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Broadcaster Reggie Bryant; 'Never backed down'

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If you were a guest on Reggie Bryant's talk-radio shows, you'd better have known what you were talking about.

If not, he would "chew you up," said the Rev. Leroy Simmons, a longtime friend.

"You had better have done your homework or he would grind you up. He could be overbearing and intimidating. Some guests got angry and walked out. But he was non-apologetic in his pursuit of the truth."



Reginald Bryant, veteran radio broadcaster most recently with WURD (900-AM), a onetime filmmaker, a talented artist and a man who liked working with troubled young people to show them a better life, died Monday night at age 69 after a long battle with cancer.

He died in a hospice after watching the Phillies trounce the Washington Nationals, alert and perceptive to the end. "He was still Reggie Bryant," Simmons said. "The threat of death never changed him."

Acel Moore, former *Inquirer* columnist and editor emeritus, said: "Reggie was one of the most intellectual journalists and communicators that I ever met. He was an artist. He could write, draw and produce. He was ahead of his time.

"He was always reading and thinking deeply. He was very controversial. You either hated or loved Reggie. He loved people and mentored people. The impact he had was broad."

Daily News columnist Elmer Smith first encountered Reggie discussing fine art with a group of teens outside a cultural center.

"Reggie had a heart for his community," Smith said. "He used his broadcast career to serve the underserved. He was an unapologetic, unyielding and fierce advocate for his people. He never backed down.

"I got to spend a morning with him two weeks ago. His health was failing, but that incredible mind was on overdrive. It was a privilege to know him."

Reggie was on the air until early February. Simmons and other friends helped him get to the station. "He was completely different when he got on the air," Simmons said. "Nobody had an inkling of how much pain he was in."

Reggie was a well-educated man, but he kept reading to advance his knowledge.

"Authors loved him," said Simmons, an associate pastor at Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church. "He was intimate with their books, and would ask probing questions about them. He had a way of asking questions people weren't ready for.

"He made people think. People would leave him, thinking, 'That's interesting. I never thought about that.' "

Reggie was a native Philadelphian who graduated from Central High School, where he was a standout football player. He went on to Temple University's Tyler School of Art, taught for a time in the Neshaminy School District and worked with hostile gang members at night.

Early in his career, he was a filmmaker who made documentaries, his first on teenage gangs. He was part of the Film Media Center, which taught teachers to use films and videos in the classroom.

He did graduate work at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and became an assistant professor of art at the Philadelphia College of Art (now University of the Arts).

His watercolors and oils are coveted by friends and connoisseurs.

Reggie's radio career began with WCAU-AM, where he hosted a show called "The Urban View." He moved on to WPEN-AM, where he hosted an hour-long talk show.

In his increasingly limited spare time, he produced television programs for Group W Westinghouse, Capital Cities and PBS, where he produced short films for "Sesame Street."

He hosted "Black Perspective on the News" for WHYY, which became a national series for several years. He then moved to WHAT-AM, and, in 2006, switched to WURD to host a three-hour talk show called "In Pursuit of Truth."

Over the years, he interviewed five U.S. presidents, 52 Pulitzer Prize winning authors and other government leaders and celebrities, the station said.

He was frequently honored for his work, and was recognized by the National Association of Broadcast Journalists, of which he was a founder, as a "Legend Who Lived It."

He was an early member of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists.

"Reginald Bryant's voice inspired and educated," said Sarah Glover, PABJ president and a photographer for the *Daily News*. "He masterfully weaved activism and journalism on his radio shows.

"He was a broadcasting giant who had a direct impact on the community and blazed a trail for black journalists in radio and television."

Reggie was often referred to as "Doctor" because of his ability to perform verbal "surgery" on a variety of issues, and possibly because of his erudite manner.

"Reggie Bryant was the smartest, most culturally sensitive and talented on-air personality that I have had the opportunity to work with," said Kernie L. Anderson, WURD board member and former general manager.

He is survived by a son and two daughters.