

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

NORBERT SEBASTIAN DOWNIE

Sunrise: July 5, 1933

Sunset: March 11, 2024



WHEN GOD SAW YOU GETTING TIRED
And a cure was not to be,
He put his arm around you
And whispered, "Come to me."

He didn't like what you went through,
And he gave you a rest.
His garden must be beautiful.
He only takes the best.

And when he saw you sleeping,
So peaceful and free from pain,
We didn't wish you back
To suffer that again.

Today we say goodbye,
As you take your final rest.
That garden must be beautiful,
Because YOU are one of the best!

PALLBEARERS

Michael J. Downie
Eain Coakley

John James
Michael Heningburg, Jr.

Mark Downie
Ernest Coakley

HONORARY PALLBEARER

Kendall David Smith

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The family of Norbert S. Downie wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation and gratitude the many expressions of love, kindness and concern extended to us during this time of bereavement. We would like to extend special thanks to the staff and administrators at Bridges By Epoch in Hingham, MA, and the Ascend Hospice team, which provided excellent care to Mr. Downie during his latter days. We also would like to thank Ms. Clara Bell, Jonathan Singleton, Jonathan Gramling, Reverend Brown, the Twelfth Baptist Church ministers and family, and Davis Funeral Home for their support and assistance with the services. We pray that God will strengthen us and each of you daily, and that He will continue to bless you with His mercy and kindness.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024 at 11 AM

TWELFTH BAPTIST CHURCH

160 WARREN STREET, ROXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

Reverend Jeffrey Brown, Officiating
Reverend Willie Bodrick, II, JD, M. Div, Senior Pastor

OBITUARY

Norbert Sebastian Downie was called home by the Lord on March 11, 2024 at the age of 90, after a long, valiant battle against heart disease and advanced dementia. He transitioned peacefully in his sleep. Norbert was born on July 5, 1933 at New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, the only child of Muriel Bair Downie and John Downie, both from Jamaica. His mother was a licensed nurse, and his father was a bank security guard, who eventually worked his way up to become the head of the bank’s accounting department. Like his father, Norbert possessed strong mathematics skills and business acumen, which would stand him in good stead later in life. Norbert was educated in New York Public Schools until the age of 12, when his parents divorced, and he moved to Summit, New Jersey to live with his father, to enable him to benefit from the better schools there. He would travel by train back to Brooklyn, NY on the weekends to spend time with his mother, whom he adored. It was she who taught him how to dance! At age of 14, Norbert began to caddy at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, NJ, which sparked his life-long love and passion for golf. He attended Summit High School, where he was both a scholar and athlete, playing on the Summit High School basketball team. He then matriculated to Seton Hall University in New Jersey, where he received his B.S. degree in Business Administration. Among his classmates and dear friends in college was former U.S. Congressman Donald Payne, Sr.

When Norbert graduated from college, the Korean War was raging, and he was drafted into the army. Because of his exceptional math abilities and organizational skills, Norbert was selected to train in the Quartermaster Program, graduated and was assigned to Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia. He was honorably discharged and then continued to serve his country in the army reserves. From there he became an agent in the U.S. Treasury Department, where he would meet and become friends with Earl Graves (who became the founder and CEO of Black Enterprise magazine).

In June 1961, Norbert married Dr. Marjorie Jones, who, in 1960, was the first Black woman to graduate from Seton Hall Medical/Dental School. From their union, came three beautiful children: Jeanine, Michael and Mark, all college graduates. Norbert was a hard-working, devoted father, taking his family on adventures to the mountains for ski trips and white-water rafting, African safaris, and vacations in the Caribbean. He was determined to expose his children to an array of experiences to expand their vision and better prepare them for life.

Norbert began to work at Prudential Insurance Company, where he soon became a top performing insurance agent, earning accolades for many years for his outstanding performance. He eventually became a General Manager at an agency in Flatbush Brooklyn, where he was intentional in hiring a diverse workforce that reflected the community served. Norbert ultimately retired from Prudential after 50 years of dedicated service.

