

MUHAMMAD ALI 1942-2016



Photos by Bud Doney, Louisville Defender

The Childhood Home of Muhammad Ali on Grand Avenue in West Louisville has been restored into a museum. Thousands have visited the home to honor Louisville's Hometown Hero, Muhammad Ali.

Muhammad Ali, 'The Greatest,' makes his final journey home

BY YVONNE COLEMAN BACH
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LOUISVILLE, KY — Hearts were heavy in many of the citizens of Louisville when it was announced that their hometown hero, boxing great Muhammad Ali, had died at the age of 74 in a Phoenix, Arizona hospital Friday, June 3, from complications relating to Parkinson's disease, bringing to a close his most challenging fight.

Although Ali was known and loved throughout the country and the world, there was a special bond that he shared with his hometown. Louisville is the home of the Muhammad Ali Center and just recently, Ali's childhood home was restored as a museum in his honor. The home is located in West Louisville, the heart of the African-American community.

Ali's roots were in Louisville, everyone knew he would always return home. Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. — Muhammad Ali — The Greatest, made his final journey home Sunday, June 5, 2016 in a private plane that carried his body back to his home. A motorcade led him to A. D. Porter & Sons Funeral Home—Southeast on Bardstown Road. Louisville's Hometown Hero is Home. Plans have been made for all to say their farewells to the Champ.

A Jenazah Service will be held at Freedom Hall at noon today, Thursday, June 9.

Ali's funeral will be on Friday, June 10. The public ceremony will be held at 2 p.m. at the KFC YUM Center in Downtown Louisville. Seating will be limited, with 15,000 tickets available. However, for those unable to attend, the service will be streamed live from www.alicenter.org.

Louisville Metro Mayor Greg Fischer issued a statement about his passing.

"The values of hard work, conviction and compassion that Muhammad Ali

developed while growing up in Louisville helped him become a global icon. As a boxer, he became The Greatest, though his most lasting victories happened outside the ring. Muhammad leveraged his fame as a platform to promote peace, justice and humanitarian efforts around the world, while always keeping strong ties to his hometown. Today, Muhammad Ali's fellow Louisvillians join the billions whose lives he touched worldwide in mourning his passing, celebrating his legacy, and committing to continue his fight to spread love and hope. Thank you Muhammad, for all you've given your city, your country and the world."

To honor Ali's life and work, flags at all Metro Government facilities were lowered to half-staff at 10 a.m. Saturday morning when citizens joined the mayor in a special ceremony.

Kentucky U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth said, "The word 'champion' has never fit a man better. Muhammad Ali was a champion for peace, a champion for justice, and a champion for equality. He was a man who gained fame in a violent game, but immorality as a gentle and caring soul. In the ring, there was no one better, but his contributions to humanity managed to eclipse his boxing prowess."

Yarmuth said he remembers watching every one of his championship fights. "I remember waiting for him at Standiford Field when he returned home after beating Liston, thinking to myself that I had never seen a more perfect human being. And I remember the loud-mouthed speedster by the name of Cassius Marcellus Clay, whose fights in and out of the ring would one day make him Muhammad Ali — a selfless giant who put principles over everything and never forgot the city he called home."

He truly was the greatest, especially in his hometown. Growing up in Louisville, many in his age group had the opportunity

to attend high school with him, then known as Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. at Central High School; he babysat for those that lived in his neighborhood on Grand Avenue. Even when Ali became the Heavyweight Champion of the World and moved away, he always returned to his hometown. He never forgot where he came from.

Ali's popularity transcends age and race lines. Young children that were not even born when Ali achieved his greatness in the boxing ring know exactly who he is. Ali often times returned home to speak and interact with area youth from all races and walks of life.

It was in Louisville that Ali first learned of racism. As a small boy, his mother Odessa Grady Clay, a household domestic worker, took her son downtown to the five-and-dime store. She said her son was thirsty and he asked for a drink of water, but the store would not give it to him because of his color. His mother said he started to cry and she calmed him down by taking him to a place where he could get some water. However, she said it really hurt him.

Young Cassius Clay's bike was stolen when he was 12 years old. It was that incident that led him to take boxing lessons from retired Louisville Police Officer Joe Martin.

