

Green Eaters Clamor For Grandma Bryant

By LEE IVORY

Sentinel City Editor

Very slowly the 78-year-old matriarch of the Pryor family shuffled around the well-appointed kitchen, pulling out drawers, opening cabinets and preparing to cook a pot of greens for the guests at Ike Sutton's birthday party.

"I just got out of the hospital, you know, but I must make certain that people have something to eat that has character," she said. "That caviar stuff is too much for me."

Marie Bryant is an institution in the town of Peoria, Ill., where she is the last of the Carter family.

"There were 19 boys and two girls," she said proudly. "Only six boys and me survived. And I am the last of a fine group of people."

No doubt this is one of the reasons comedian Richard Pryor would like to talk Mama Bryant into staying in sunny California. There is certainly enough room for her in his heart and his home.

"I like it out here fine," said the legendary cook, "but all my friends are in Peoria and I just can't give it up, it seems."

The collard greens looked fresh, but the silver-haired lady seemed unhappy.

"If you'd run down to the store and get me some mustard and turnip greens to go with these I got, I'd have a fine mess of greens to go with the cornbread," she said, hating to ask a guest in her grandson's home to exert himself at all.

"And get some green onions; you know the kind, with them big tops, because I generally cut them up in my greens." She smiled, and the guest trotted off to the supermarket.

The party was about to start when Grandma Bryant finished cleaning her greens. Many of the guests, nibbling on the dainty hors d'oeuvres, laughed at the thought that greens were steaming and they cracked little jokes about "soul food."

But Grandma Bryant was undismayed.

"Wait until the hungries attack them," she chuckled. "They'll be in here in droves."

When the greens were cooked, and the party was well under way, Grandma Bryant decided to retire.

"It's been a long day for me," she said. "I wouldn't have cooked for anybody but Ike Sutton. I love him."

But before she left, she called the reporter aside and whispered into his ear:

"Thanks for going to get the greens and onions for me. If you're ever in Peoria, stop by my poolroom and play a few games on me."

And all the while that



PEORIA'S PRIDE—Marie Bryant, 78-year-old grandmother of comedian Richard Pryor, puckers up to receive kiss of appreciation and love from Jet/Ebony photographer Ike Sutton. Mama Bryant, who owns a poolroom in Peoria, cooked a pot of greens for Sutton's birthday party held last Sunday at the Pryor Estate in Northridge.—LEE IVORY PHOTO.

pianist-singer Les McCann and real estate genius Donna Pereyma were slurping the "pot likker" and crumbling up cornbread into their greens. I thought about how nice it would be to have a wonderful, gray-haired lady sitting on a stool near the cash register by the door waiting for patrons to yell . . . "Rack, ma'am."

There aren't too many 78-year-old ladies who own poolrooms in Peoria who can cook greens.

Could that be why Richard wants her to stay?

Long after Marie Bryant had gone to bed, the soul food eaters were dipping into the pot of greens.

"I am not usually carried away by greens," said Donna Pereyma, "but these are sensational and I'm really hungry."

Mama Bryant must be clairvoyant. She knew that caviar would not stick to the ribs, and she probably smiled in her sleep when Donna made her statement.

A lot of people are going to join Richard Pryor in lobbying to keep Marie Bryant on the West Coast.

"I'd probably move out here," she confided to this reporter, "if I could find a good location for a poolroom."

(Note to Mama Bryant: Since I cantaloupe with you, if you carrot all for me, lettuce open a pool hall in the guest house. — LI)