

I was sitting down at my computer yesterday to write this missive when I got the news that Aretha Franklin had died. It affected me much more strongly than I thought it would. She had several health issues over the last few years, and last week I heard she was under hospice care at her Detroit home. But still, when I heard the news, I was profoundly saddened. I suddenly didn't know what to write, so put it off until today.

It is a strange thing when we are so affected by someone we have never met. I had the distinct pleasure of being at a Sippie Wallace concert in Detroit in the early 80's. Ms. Wallace was in her 80's then, and had been a resident of Detroit for 50+ years at that point. She continued to play and sing all over town, in clubs and especially for fundraisers for various charities. About half-way through this fundraiser for various local politicians, including my boss, Detroit mayor Coleman Young, Aretha Franklin walked out and sang with Ms. Wallace for about a half hour. It was electrifying. The Matriarch of the Blues and the Queen of Soul on the same stage, laughing, singing, enjoying themselves and most importantly, sharing that gift with those of us lucky enough to be there.

That evening came back to me when I heard of Ms. Franklin's passing. I remembered going to her father's church when I was in my church's youth group. Her father was Rev. C. L. Franklin, one of the icons of the Detroit civil rights movement. His church, New Bethel Baptist Church, was famous for hosting Martin Luther King, Jr., for being a central gathering place for those fighting for Civil Rights, and for hosting the funerals of Dinah Washington, Flo Ballard of the Supremes, Phillippe Wynne of the Spinners, David Ruffin of the Temptations and other Detroit luminaries. It was the site of Rev. Franklin's funeral, who succumbed to injuries after being shot in an attempted robbery. But to many, it will forever be known as the church that nurtured Aretha Franklin, Detroit's own Queen of Soul. And she deserved every bit of that title.

So, why did it hit me so hard when I heard the news? Maybe because it was another part of my youth that had left us. Maybe the simple pride that as a Detroiter, we always claimed her as "one of us." But maybe it is simply because when such a musical genius is silenced, a little bit of light goes out in all of us. There will never be another Aretha; she will always be "The Queen". She touched us with her soaring voice and her heartfelt songs. When we are touched in that way, we are changed forever. The power of music is amazing, whether it is someone like Aretha, or classical music, or a favorite hymn on a Sunday morning. And the power that is Aretha will stay with us always, and she will be missed.

Be peaceful,
Brad

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"Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." - Francis of Assisi