When he left Louisville, Ali's family remained, including the mother that was dear to him. She died August 20, 1994 at the age of 77 in Louisville and was eulogized by local minister Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby. "One of the greatest honors of my life was when Muhammad Ali asked me to preach the eulogy of his mother Odessa," said Cosby.

Cosby said, "When I eulogized Ali's mother, I said Odessa his mother was the root and Ali was the fruit. He (Muhammad Ali) stood on his feet! It was a great honor!"

Many more sent in their respects for Ali, such as Oprah Winfrey, President Barack Obama, Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (a Kentucky Republican) and U.S. Sen. Rand Paul (also a Kentucky Republican).

Before the Friday funeral service, there will be a procession throughout Louisville to allow the general public to pay their respects. Starting at 9 a.m., the procession will travel northbound on Bardstown Road, westbound on the Watterson Expressway and then north on I-65 to westbound I-64, exiting on the 9th Street Ramp. The procession will then travel west on Muhammad Ali Blvd. to 34th Street, left on 34th Street to Broadway, making a left on Broadway and then traveling to Cave Hill Cemetery. The procession will proceed slowly to allow mourners to pay their respects.

Pallbearers for the funeral will include Will Smith, the actor who portrayed Ali in the movie ALI; John Grady, Ali's cousin; Ibn Ali-Muhammad Ali's nephew; Komawi Ali, former brother-in-law; Jerry Ellis, brother of Jimmy Ellis who was Ali's former sparring partner and a former heavyweight champion of the world, also a Louisville native; Lennox Lewis, former heavy weight champion of the world; Jan Wadell, Ali's first cousin; and John Ramsey, Ali family friend.

Speakers at the funeral will include Lonnie Ali, Maryum Ali, Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby, Rabbi Joe Rappaport, Actor/Comedian Billy Crystal, Bryant Gumbel, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Orrin Hatch, and Former President Bill Clinton, a representative of the Catholic Faith and a representative of the Buddhist Faith.

Ali N.C.

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welcome remarks to Ali during the dinner used his famous phrase, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." Finally when it was his turn to speak, Ali got up, thanked everyone for coming, and joked that a few of the speakers looked like his arch-rival, Joe Frazier.

When the emcee played a practical joke and gave Ali a rubber nose as a "Howard Cosell Fake Nose Award," the champ leaned into the microphone and mumbled, "It's the wrong color," bringing the Shaw University gymnasium down with laughter.

After his victory over Sonny Liston to take the heavyweight boxing crown, the federal government soon ordered Ali to report for enlistment in the U.S. Army. Ali refused, saying that his Islamic faith prevented him from taking part in the bloody Vietnam War the U.S. was engaged in. Because of his refusal, the federal government stripped him of his title and passport for three years, preventing Ali from earning a living in the ring.

It was during the initial proceeding in federal court in Houston, Texas, in 1967 that Ali met Cecil Goins.

