

Billie Rose remembered with laughter, tears and heartfelt song

by Lainey Millen
Q-Notes Staff

For those lucky enough to have had the rare pleasure of knowing her, she was reckoned a champion in many rights. But, most recently, she was a warrior in her three and a half-year battle with cancer, which all too quickly took her life, but not her legacy.

A native Charlottean, Billie Stickle Rose was a driving force throughout her 52-year life. She was vivacious, exuded bountiful energy and was not one to accept "no" easily. She was relentless in her causes, be they women's issues or those centered around civil liberties. She took the forefront in politics, running for a spot on the Charlotte City Council in the 1970s. Rose was invariably involved in many arenas (both politically and socially) that often proved unpopular in mainstream society. Early on, she was one of the most active members of the local chapter of the National Organization for Women.

She served as a security guard at Queens College in the 1980s. Despite her small stature, students who knew her always felt safe — protected not by her size, but by her grit.

Rose will be remembered even more for her contributions to the GLBT community. In 1981, along with long-time activist Don King, she was instrumental in bringing Charlotte its first-ever Gay/Lesbian Political Caucus. This group was comprised of individuals who were ready to go head-to-head with anyone who opposed the rights of GLBT people. The group spoke to many organizations and endorsed various political candidates over the years. The pair also launched Queen City Quordinators (*Q-Notes* was originally its newsletter for reporting local events, as well as community initiatives.) and the Metrolina Community Service Project, which engaged in fundraising for the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard of Charlotte, the Gay/Lesbian Political Caucus and other community groups. Rose and King also opened a GLBT bookstore and gift shop on East Boulevard called Friends of Dorothy.

An avid bowler for the better part of her life, Rose was also involved in the early years of Queen City Rollers. She was the president for five years and served as a delegate to the regional league.

One of her biggest investments was her tremendous involvement in One Voice Chorus, where she served in various capacities including fund raising, ticket sales and, most recently, as a performer.

But these were only small portions of her gentle, yet, giant spirit. She was previously married for 10 years and not self-identified as lesbian until age 31. She and her life-partner were featured in a multi-part series on GLBT lifestyle in the *Charlotte Observer* both in word and pictorially in the early 80s, challenging the conservative Charlotte landscape. Her short sojourn within GLBT culture was generous and filled with passion. Her sense of volunteerism ran so deep that she was recently awarded the Don King Community Service Award, as well as the One Voice Chorus Service Award.

She was a staunch animal lover, often rescuing and finding homes for each one of them. Mostly, she possessed a persistent determination to do things right, and to do the right things.

On Saturday, April 28, over 70 friends, family and admirers joined Samis Rose, her life partner of 22 years and with whom she shared a jewelry making business, in remembering her with song and soul. In a moving, though often humorous commemoration, those who were present spoke honestly and respectfully of the person who had touched a community's heart. Held at Park Road Park in Charlotte, the gathering began with a short time of mingling and mixing, of leafing through the many albums that featured photographs of "the two Roses," along with scenes from an overseas trip and clippings from several newspapers depicting their lives together. Friends brought flowers, photos and other personal mementos to add to the day's remembrance. In late afternoon, a program interlaced meaningful music with memories of friends and family. One Voice Chorus presented two of Billie's favorite songs — *Soon in the Morning* by David Maddux and *Ubi Caritas* by Maurice Duruflé — as a tribute to her countless hours of service to the organization. Those who loved her spoke of her life and shared stories of her passion. As a final tribute to her, Samis played *Gabriel's Oboe* while those gathered to remember Billie, joined hands in a circle and listened to the soft, yet moving song. At the end everyone — hands still joined — lifted their arms upward as a jubilant shout crescendoed.

The shared memories stirred chords of recognition:

"My parents and I were sick and Billie called to see what she could do. You know she was a vegetarian, but she came and cooked meat for us. While she

was here someone else came and brought food. When I asked how he knew about the situation, I was told that Billie called and said there was a "food emergency" and friends brought over food to sustain us. She was always reaching out."

— Sandra Bailey

"When I learned that her master craftsmanship had brought out her business acumen...is it any wonder I hired her at my business? Within a few weeks, she was explaining to me the ins and outs of the company and how things needed to be improved."

— Rick Haffner

"She was the first woman at Dignity. During hostile moments while representing the Caucus, she would command an opportunity for clarity. She had great strength."

— Don King

"She was a right-on lesbian."

— Concetta Caliendo

"I was her first gay male pet. She was closer than a sister and wiser than a parent."

— Jerry Brett

"She had a positive impact on the GLBT community. She had an uncanny wisdom on where to go and what to do."

— Mike

"Billy taught me many things. Perhaps the most important was not to settle for less than I wanted. If it was not cooked right, send it back...If it was not the diagnosis you wanted, live life, take risks and



take trips anyway. Live all the time. And never, never accept second best."

— John Quillen

Bette Midler might have had her in mind

when she sang, "Just remember, in the winter, far beneath the bitter snow, lies the seed that, with the sun's love, in the spring becomes the rose." ▼

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