

Obituary

Byron Burnett (August 10, 1946 – March 24, 2003)

Byron was born in Brooklyn, New York on August 10th, 1946, to his devoted mother, Iris Clarke and father Winfield Burnett. With family roots in Barbados, he was raised on Prospect Place in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. He attended John J College graduating Valedictorian, and worked for the NYPD before entering Harvard Law School where he was known for the acuity of his remarkable intellect. He received a joint degree from Harvard Law School and the Kenned School of Government, spent a time at the Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C., following which he returned to New York City where he joined Dewey Ballentine as an Associate. He became Counsel to Deputy Mayor Ken Lipper, in the Koch Administration, and went on to establish his own legal practice. In recent years he also ventured into the hospitality business, purchasing the Sampler Inn on the Jersey Shore.

Byron was deeply engaged with local community organizations, including Heritage Health and Housing where he was Chairman of the Board for fourteen years, Highbridge, Concourse Day Care, and the Community Board of the Church of St. Matthew & St. Timothy. Byron had a passion for flying and wonderment about air and space. He loved piloting small planes, was a member of the Black Pilot's Association, and for many years was an active member of the Civil Air Patrol.

Byron is survived by his daughter, Alison, whose mother Debbie Mandelker was his partner for many years. Byron adored Alison, sharing his sense of life as an adventure with her, nurturing her own love of life, independence, and free spirit. In 1998, Byron and Mel met up again, 24 years after meeting on holiday in Italy. They married and remained as devoted to each other as he was to Alison until his death.

We cherish Byron's open mind, his curious, exploring, and generous spirit. He has left us all better for knowing him. We all have wonderful memories of the times we shared and we will truly miss him.

Testimonials

The news from Ana was shocking. My condolences to you, Stephanie. I know you and Byron were close. We have been friends for many years. I liked him a lot. He was dedicated to our organization. It's a great loss. (Phillip Morrow, Chairman, Heritage Health and Housing) *

I too will miss Byron...mostly his smile and willingness to respond to all questions...his positive and total commitment to Heritage. Let us all take Byron's enthusiasm and keep the flame burning in our work. (Pyser Edelsack, Board Member, Heritage Health and Housing)

Do Not go Gentle into that Good Night

by Dylan Thomas



Do not go gentle into the night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and by gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*

Byron was so much a part of our life and work at Heritage Housing that it is inconceivable that he is gone. His intelligence, wit and charm helped us build Heritage from a small to a nationally recognized agency that it is today.

His assistance and persistence were essential as we grew in size and services. He wanted to help people, to restore housing and services to West Harlem.

I don't know what our world is going to be like without him. He was Chairman of the Board of Directors at Heritage Health and Housing for 14 years, and Treasurer for two years. He helped me resolve so many difficult problems with his unrelenting creativity. So let me just say that overall, he was a beautiful, caring human being, and I do not know what better can be said of anyone. (Ana Pereira, Executive Director, Heritage Housing).