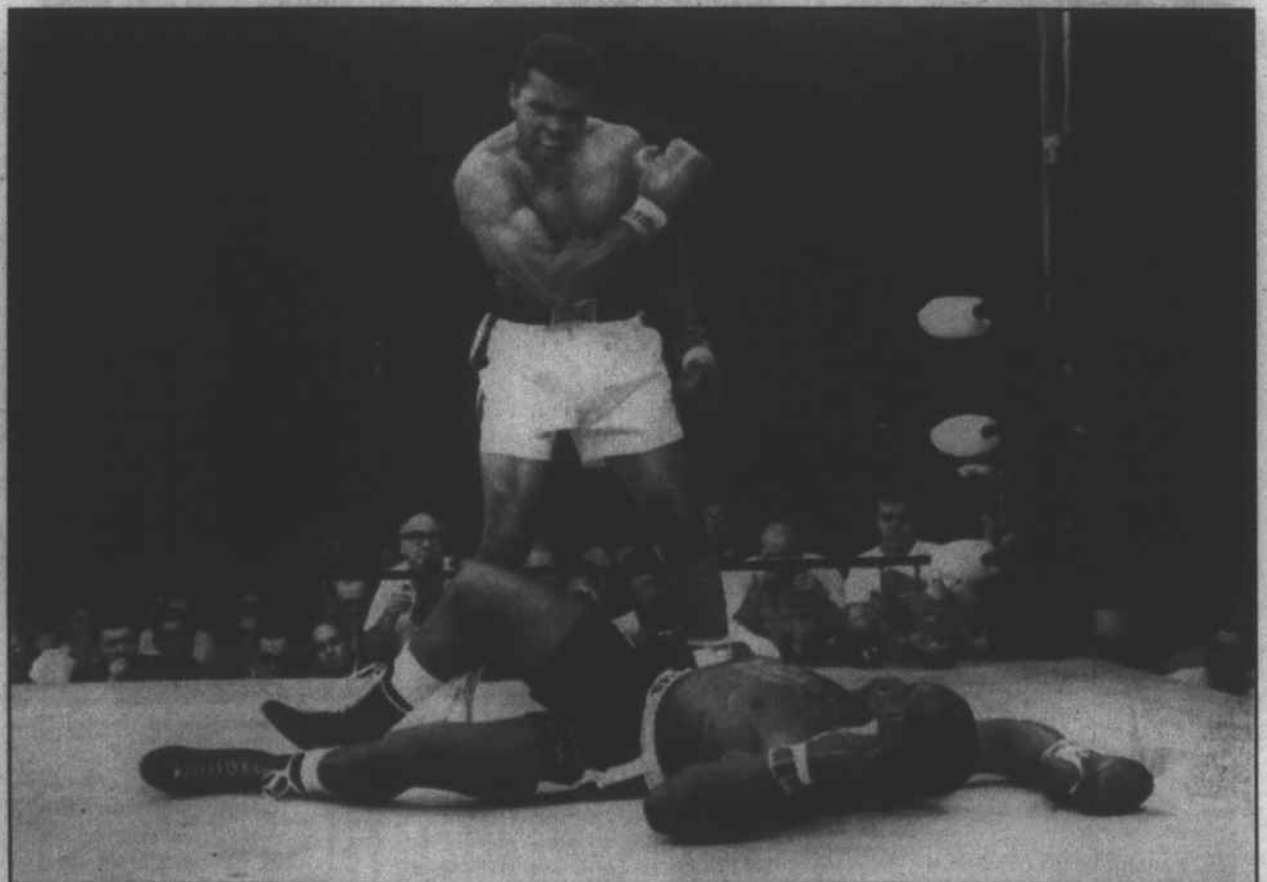
Mr. Goins, now 90, was one of the few black Federal U.S. Marshals in

the nation at the time. Having joined in 1965, Goins was part of security for the historic Selma to Montgomery, Ala. march. The Southern Pines native, NC A&T alum and U.S. Army World War II/Korean War veteran, was based out of the Eastern District North Carolina, but because the Ali case had drawn such worldwide attention, he and another black deputy U.S. Marshal were reassigned to Houston by the U.S. Justice Dept. to provide protection for the controversial prizefighter.

"Our orders were to go down and keep order," Goins recalls, noting that with a prominent black college, Texas Southern University, right there, huge crowds of young people, as well as protesters, were expected.

"I was with him every day," Goins said during a phone interview from his Raleigh home on Monday, adding that Ali was in "good shape" because he had been training for an upcoming fight when he had been indicted. Ali was always up early in the morning for prayer and to jog, and then would arrive at the courthouse at least an hour before his 9 a.m. trial.

Ali would use that time to walk the halls and meet people. The U.S. Marshals were required to issue tickets to spectators in order to admit them to the court-



In this May 25, 1965, file photo, heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, then known as Cassius Clay, stands over challenger Sonny Liston, shouting and gesturing shortly after dropping Liston with a short hard right to the jaw, in Lewiston, Maine.

room. "When there were breaks during the trial, Ali would leave his lawyers and come out to be with the people," the retired U.S. Marshal says.

As someone who had served in the U.S. Army active duty for many years over two wars, Mr. Goins admits that he didn't agree

with Ali's refusal to serve at first. But Goins got the chance to speak to the heavyweight champion every day before the trial would start, understand him, and also observe him. Goins was impressed when black militant leader H. Rap Brown came to the Houston courthouse to apparently join with Ali to

start a protest against the war, and Goins saw Ali turn Brown away. The champ knew he was facing at least five years in federal prison, he was determined to wage his fight against the Vietnam War through the courts. Goins recalls H. Rap Brown did not come back.

"I agree with the mass-

es of people. At the time I thought he was dodging to serve in the military. But now I can see his reasoning." Mr. Goins, who later retired from the U.S. Marshals after 25 years, says. "He had more nerve than most people to do what he did."