

## 'Dr. Ruth' puts sex in the spotlight

By R. G. DUNLOP  
The Courier-Journal

The diminutive, 70-year-old grandmother had, after all, encouraged the men in the audience to go home and admire themselves, naked, in front of a mirror.

She had indeed urged the women present to exercise their vaginal muscles while sitting in traffic, and then to wink at the nearest driver.

She had talked in jest about "floor-to-ceiling" erections, and seriously about the irrelevance of penis size in sexual satisfaction.

She had stressed her belief that any non-destructive, private sexual behavior between consenting adults is acceptable.

She had endorsed abortion

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Dr. Ruth Westheimer

rights and the need for contraception and responsible sex.

She had exhorted parents to talk frankly with their children about sex.

So after Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who doesn't mind being called the world's most famous sex therapist, had said all that and more, it seemed only natural that

Louisville first lady Madeline Abramson would thank Westheimer for "a very stimulating evening."

As the Brown Theatre audience tittered, then roared, Westheimer shot back to Abramson and her husband, Mayor Jerry Abramson: "May I ride home with you?"

And so it went when "Dr. Ruth" came to town last

night as part of the Jewish Community Center's Signature Series and the 1998 Jewish Festival of the Book.

Before and after her rambling, 90-minute lecture, Westheimer touted her own books and signed copies of three — "Sex for Dummies," "Grandparenthood" and "The Value of Family" — with a felt-tipped marker.

She bantered with admiring purchasers and posed for pictures with some.

She used and reused many of her stock lines — about being the "foreplay" for her friend, former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, who is to appear in Louisville next month, for example. Nobody seemed to care.

"Give me some questions," she exhorted those who

thrust books in front of her. "Give me some good questions."

At 4 feet 7 inches tall, Westheimer nearly disappeared between the Abramsons when they flanked her for a photograph. But standing on a foot-high riser behind the lectern, waving her arms for emphasis and barely glancing at the "outline" she said she brought for her talk, Westheimer was in command on stage as well as off.

Before she began, she wanted to know where Louisville psychologist and talk-show host Stan Frager would be sitting in the audience, so she could gesture toward him from time to time.

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BY DURRELL HALL JR., THE COURIER-JOURNAL  
Dr. Ruth Westheimer covered a wide range of behaviors and beliefs as she spoke at the Brown Theatre last night.

## Sex therapist 'Dr. Ruth' charms audience

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Why was that chair sitting next to her? she wondered aloud. The chair was removed.

What to do with the large brown handbag slung from her left shoulder? Stow it on a shelf underneath the lectern, within easy reach, it was agreed. And it was done.

Watching Westheimer sign books, Frager recalled a "conversation" about sex that he'd had as an adolescent with his father.

"He said, 'You'll learn all about it in school,'" Frager recalled. "That was typical in those days. Dr. Ruth made it socially acceptable to talk about sex, and she did it in terms that people could understand.

"That was very revolutionary. She

made it not dirty, not bad, not ugly."

Westheimer told the audience of mostly middle-aged and older men and women that being Jewish makes it easier for her to talk about sexuality. That's so, she said, because historically, Jews have regarded sex as "not a dirty subject" and important for recreation as well as procreation.

And what did Louisvillians ask Dr. Ruth? A sampling:

What do parents who are products of the anything-goes '60s tell their children about their own sexual histories, particularly if they were promiscuous?

"Use white lies," Dr. Ruth counseled.

How do parents talk about sex to 8- and 9-year-olds "who think it's

gross"?

"Don't," Dr. Ruth said. "Just smile and say they'll change their minds."

What do parents tell their children about graphic news accounts of President Clinton's infidelity?

"Say what you believe," Dr. Ruth replied. "If you believe that extra-marital sex and infidelity are wrong, say so."

And how does Dr. Ruth feel about older adults having sex?

"I approve," she answered without hesitation.

Then she strode off to more book signings and to dinner, carrying gifts bestowed by the Abramsons: a University of Louisville basketball jersey, a personalized Louisville Slugger baseball bat and a T-shirt bearing the inscription, "Live it up."