

Josephine Baker
By Rebecca Doria

Josephine Baker lived during the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was a time of rebellion and a birth of a new culture. The Harlem Renaissance helped look at the arts and the world in a new way. Josephine had a lot of struggles in her life but she still turned out to be famous.

Josephine Baker was born on June 3, 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri. Josephine's name wasn't always Josephine Baker but Freda Josephine McDonald. Her parents were Carrie McDonald and Eddie Carson. Carrie was a washerwoman and Eddie was a drummer in a local band. Eddie left the house with Carrie to take care of the kids. Later on Carrie met Arthur Martin. Carrie gave birth to some Josephine younger siblings and Carrie and Arthur got married. Since Josephine was lighter than her brother was, Richard she wasn't welcomed by her mother was. That started Josephine's rough childhood.

Her mother was rejecting Josephine, so she lived with Aunt Caroline her father's sister, for five years until Carrie wanted her back to help her with the kids. Josephine only stayed two years at her mom's house. After that her mother sent her out to work and got jobs as a maid. Josephine went out to three different houses to work but at each house she didn't stay too long. Also at this age she wasn't really that smart either, Josephine could even spell her own name.

When Josephine was thirteen she got married to Willie Wells. This was her first marriage. Josephine didn't stay married too long because she spent Willie's money and it ended ugly so, they divorced. Josephine waitresses in a restaurant. For entertainment she went to the Theater Owners Bookers Association. At this theater Josephine met Bessie Smith. Bessie didn't notice Josephine, but Carla Smith (Bessie Smith's sister) did. Carla Smith was a big sister to Josephine, for Carla taught and gave Josephine the knowledge of show business. Josephine and Carla soon became lovers. Josephine went down south with the Smith sisters but soon came back at the age of fourteen.

At the age of fourteen Josephine went to Philadelphia where Bessie Smith performed and Josephine also met another boy. That boy was Billy Baker and he worked in a restaurant with his dad. They lived together on top of the restaurant with Billy's family. The marriage didn't last too long for Josephine got accepted to the musical, Shuffle Along, in 1921. In the Shuffle Along Josephine experienced Show Business. She also found out that her skin color wasn't too light after all, that the white performers would tease her like she was dark like everyone else. Even though they teased her, Josephine turned that in to her advantage by creating a style wearing big picture hats with evening dresses. She wasn't humble to anyone.

During that time Josephine also performed in the Cotton Club, The Plantation, and other New York nightclubs. At the clubs Josephine would dance the Charleston, the Black Bottom, and other dances created by blacks. The Shuffle Along went on a tour around the U.S. but when it hit St. Louis Josephine didn't perform because of her bad times in her hometown. Josephine's mother was there but she couldn't find Josephine for Josephine wasn't in the show.

In the same year Josephine was in some musical dances of the Chocolate Dandies. The dance that made Josephine famous was The Revue Nègre, which she performed in Paris. She was only eighteen at that time. At the audition Josephine did her dance and was noticed out of the rest of the dancers doing their acts. She was chosen to be part of The Revue Nègre. Josephine got picked to perform in The Revue Nègre. The Revue Nègre featured Josephine last in the show but she showed people that "black is beautiful". Josephine came out with a feather costume and danced the Charleston dance with a person playing the

clarinet. The ratings for Josephine were excellent. Everyone wanted to know who was that girl on stage.

After the performance Josephine received high praise and stayed in Paris for a while. She then became a legal Parisian citizen when she was 31 years old (1937). Josephine toured the rest of Europe and recorded songs for Columbia Records. Josephine also starred in films like, "Zou-Zou and the Princess Tam-Tam".

Josephine returned to the U.S. and while she was there she helped with racial issues that rose in America. Josephine didn't like to perform in segregated theaters and other local places that were segregated. For what Josephine did the N.A.A.C.P (National Association of Colored People) named her the most Outstanding Woman of the Year. Josephine even participated in the 1938 March On Washington and gave a concert at Carnegie Hall for the N.A.A.C.P, Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (S.N.C.C) and the Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.).

Josephine made a difference in the U.S. and also helped France in World War II. Josephine served as an intelligence liaison and an ambulance driver for the French Resistance. Josephine was honored with the Medal of the Resistance and the Legion of Honor. During this time she also adopted twelve children and called them the "Rainbow Tribe". The "Rainbow Tribe" was made of kids from different nations. There were ten boys and two girls. That was Josephine's family because Josephine had to undergo an emergency hysterectomy that took her stillborn baby and almost took her life. So the "Rainbow Tribe" was her only real family.

In 1975 Josephine performed in a Revue to tribute Josephine for her success in the show business world. Josephine ended out poor and had to move into a small villa and could scarcely support her "Family". Four days later Josephine died in her sleep because of cerebral hemorrhage. Josephine was 69 years old and still was performing really well for audiences. The people in Paris gave a big burial. Her casket went through the Salpatriere Hospital, passed the Bobino Theater and proceeded to the Madeleine. Thousands of people paid their respect to Josephine Baker, a person who renew herself as Josephine Baker, Star.

This woman was one of the greatest people to live in this world. Even with hardships Josephine came to be a star of Paris. Josephine showed Paris and the U.S. that there are new things happening around you. Open your eyes and see the different worlds and their styles. Josephine gave the world the best style of daring costumes and dances. She was intelligent and always gave respect for others. She also learned how to have a good time!

December 14, 2000