

Celebration of Life Darren Shomari John Harper Bio

On Monday, January 5th, 1959 at 8:48 at New York Infirmiry in Manhattan, after 12 hours of labor to Darren Harper, was born to Leroy and Althea Harper. He was named Darren Kurt Harper, meaning dignity, strength and ambition, and he grew to embody each character trait. The family moved to East 96th Street in Brooklyn, where he was raised. At age 5 he graduated from kindergarten. The educational foundation he received at school was rewarding. He learned to love learning which was fueled by his intellectual curiosity. He started piano lessons at age 7 and performed on two occasions at Brooklyn Academy of Music. He developed a love for music and continued to play saxophone in high school and college. He played each instrument with equal excellence. His extracurricular activities were scouting and karate and he became an Eagle Scout.

He attended St. Johns Summer Day camp, and became interested in swimming, track and basketball. For the remainder of his elementary education, Darren, attended boarding school at Our Lady of Grace, and continued his catholic education at Our Lady of Peace, followed by high school at Bishop Laughlin.

At an early age he developed a love for athletic activities. Cycling and roller skating were the first sports. Table tennis, skating, track, karate and court tennis soon followed. His greatest love was basketball, he started at St. John's camp and continued throughout adulthood. In high school, at age thirteen, he joined the track team. little did he know that track would be the vehicle for his entrance into college. He earned many trophies, medals, desk sets, watches and plaques for his excellence in the sport. Like a true Capricorn, Darren learned quite early that he who is beaten easiest, is beaten most, so he developed a pattern of winning, and aimed for it. He fearlessly worked to meet his goals for success in any endeavor.

Given his interest in Scienc-fiction, Darren and his brother, Brian, thought there should be Black heroes in the comics. They wrote to one of the comic-book companies requesting that Black as well as white heroes be represented. Soon after, they noticed that Black heroes were being portrayed. We do not know how influential their letter was because great minds do think alike, but it was good to see the Black heroes in the comics. In response, Darren and Brian made a comic-book of their own, it was called "Planet of the Gods." This foreshadowed his future of being a superhero to his family and the community that he loved and cherished.

Darren is a believer, but he did not feel that one should spend their entire life denying, sacrificing and restricting in preparation for a future life after death, of which we are uncertain. He was a considerate, unselfish, sensitive, person who did not deliberately hurt anyone.

Of the many colleges that recruited Darren, his choice was Brown University (Ivy- League) in Providence Rhode Island. Year after year, as he retruned home from college, metamorphosis was evident. Darren was cognitively and emotionally more aware of his Afro-American roots. His charismatic oratory skills were so emotive that his voice carried beyond the walls of his home (to the street and the neighbors) whenever he discussed the racial injustices of the black community. There was an upsurge of brotherhood, and a sense of responsibility and commitment to disburden the black community, through his profession.

While in college, Darren made many lasting friendships, one of which, was his beautiful wife- Janice Nichols. During his first year in medical school their marital vows were exchanged. Of that union, three beautiful children were created, Nia Zarina, Kamau Osei, and Malik Shaka Idris Harper. Building a family while acheiveing a medical profession was not easy, and that is an oversimplification, but if anyone could do it, Darren could. He made the biggest problem seem insignificant. The years in medical school at SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse, New York, were financially, physically, mentally, emotionally stressful, but spiritually he was not alone. With God all things are possible. His supporting and understanding wife, his family an and his in-laws were always there for him. After graduation from medical school, he returned to New York to better serve his people.

Until his transition he had established himself as the trusted community health advisor wherever he went.

In New York, he continued his medical education through an internship at Columbia University and Harlem Hospital and a residency program at Kings County Hospital and the S.U.N.Y. Health Sciences Center at Brooklyn. During his undergraduate education he had a special interest in African American Studies and as part of his medical training had educated himself on African American Health Disparities. He started his own medical practice in Brooklyn, NY. He served as the Associate Chairperson of the Department of Family Medicine at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center in New York. He was the President of the Brooklyn Branch of the National Medical Association, the largest and oldest national organization representing African American Physicians.

In 2005, he relocated to Atlanta. He joined Morehouse School of Medicine in the capacity of Medical Director of the Department Family Medicine, Community Liaison, and served as Assistant Professor of Family Medicine. Dr. Darren Harper served as a primary care doctor treating patients in Lithonia and Decatur, Georgia, and the surrounding communities. He holds certifications from the American Board of Family Medicine and was a member of the following additional professional organizations: the Georgia Academy of Family Practice, the American Academy of Family Practice, and the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine. Dr. Harper also held several leadership positions during his career.

In keeping with his strong sense of community, Dr. Harper also served as the Coordinator of the Health Ministry and Kijana, the Young Men's Rights of Passage program, at First Afrikan Presbyterian Church. He was an active member of several Pan-African community organizations including National Black United Front, Organization of United African Peoples, Organization of African Unity, National Action Network, Friends of the Congo and the Pan-African Federalist Movement, at which he held the position of Research and Strategy Commissioner for North America. He maintained a special interest in Environmental Health and carried on the legacy of strong environmental advocacy for environmental justice that he and his late wife cultivated together. Dr. Harper became a devoted member of Citizens for a Healthy and Safe Environment (CHASE) in 2009. He often spoke at county commission meetings, city council meetings, protests and rallies educating the community about the adverse health impacts of hazardous waste and toxic chemicals. He was elected to the position of Vice-President of CHASE on August 12, 2022.

Darren Shomari was a dedicated husband, father, brother and grandfather, a loyal and devoted friend and a strong advocate for causes that support the Black community and the African diaspora. Being an example of a strong Black family unit was one of his lifelong passions. He was a strong supporter of his late wife especially throughout the latter part of her life. He was charismatic, jovial and a strong supporter of all who knew him. He had a way of making all in the community feel welcome and valued.

Dr. Harper was preceded in death by his wife Janice Teheera Nichols Harper, his father Leroy Harper and his parents-in-law Rufus and Janet Nichols. He leaves to celebrate his living legacy, his beloved children Nia, Kamau and Malik, his 91 year old mother, Althea Harper, for whom he served as a dedicated caregiver until the end of his life. His older brother Dennis Harper, his younger brother, who is jokingly referred to as his twin because of their lifelong closeness, Dr. Brian Harper (Penni). His brothers-in-law, Dr. Ronald (Sati) Nichols, Rev. Dr. Reginald (Vanessa) Nichols and Roy Nichols. His cherished grandchildren Jalen, Zenzele, Manelin, Naade, Mansa, Asante-Taheera and Mandel. Neices and nephews (Averi, Omari, Russell, Troy, Ryan, Therren, Aaron, Austin, Lauren, Yejide, Aliyah) and a host of Aunts, Uncles, cousins, godchildren and friends.