

Obituary for Charles Moses Cohen (Pittsburgh)

March 23, 1927 – March 30, 2021

Charles Moses Cohen took his last breath and went to meet the Lord at 6:54 AM on Tuesday, March 30, 2021. He was 94 years old. He was a loving father, grandfather, and great grandfather. He loved Shakespeare, African American literature, and opera. He spoke several languages fluently. He had a beautiful baritone voice and was a talented artist. He also was an amateur boxer and had an excellent pitching arm in baseball, to the point that several teachers encouraged him to go for a professional sports career.

Charles Moses was the fourth child born to Henry Edward Cohen and Isabella Holloman Cohen on March 23, 1927 in Augusta, Georgia. His father had moved there from Aiken, South Carolina to open a tailor shop. Due to his mother being ill when he was born, Charles Moses was raised by his aunts, Edna Nicholson and Louise Holloman, during his first few years of life. In 1929, Henry Cohen lost his tailor shop in the Great Depression. All of the family except Charles Moses then moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, leaving him behind with his aunts. Charles Moses joined the rest of his family when he became of school age.

Due to the Depression and segregation (legal in the South, de facto in the North), Charles Moses lived a difficult life in his early years. At six years old, he helped his older brother sell coal and newspapers. But he was a very bright and talented young man who early on demonstrated good athletic ability, artistic ability, and had a beautiful singing voice. These qualities made him stand out in school, despite being black. He had an award in high school for drawing. He developed into a beautiful baritone and was in several choirs throughout his life including the Amicitia Male Chorus in Philadelphia. Despite his athletic, artistic, and musical abilities, Charles Moses decided to focus on an academic career. He finished high school a year early to start Temple University. But he was there less than a year when he was drafted into World War II.

Charles Moses served three tours of duty in the Pacific theatre in World War II. While there, he became a noncommissioned officer and learned to speak Japanese fluently. When he returned from the war, he decided to go into the Army Reserves and used the GI bill to matriculate at New

York University, where he got a bachelor's in general science, no small feat for a black man in those days.

He flirted with the idea of making the military his career and entered the Korean War as a major in 1951. He served in the 644th Engineer Battalion. By the war's end, he was a Captain, but no longer wanted to make the military his career.

So, Charles Moses returned to Philadelphia in 1953, where he came across an old childhood friend, MaChere Tresville. She had just graduated from Bennett College, a black women's college in North Carolina, where she had earned a bachelor's degree in music. This time they fell in love. With his beautiful baritone voice and her virtuoso abilities as a pianist, they began a music program for neighborhood children in the basement of MaChere's parents' house in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. They would have the children learn and put on operettas and musicals for the local public at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church (Now St. Luke's) on Germantown Avenue. They were so professional and well done that kids all over Germantown flocked to audition for them and the program was featured in the *Philadelphia Tribune*.

On October 9, 1954, MaChere and Charles Moses married. They went on to have eight children between 1956 and 1966, four girls and four boys. (One son died of pneumonia in infancy and one daughter died of cancer in 2006.)

In 1956, the Philadelphia Public School system hired a small group of black male teachers for the first time. (They had previously only employed black female teachers.) Charles Moses was among that group, making him one of the first black male teachers in the Philadelphia School District. They all had to pass a certification test to determine what they would be qualified to teach. Charles Moses ended up certified to teach English, Latin, German, Math, and Science. He started out teaching mainly math; but for most of his teaching career he taught English. He loved teaching Shakespeare and African-American literature. He taught full-time until the mid-1980s and then returned as a substitute until he moved to Pittsburgh in 2007, giving the Philadelphia School District over 50 years of service. It should be noted that in the early 1960s, he obtained a master's degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

In 2006, Charles Moses' second eldest daughter died of cancer, leaving behind six minor children and two just barely adult children. Their father was unable to care for them; so, Charles and MaChere, with their oldest daughter, Claire, got permanent legal guardianship of the six children and in 2007, brought them to Pittsburgh, PA, where Claire lives. Once in Pittsburgh, Charles Moses had his two young grandsons audition for the Afro-American Institute Boys Choir. He became a major mentor and elder for the choir until the boys grew up and went to college.

Charles Moses Cohen is survived by his 95-year-old wife, MaChere, one remaining sibling, Joseph, six of his eight children, thirteen grandchildren, one great granddaughter, Yemaya, and a host of cousins, nieces, and nephews. Funeral Services were held on April 7, 2021.