

PAUL ESSEN, ENTREPRENEUR AND NIGHTCLUB OWNER; AT 75

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16 August 2002

The Boston Globe

Paul Essen, a nightclub owner and entrepreneur who relied on the flip of a coin to make career decisions, died of heart failure July 10 at Union Hospital in Lynn. He was 75.

A former typesetter, Mr. Essen saw his life change in 1966 after he married Paula Burchell, a variety-show performer whose father was a circus performer billed as "The Spider" and whose mother was a clairvoyant known as "Madame Hilda."

From 1975 to 1980, the Essens managed Paula Fontaine's, a nightclub in Peabody where Mrs. Essen also performed.

The couple decided to buy the nightclub by flipping a coin. Had the coin landed "heads," Mrs. Essen would have become a veterinarian. "That's how we did everything," said Mrs. Essen. In 1967 they used the same tactic when Mrs. Essen opened The Gay Paris Poodle Parlor on Bennington Street in East Boston. The shop closed two years later.

The nightclub stayed open for five years, but was destroyed by a fire in 1980.

Having nightclub performers regularly passing through made the Essen house an exciting place to grow up. "It was quite an interesting lifestyle for me," said daughter Davina Essen, of East Boston, "It wasn't dysfunctional, it was just interesting."

Mr. Essen also dabbled in the racehorse business at Suffolk Downs between 1975 and 1977. At one time he owned six horses, with names like Persian Dandy and Infant Prodigy.

Born in Philadelphia to Russian immigrants, Mr. Essen was often bullied for being Jewish. As a teenager, he moved to live with his aunt in Brooklyn, where he raised carrier pigeons on the roof of her apartment building. He once used the pigeons to send a message from Brooklyn to his family in Philadelphia, his wife said.

When he turned 18, Mr. Essen joined the Army. A technical sergeant at the end of World War II, he drove tanks in Italy and Yugo slavia. Around that time, he took up boxing, and after the war ended spent several years as a boxing promoter. The brutal nature of the sport finally led him to switch to typesetting, his wife said.

He set type in print shops in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston for about 40 years.

Mr. Essen was formerly president of Typographic House and vice president of Arrow Composition.

Besides his wife and daughter, he leaves his brother, William, of Lynn.

Burial was in Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett.