



Mrs. Juanita Reese

February 4, 1914 - April 4, 2014

Juanita McGaugh Reese was born February 4, 1914 in Omaha, NE. She was the fourth child and eldest daughter, one of nine children born to the late Joseph H. and Effie Ervin McGaugh. At the age of 13, she demonstrated a natural talent for designing and sewing ladies fashions.

In 1943, she moved to Detroit, MI. Having worked in Omaha as a seamstress for the Omaha Pants Factory, she set up shop in her Detroit home. During the war, she worked at Ford Motor Company and then at a parachute factory. She also worked at the Grosse Ile Naval Base, all while designing and producing clothing in her spare time.

In 1946, Juanita McGaugh married Joseph Reese. In 1950 Juanita entered into a partnership with Amelita Hatcher, which they named "Nita-Lita Fashion Designers." They were one of the few Black owned businesses that joined the National Fashion Group known as NAFADS. In 1959, Nita-Lita Fashions won the National Trophy for leather fashions and launched an era that brought them fame and recognition from the top fashion editors not only in Detroit but across the nation. They were known as the "Leather Queens of Detroit," specializing in one of a kind leather fashions, ranging from bikinis to formal evening gowns.

Mrs. Reese opened a ladies ready-to-wear clothing store on Dexter Boulevard

in Detroit. Named after the Nita-Lita model, "Mode Elite Fashions," fashion conscious women could have clothing designed and made just for them, although shoes and accessories were the bread and butter items.

In 1975, Juanita closed shop and went to work for the Detroit Board of Education in the Cass Outreach Program. A former member of Second Baptist Church, she later became a member of the Historic People's Community Church. After the death of her beloved husband, Joe, in 1987, and a bout of illness in 1989, Mrs. Reese retired from the Board of Education.

She maintained her home in the historic Atkinson district until 2013, a house she called home for over 64 years.

Mrs. Reese lived to be 100 years of age and had a grand celebration February 8, 2014 at the Focus Hope Conference Center in Detroit, Michigan. Her smile, grace, fashionable dress, and infectious laughter were her signature trademarks.

Following a brief illness Juanita made her transition on April 4, 2014 at Providence Hospital in Southfield, Michigan.

Cemetery Details

Acacia Park Cemetery

31300 Southfield Road
Beverly Hills, MI 48025

Previous Events

Visitation

Wednesday, Apr. **9**. 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

O. H. Pye, III Funeral Home
17600 Plymouth Road
Detroit, MI 48227
(313) 838-9770
info@pyefuneralhome.com

Family Hour

Thursday, Apr. **10**. 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Peoples Community Church
8601 Woodward Ave.
Detroit, MI 48202

Funeral Service

Thursday, Apr. **10**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Peoples Community Church
8601 Woodward Ave.
Detroit, MI 48202

Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Juanita Reese*

January 21, 2023 at 09:34 PM