

# Dr. Ruth J. K. Pratt's latest landmark: 100 years young

By **Jannette J. Witmyer** - August 2, 2021



*Dr. Ruth J.K. Pratt is celebrating her 100th birthday. (Courtesy photo)*

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Special to the AFRO

Dr. Ruth J. K. Pratt is a force of nature. Throughout her life, she has worked towards making her mark by achieving lofty goals and remarkable accomplishments. Now, she's greeting the arrival of her 100th birthday, August 2, with that same sense of gusto and energy for life. With the assistance of her niece April Johnson Goodman serving as companion and caregiver, Dr. Pratt continues to reside in the home she has occupied for over 50 years, to eat whatever she wants, and (with the assistance of a walker) to execute some pretty agile moves.

"God is good. That's all I can say. The fact that I can be here in this house, as long as I want to be here, is amazing," she comments, flashing a smile.

Dr. Pratt says her mother, who was only able to complete the sixth or seventh grade, wanted her to have more in life and taught her the importance of always striving to reach higher. She encouraged her love of learning; taught her to crochet and sew; and also taught her to play on an upright piano, which sits in the retired educator's basement. She still plays it on occasion. Her father, who could neither read nor write, was a laborer at Bethlehem Steel and, by example, taught her the importance of a strong work ethic.

Growing up, Pratt says that she had three strikes against her, "I was an African American. I was an African-American female. And I was a dark-skinned African-American female."

In her day, disparities between the way light and dark-skinned African Americans were treated were real; but her mother taught her to keep her eye on the prize. She says, "Never did I ever have to worry about [not being] light skinned because I was smart and never lost sight [of my goals]. I was always thinking about the next step."

During those times, working to overcome financial obstacles and general indifference towards providing African Americans with a quality education was difficult. In addition to crediting her parents' strength and support for her determination, Dr. Pratt also credits the AFRO with providing inspiration and says, "With the AFRO newspaper, that helped a lot, because it was bringing positive influences to the whole situation, and they were talking about the influences of education [on our race]."

A lifetime AFRO reader, she has a picture of her son, Karl King Jr., now married and the father of three young adults, sitting and reading the newspaper when he was just three years old.

Through it all, Ruth Pratt turned her three strikes into a three-run homer by earning a bachelor's, master's, and doctorate in education at then Coppin Teachers College, Howard University, and University of Maryland College Park, respectively. She enjoyed a five-decade-long career in the Baltimore City Public Schools, serving in numerous capacities, ranging from elementary school teacher to chief education officer to the superintendent, before retirement, and returned to the classroom after a 13-year hiatus as an adjunct professor at (now) Coppin State University.

She is a longtime member of Sharon Baptist Church and also a deacon. She is a highly-respected and valued member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and has served in both

local and national capacities. The honors and awards she's earned for mentorship, community service, and professional excellence are too numerous to list.

Holding true to her mother's goals for her to "go higher," Pratt has also enjoyed success in business as a spokesperson for Fashion Fair Cosmetics, licensed esthetician in the state of Maryland, distributor of Amway Global Company products, and various other lucrative ventures.

She is looking forward to the birthday bash. She reflects on her life, smiling, and says, "My life is a beautiful life. I have to say that."

Then, her expression becomes serious, and she continues, "I'm just thankful and blessed and highly favored because I've risen to all kinds of levels, and somehow I've survived them all. I don't mind if I had to go to the backseat to do what I had to do. Whatever it takes to get a good seat, an intelligent seat... If you have to face a little extra, that's what you do."

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