

A City Council Resolution Honoring the Life of Mary Elizabeth Armstrong

WHEREAS, Almighty God in His infinite wisdom and judgment has called Mary Elizabeth Armstrong, an outstanding citizen of the City of Chicago , to her everlasting reward and returned to the heavenly realm on November 5, May 27, 2024; and

WHEREAS, This august Chicago City Council body has been informed of her passing by the Honorable Michelle A. Harris, Alderman of the 8th Ward; and

WHEREAS, Mary Elizabeth Armstrong was born December 28, 1932, to the late Oscar Sr. and Allen Moore Smith in Indianola, Mississippi. She was the third born of nine children (4 boys, 5 girls), who have all preceded her in death: Oscar Jr, Dorothy Lee, Monroe, Eloise, Allen, Addie Jean, and Randolph. Mary is survived by her baby sister Vernice “Vern” Link Milwaukee/Chicago). After a very full life, she transitioned at the age of 91 on May 27, 2024, surrounded by family and close friends; and

WHEREAS, Like many other African American families in the south, her family settled in Arkansas. She chopped and picked cotton along with her siblings and grandmother, Lizzy Alexander Franks. Because her grandmother valued the importance of education, Mary finished high school at Turrell in Gilmore, Arkansas as Salutatorian, and continued her education at Le Moyne College in Memphis, Tennessee. It was during this time that she met and fell in love, marrying her high school basketball star sweetheart, Adolph Armstrong also preceding her in death in September 1993; and

WHEREAS, In 1953 he was honorably discharged from the Korean War. The two moved to Chicago and started their family. To this union four children were born: Deborrah Ann (deceased 2010), Phillip Darryl, Sharon Gail (deceased 2020), and Rita Renee. They later accepted into their family her brother’s three daughters, Carolyn, Felicia “Fee” and Glenda “Boo” Smith, making Adolph and Mary the proud parents of seven children; and

WHEREAS, Mary E. Armstrong was given the name “Baby Doll” (Doll) by her mother because she was born so close to Christmas and was a gift to her eldest brother and sister, Oscar Jr. and Dorothy Lee; and

WHEREAS, She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education at Chicago State University and later completed a Master of Education at National Louis University. She was employed by Chicago Public Schools and retired from teaching after 27 loyal years committed to the education of young students; and

WHEREAS, She began her educational career at D. S. Wentworth Elementary School as a teacher assistant. After obtaining her bachelor’s degree in 1979 she was assigned as a certified teacher at Wentworth. In 1980, the Chicago Public Schools was put under a federal consent decree and a court-mandated desegregation plan. Mary E. Armstrong was selected to move to the north side of Chicago and be one of the first black teachers in the area to spearhead integration race efforts in Chicago. She continued to work as a second-grade teacher at Peter A. Reinberg Elementary School until she retired, in 1999. Mary maintained her substitute teacher certification after retirement. Several years after retirement she began consulting as an Early Childhood Education Instructional Leader, consulting and mentoring staff in ECE programs for Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago. A job she enjoyed working with her daughter Rita as one of the agency’s directors; and

WHEREAS, God was her everything. Trusting in the Lord is what she believed would sustain you in life. A woman with very strong principles, she always kept God in the forefront of her life. She joined Monumental Baptist Church in 1954, soon after arriving in Chicago. Mary has been a well-respected and loyal member for over 70 years, which she recently celebrated at the church's 105th anniversary. She worked and supported her church faithfully. She touched and connected with people of all ages. She served many years working vacation bible school and served as a key spokesperson to the sisterhood church groups. She met her lifelong dear friend Eugenia Hardaway at Monumental, in the 1950's. Both were schoolteachers. Mrs. Hardaway remained her close friend until the end. She never stopped working in the church and serving through her Christian ministry; and

WHEREAS, As time progressed, she made other lifelong friends, Barbara Dawson, the only surviving member of the Paramount Seven. The G.R.O.U.P. with Winfred French and Phala were also part of a large social group she truly enjoyed. Her dear friend Joann Robinson and Mr. Chris Cunningham whom were her very special colleagues and her dear friends at the Junction Lounge; and

WHEREAS, Mary had five very special caregivers, Ms. Bobbie Ellis and Carolyn Barksdale, both with whom she shared a special closeness, and Barbara, Ms. Lillie, and CoCo; and

WHEREAS, Mary loved blues, cooking, playing the piano, a genre of music, reading, writing poetry, theater, and dancing. In her earlier years, she enjoyed traveling abroad to London, Italy, Greece, and Rome just to name a few. Mary loved learning and sharing what she learned through reading Philosophy and Greek Mythology; and

WHEREAS, Baby Doll was loved, respected, and adored by many and will be sorely missed. She was preceded in death by her parents, Oscar and Allen Smith, her daughters, Deborah Ann (2010) and Sharon Gail (2020), and seven of her siblings Oscar Jr, Dorothy Lee, Monroe, Eloise, Allen, Eddie Jean and Randolph. Grandchildren Omari, Cicely (Peedy), Khalia Burgos and Cheryl. Great-grandchildren Deborah, Harold, Zion, Milo, Marceaux Luca and Cyr. special nephews Myron Hood (Judy), Steve Smith, Micheal Smith (Nita) a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and dear friends; and

THEREFORE, Be It Resolved, That the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, do hereby express our deep sorrow on the passing of and extend to her family our sincere condolences; and

Be It Further Resolved That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Ms. Mary Elizabeth Armstrong.



Michelle A. Harris
Alderman, 8th Ward