb 1944." In 1945 she transferred to Harding College where she was active in Phi Delta Social Club, serving as its first president and editing the 1946 Petit Jean (yearbook), was crowned the 1946 Petit Jean Queen; she played in the band as well. After graduating in May 1946, she married her faculty and yearbook advisor, Dr. Joseph E. Pryor, in August of that year.

After their marriage, she taught Home Economics at Harding for two years. She also worked as J. D. Bales's secretary and for an attorney in Searcy until the couple adopted their children: Beverly Jo Pryor (of Clarksville, TN); Joe Byron (Jody, deceased); and Susan Pryor Hodges (of Searcy).

Bessie Mae was the ultimate homemaker and hostess. Her beloved family was at the heart of all she did, followed closely by a broader Christian/Harding

family. In addition to cooking three meals a day every day, she hosted countless groups, large and small, on a regular, even weekly basis. She sponsored the Regina Social Club for 40 years, and opened the doors of her home to TNT men's club, the Petit Jean staff, Alpha Chi, Friendship Home Extension & Greenskeepers Garden Club friends. She served as past president of the Searcy Council of Garden Clubs, Home Extension club, Garden Club, Associated Women for Harding and was Northeast District Director of Arkansas Federation of Garden Clubs. She was a Brownie Scout leader for 10 years. An active servant at College Church of Christ, she taught the two-year-olds for more years than anyone kept a record. In 2006 she received the National Council of AWH Worthy Woman Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

She loved gardening, and had a huge productive garden along with her in-laws, Lonnie & Queetro Pryor, of Searcy, spending countless hours canning, freezing, and storing away food for her family and friends.

Creative in all she did, Bessie Mae was an avid flower arranger, becoming a certified judge and teacher of flower arranging. She loved ceramics, stained glass, sewing, and producing crafts of all kinds. Every presentation of her food was as beautiful to look upon as it was delicious. She was famous for her "Bessie Mae" yeast rolls and her hot spiced tea. Her gracious style and warm hospitality made all feel valued and loved. Throughout her years, she mentored and counseled countless numbers of young women and men; she directed and catered countless numbers of weddings in the area; She loved children and animals; putting up with countless pets through the years including beloved dogs and Jody's endless collection of snakes! She loved to be in nature; to play games (Rook & Spinner); to laugh and have fun; to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and family. She was great at helping all make memories that will last a lifetime. She loved to love others, cook and care for others when they needed extra care. She was generous to share all that she

had with any in need.

Bessie Mae was well-traveled. She and Joe loved to drive; they traveled by car across the US installing Alpha Chi chapters in many states. In 1985, they drove from Arkansas to Alaska and back, just to say they did it! Joe also taught at Harding's campus in Florence, Italy; the two of them enjoyed traveling that semester around Europe, Israel and Egypt. Upon Joe's retirement, they traveled to China, returning home by way of Mexico.

Bessie Mae loved greatly--children, animals, nature, and people. She cared for her beloved Joe the last 12 years of his life after he became ill. They were blessed with 60 years of adventure and laughter. It was one more beautiful example she left of faithful love.

In her final years, Bessie Mae read through the Bible annually, created silk arrangements for The Checkerboard Shop, was active in Red Hat Society, volunteered at White County Hospital and could even be seen on walks across Harding campus "tidying up" the grounds.

After 92 grand years, Bessie Mae leaves behind two daughters, Beverly Jo and Susan, and a granddaughter, Audrey, who could make her smile like no one else could even in her final days. She also leaves many Ledbetter and Ingram nieces and nephews, and hosts of those blessed to call her friend. Her family wishes to publicly thank our recent caregivers Vickie Bailey-Bird, Jenny Wortham, Dena McDaniel & Alicia Kendrick for their precious care of Bessie Mae.

Gifts of love in her honor are welcomed anywhere, but especially to Harding's Dr. Joe and Bessie Mae Pryor Scholarship Fund.

Tribute Wall

MS

“ *One of the rare gems in the world. I was blessed to know such a lady, Miss Bessie Mae.*

Love,

Melissa

Melissa R Smith - May 19, 2016 at 06:39 PM

JE

“ *Bessie Mae was loving, gracious and truly remarkable. Thanking God for her life...treasuring sweet memories and anticipating our next reunion. Praying for peace and comfort for her family.*

Jane Esparza - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

JE

“ *Full of sweet memories this morning. And praying for a dear family.*

Jane Jackson Esparza - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

DR

“ *Thank you Queen Bessie for the many hours of service you invested in Regina and the young women you mentored and inspired by your diligence, your graciousness, and your Godly heart. You have forever affected countless young men and women and pointed them toward the path God would wish them to serve. Go and enjoy the rest that you so richly deserve. Regina alumni, 1980*

Deborah Noblin Roll - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

AW

“ One of my many mentors when as a young mother and wife of a student we arrived in Searcy from Canada on January 1, 1956. The college church supported us in our mission work with the Cree Indians, and later with the Navajo Indians. A dear friend, a wonderful example, and leader to my children and grandchildren.

Alice Williams - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

SC

“ Gracious, soft spoken Prov 31 lady in all areas

Sherry Davis charles - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

SO

“ A dear and regally gracious lady. She was the quintessential southern belle. My condolences to Susan, Beverly Jo and family.

Sandra Ogburn - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

ML

“ I am so sorry for your loss. Bessie was one of the kindest people who graced this earth. She always had a warm smile for everyone. Her creativity came through in everything she touched. I pray you find sweet comfort in her memories and the legacy of love she left for you all.

Martha Leeson - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM

BS

“ Bessie Mae was a true lady always exemplifying a Godly walk in everything she did a true leader a true example of Love. My thoughts and prayers go with the family especially Beverly Jo and Susan. How blessed you were to have had such a great mother. God Bless!

Ben Sims - May 04, 2016 at 02:56 PM