

## the music of ebony and ivory

Ebony and Ivory was the name given to two elderly women in New Jersey – one white and one black – who played classical piano together.



Both had suffered a stroke in 1982 and became partially disabled. Ruth Eisenberg and Margaret Patrick were introduced to each other the following year and began playing piano together, one hand each.

Patrick grew up in Harlem and started playing piano at the age of 8. She accompanied singers and orchestras from the time she was a young girl and was often called on to play the piano while in high school. At the age of 16, she graduated with honors from the Martin Smith Conservatory of Music. She stayed with the piano and taught countless children how to play.

Eisenberg learned to play the piano as an adult. Her husband devised a method of teaching the piano to adults and insisted that she learn the technique. She became her husband's prize pupil and toured the country demonstrating her acquired talent.

After their stroke, neither of them attempted the piano until they met Millie McHugh at the Southeast Senior Center for Independent Living in Englewood, New Jersey.

McHugh introduced them and suggested they put together their piano talent. Patrick could still play with her left hand, and Eisenberg was able to use her right hand.

They started cooperating on the keyboard and the duet of Ebony and Ivory was born. Beautiful music started flowing through the hallways of the senior center and concerts began happening all over New Jersey.

Their story went national after being picked up by *The New York Times*, which put it on its wire service. They were on television both in the U.S. and abroad, and appeared with Regis Philbin, Geraldo Rivera and David Hartman. Liberace, who was a fan of Ebony and Ivory, made his last television appearance on the *Hour Magazine* with Gary Collins, and made it a condition of his appearance that if they would bring Eisenberg and Patrick on the program, he would come.

At the ages of 75 and 86, these two cooperative ladies produced some of the most beautiful music of their lives.

The story of their disability and their work together shows the power of both determination and cooperation. And the harmony and achievement – beautiful music, if you will – when those elements are involved are examples of what we can accomplish as team players in Life Care and Century Park.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil (Ecclesiastes 4:9 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter