



legendary ladies

10 WOMEN WHO CHANGED THE FACE OF MARYLAND

BY JENNIFER KEATS CURTIS

Last year, with help from the Maryland Women's Heritage Center (MWHC) and an outstanding nominating committee, *Maryland Life* started a new tradition by identifying "10 Women Who Changed the Face of Maryland."

This year, 10 more women were selected by an impressive array of female committee members who scrutinized Marylanders past and present and then came together to whittle the list down to the final number.

Although not every woman chosen was born in the Free State, each honoree embodies a strong element of "Maryland." And while their accomplishments are individual and unique, these legendary ladies all share dedication and drive, boundless energy, persistence, and sheer will.

HERE ARE THEIR STORIES.

legendary

LUCILLE CLIFTON (1936-2010)



{ POEM }

*i need to know their names
those women i would have walked with
jauntily the way men go in groups
swinging their arms, and the ones
those sweating women whom i would have joined
after a hard game to chew the fat
what would we have called each other laughing
joking into our beer? where are my gangs,
my teams, my mislaid sisters?
all the women who could have known me,
where in the world are their names?*

FOUR LINES FROM THIS poem, written by the second female (and first African-American) poet laureate of Maryland, Lucille Clifton, were chosen for the MWHC's brochure as an inspiration for Maryland women. And in her memory, the MWHC has created the Lucille Clifton Fund for Women in the Arts.

The poet and author of over 30 books, including the Everett Anderson series for children, Clifton was a 1988 Pulitzer Prize finalist. In 2000, she received the National Book Award for *Blessing the Boats*. And, four years ago, she became the first African-American woman to win the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, which carries an award of \$100,000. Toni Morrison edited her first three books of poetry.

"She was an extraordinary human being and I loved her poetry long before I met her," says Jill Moss Greenberg.

"She was so bright, so clear about being inclusive, and a speaker of the truth. She spoke and she wrote plainly and straightforwardly about countering injustices, about her own experiences, and she spoke especially to African-American women."

Born Thelma Lucille Sayles in 1936 in New York, Clifton did not have an easy childhood, yet she emerged a leader, says Greenberg.

In addition to writing, Clifton, whose mother was also a poet, was a visiting professor at both Columbia and Duke. She also taught at the University of California at Santa Cruz until she returned to Maryland in the late 1980s and began teaching at St. Mary's College.

In 1958, she married the poet Fred Clifton. The couple had six children by 1965. Clifton, who resided in Columbia, passed away last year.

"She had this way about her, her depth, her perception, the way she cared about people," says Greenberg.

"People will forever remember her."