Musical Prodigy and Early Life: Aretha Louise Franklin was born on March 25, 1942, in Memphis, Tennessee. Raised in Detroit, Michigan, she began singing in her father’s church, New Bethel Baptist Church, showing prodigious talent from a very young age. She taught herself to play the piano by ear and soon became a part of the gospel music circuit.

First Record Deal: Franklin signed her first record deal with J.V.B Records at the age of 14, releasing her first album, "Songs of Faith," in 1956. However, it wasn't until she moved to Atlantic Records in 1966 that her career as a soul singer truly took off.

Breakthrough Hit: Her rendition of Otis Redding's song "Respect" became an anthem for the civil rights and feminist movements and is often considered her signature song. It reached number one on the R&B and pop charts in 1967 and earned Franklin her first two Grammy Awards.

Chart-Topping Success: Over the course of her career, Franklin scored over 100 singles on Billboard charts, including 17 Top Ten pop singles and 20 No. 1 R&B hits. She was the first woman to have 100 songs on Billboard's R&B chart with the release of "Rolling In the Deep (The Aretha Version)" in 2014.

Pioneering Female Artist: Aretha Franklin was the first woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, a testament to her influence and the barriers she broke down for women in music, particularly African American female artists.

Civil Rights Involvement: Aretha Franklin was deeply involved in the civil rights movement. Her songs "Respect" and "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" became anthems for the movement. She also worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. and provided financial support and performed at benefits and protests.

Presidential Performances: Franklin sang at the inauguration ceremonies for three U.S. presidents: Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama. Her performance of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" at Obama's inauguration in 2009 was particularly memorable.

Operatic Performance: In a famous last-minute substitution at the 1998 Grammy Awards, Franklin performed the aria "Nessun Dorma" from Puccini's opera Turandot, filling in for an ailing Luciano Pavarotti. Her performance demonstrated her versatile vocal ability and was met with critical acclaim.

Awards and Honors: With a career spanning several decades, Franklin received numerous honors, including 18 Grammy Awards. She was awarded the National Medal of Arts and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award of the United States, in 2005.

Legacy and Death: Franklin's influence on the music industry is immeasurable. She helped shape the very fabric of soul music and was known for her powerful, emotive voice and her ability to imbue songs with a deep sense of emotion and humanity. Aretha Franklin passed away on August 16, 2018, from pancreatic cancer, but her legacy continues through her music and the countless artists she has inspired.