**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JUNE HARRIS**

Hello everyone!!! It’s such a joy to be here on this very special occasion… birthday celebrations are fun… getting all dressed up, gathering with good friends and wonderful family, as we now surely know, really warms the soul and reinforces the power of connection and community…. On top of all of that, we’re here to recognize an incredible milestone for an even more rare and wonderful person…. We’ve probably heard the lyrics to a popular song… “Some people wait a lifetime for a moment like this….” Well… it’s taken a lifetime to get here and I, along with all of you, **KNOW** what a true treasure our “birthday girl” really is… today, there are only smiles and happy hearts as we gather together and say, **HAPPY NINETIETH BIRTHDAY**, Ollie Stewart!!!

I’m quite sure that each one of us has many incredible, heartwarming, funny, life-affirming stories about Ollie…. How you met… how you might be related… how you’ve enriched each other’s lives, and I am certainly no exception. I met Ollie in the 1980’s thanks to my association with Congressman William I. Clay. Congressman Clay is one of the most selfless, supportive, and compassionate people I have ever met. He was the best employer I ever had, and fortunately, his integrity and magnanimity extended to the people he knew, particularly Ollie, and she has stayed true to first impressions. Through all the years we’ve known each other, she has become like a sister to me. It warms my heart to think of the hospitality she extends…. And I don’t think I’m the exception…. To be in Ollie Stewart’s presence…. to be honored with her kindness, generosity, and abundant thoughtfulness, is literally akin to feeling “at home.” I say this because I have grown to look forward to my visits to St Louis….. now I don’t want you to get …. ***jealous***… (**Wait for the laugh**) … but when I visit here, I honestly have no idea what the inside of a hotel room looks like ….. now, I’m not knocking the hospitality industry…. (**Wait for the laugh**)… but I have the honor and privilege of staying with Ollie in her home… I feel completely comfortable and it truly feels like I **AM** home… the refrigerator is fully stocked… there’s convenient access to transportation…. The very best of everything is at my fingertips… not least of which is Ollie’s natural and loving way with people…. And most of all…. I don’t have to deal with a bill for the mini bar!!! **OUCH**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

I remember one time when I had to go to St Louis and it was necessary for Ollie to be out of town at the same time. Did that stop her from being the most gracious host imaginable?? **ABSOLUTELY NOT**!!! She went out of her way to make sure I was cared for… Ollie made arrangements for me to stay at her home… she arranged for her daughter, Mary, to host me and to take me wherever I had to go…. Needless to say, Mary was **STUCK** with me!!!! Mary…. I could not have asked for a better “guest host.” I’m so thankful for your generosity and support, and it’s refreshing and reassuring to really witness how Ollie’s wonderful traits have been infused in her children.

Ahhhh… good story, right??? But Ollie’s incredible thoughtfulness knows **NO** bounds… Ollie knows I love the NBA (**if you want, mention your favorite team and say**)… **GO\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**!!! One time, when I was visiting St Louis and staying at my “home away from home,” there was a little hitch…..although it was during the height of the NBA season, Ollie didn’t have the necessary sports channel on her television… Guess what??? She made sure she ordered the NBA channel while I was there so I could watch and enjoy my games… **WHO DOES THAT**??? Ollie Stewart, that’s who!!!! And I **ADORE** her for it!! And that wasn’t even an isolated incident!!! On one visit to St Louis, we attended an event together… even though Ollie had to leave early, she placed her car keys on the table in front of me and informed us that she would take a taxi or grab a ride with another guest…. All I can say is that being lucky enough to be in this woman’s life is beyond a blessing. We’ve traveled together… we’ve brainstormed together… we commiserated and joined forces to do our share to make a difference… something so desperately needed in our community. Ollie Stewart provides…. And she does this without pretense or ulterior motives…. with motivation only to be the kindest, most thoughtful, and generous person…Knowing Ollie Stewart is a **MASTER CLASS** in **FRIENDSHIP**. Aren’t we all so lucky!!

And what’s even **BETTER** is that this treasure has been with us, spreading her very special kind of joy, for **NINETY YEARS**… ninety years of learning and loving… doing and caring… sharing and supporting… and **TEACHING** us, by example…. exactly what it means to be an extraordinary human being.

Years ago, the late, great, Bette White said, “The best thing about being in your nineties is that people spoil you rotten…. Little do they know you haven’t changed… in the brain… you’re just 90 every place else….Now that I’m 91, as opposed to being 90, I’m much wiser… I’m more aware…”.

Ollie, today is **YOUR** day…. and will be so for the days that follow. You’ve done so much for me and for everyone in this room…. and beyond… it’s our **PRIVILEGE** to spoil you rotten… and I can’t imagine anything I would rather do that to acknowledge the gift you are and have been, to all of us.

In wishing you happy birthday, I want you to know that, as I have said, **YOU** are the gift and we are all grateful, thankful recipients of your very special light…. Have a **WONDERFUL** Birthday!! We love you!!