In 1992 Norbert married Shirley A. Smith, who was then a Regional Nurse Consultant in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the Boston federal office. He was warmly embraced by Shirley’s family and friends, who considered him to be her perfect match! After marriage, Shirley transferred to the New York federal regional office, and the two began their lives together in Edison, New Jersey. They have been happily married for 31.5 years, sharing many trips, fun, adventures, laughs, and an active social life together.

Norbert was proud of his Jamaican heritage and, true to character, always worked extremely hard and hustled! He was a classy, elegant, debonair man – a “Renaissance man” – with an engaging, exuberant personality, thousand-watt smile, and true lover of life. He was a dashing, charming, handsome, 6 foot 3 inch tall drink of water! He once even attracted the appreciative eye of Ms. Maya Angelou on one of his golf trips!

Norbert was a true “people person” and social butterfly that never met a stranger. Norbert loved golf, playing on courses all around the world. He loved to dance and to travel. Norbert was an avid skier of “Black Diamond” status, who enjoyed trips to the slopes with his New Jersey ski club. He also was an excellent swimmer and tennis player. Norbert was a founding member of the Englewood Social Club in New Jersey. He also was a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Theta Lambda Chapter, Bergen County, New Jersey. He liked to watch football and basketball games. A faithful New York Knicks fan, Norbert would often bet on Celtics games with Shirley, an equally passionate Celtics fan -- which bets he invariably lost! Indebted to Shirley for 21 lobster dinners, he said it was cheaper to marry her than to make good on taking her out for the lobster dinners!

As Norbert aged, he developed significant health challenges and memory loss. His wife Shirley took care of him for over three years at home before his condition declined to such an extent that he needed to receive comprehensive care. Shirley and Norbert’s daughter Jeanine remained by his side, fiercely advocating for the best care possible for him until the very end.

Norbert is survived by his devoted wife Shirley, his three children - Dr. Jeanine Downie (Michael), Michael Downie and Mark Downie – his “sister from another mother” Shirley Montesir, his granddaughters Jade and Sophia, his stepson Kendall David Smith, his nieces, nephews, cousins and numerous other family members and friends across the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean. He was dearly loved by all and will be truly missed. He will remain in our hearts forever.

ORDER OF SERVICE

FRATERNAL TRIBUTE		
ALPHA PHI ALPHA, INC.	Omega Chapter Induction Service	Eain Coakley
PROCESSIONAL	“ <i>Ribbon in the Sky</i> ”	
INVOCATION		Reverend Jeffrey Brown
OPENING HYMN	“ <i>Blessed Assurance</i> ”	
SCRIPTURES	Old Testament Isaiah 43: 1-3 Psalm 116: 8-9	Eain Coakley
	New Testament John 5: 24	Ernest Coakley
PRAYER OF COMFORT		Reverend Jeffrey Brown
SOLO	“ <i>My Soul is Anchored</i> ”	Reverend Jeffrey Brown
REMARKS AND REFLECTIONS		Dr. Jeanine B. Downie
		Obie McKinsey ,Ken Edwards and Alvin Poe, Englewood Social Club
		Other Family & Friends
		Ambria Coakley
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		Antoinette Coakley
OBITUARY		
SELECTION	“ <i>The Goodness of God</i> ”	Jonathan Gramling
EULOGY		Reverend Jeffrey Brown
RECESSIONAL	“ <i>Goin’ Up Yonder</i> ”	
PRIVATE INTERMENT		

REPAST

*Please join the family for a repast immediately following the service here
in the meeting hall in the lower level of Twelfth Baptist Church.*

IN MEMORIAM

In lieu of flowers, the family respectfully requests that you please provide any do-
nations you would like to share to the United Negro College Fund Boston ([https://
uncf.org/local-offices/boston](https://uncf.org/local-offices/boston)) in the name of our beloved Norbert S. Downie.

THANK YOU.