



Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker

March 11, 1953 - December 2, 2015

Celebrating The Life Of Portia Pearl James-Booker:

Portia Pearl James-Booker was born March 11, 1953 in Chicago, Illinois to Porter James and Jewell Yarbrough. Portia was baptized as a young child in Villa Ridge, Illinois at Free Will Baptist Church.

Later Portia moved to Detroit, Michigan with her mother in 1959, where she attended Detroit Public Schools. She graduated from Mumford High School and immediately started furthering her education through college attendance. She received her Bachelors Degree in Psychology from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Portia relocated to Washington, D.C. and later she received her Masters Degree in Political Science from Howard University. After moving back to Detroit, Michigan, Portia attended Law School at Wayne State University as well as studied Linguistics at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, Michigan.

After residing in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Portia accepted an opportunity for a year of study and research through Antioch College in Ohio, which took her to Jamaica. After her studies in Jamaica, Portia accepted a job in Washington, D.C. with Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

There she worked in research and development until she later joined the League of Women Voters.

Then in 1985, Portia accepted a position as a curator with the Anacostia

Museum – Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. This position allowed her to feature and exhibit African American Inventors and also landed her on the cover of USA Today in 1989. She also authored her book, “The Real McCoy,” which featured those inventors as well. Portia held this position until her retirement in October 2015.

Portia's favorite hobbies were sewing, cooking, gardening, arts and crafts, painting and drawing. She made the best salsa ever, from scratch!

Portia departed this life, December 2, 2015.

Cemetery Details

Grand Lawn Cemetery

23501 Grand River
Detroit, MI 48219

Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker*

January 21, 2023 at 09:34 PM



“ *I truly will miss my cousin. We shared so many memories of being in the country compared to her city living. She was always the scholar in every situation and could figure out the most challenging math problems. You are at peace my Dear PJ.*



Valerie Huff - December 21, 2015 at 10:24 PM



“ *I remember first working with Portia on the Black Mosaic project. Just recently I had the privileged to work with her on the Anacostia Smithsonian Folklife Festival program – her knowledge, experience, and intellectual passion were the source of its success. She has shaped many of us. I will miss her.*

*Olivia Cadaval
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage
Smithsonian Institution*

Olivia Cadaval - December 08, 2015 at 08:12 AM

CW

“ I attended the services today for my friend, Portia! I met Portia in the seventies when we were both students at Wayne State University. Portia was so smart, but more importantly, she was caring and very supportive of her family and friends. We continued to stay in touch over the years and I spoke to her a couple times last year and this year. She was excited about retirement. She was my unconditional friend- always showed that she cared about me during good times and challenging times in my life. I will miss my friend. My condolences to Chris and the entire family. Cynthia Ward



Cynthia Ward - December 07, 2015 at 11:22 AM



“ I will always remember Portia fondly as a brilliant, caring, extraordinarily hard working devoted to the artists and the community that she worked with. I will remember her as a gentle, graceful and gracious presence with a calming demeanor but fierce in her advocacy for what she believed in. She has left a legacy of exemplary scholarship on African American and Washington, D. C. history . I was fortunate to work with Portia on the early components of the Black Mosaic Project early in both of our careers at the Smithsonian and most recently on the Anacostia Program at the 2012 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. I remember our visit to BJ Adams studio and her affirmation of his work and that of other local artists. We talked each time we met about getting together to share a meal and spend time. That will have to wait for another lifetime. My sincere sympathies to her families--including her Anacostia Community Museum family. Diana N'Diaye



Diana N'Diaye - December 07, 2015 at 10:38 AM

MB

“ I will always remember Portia

I have a habit of giving nicknames to people of whom I am fond. I called her Portia-pie, she called me Marcia-May. We were colleagues at the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, I, a relative newbie of nearly 10 years and she, one of the institution's unassuming, yet 30-year veteran history-making visionaries in my view. But we were also friends and had a lot in common: our love of (and angst about) our pets, cooking (mostly hers), plants, houses, clever prose and fun things to do like trying new restaurants that we -- she, Gail Lowe (another recently passed colleague) and I always talked about but didn't get around to doing much.

As colleagues, we agreed much about where the museum should go, sometimes disagreed about methodology and on a daily basis lamented how challenging it was to make headway. But through it all, Portia's brilliantly guiding and unshakable philosophy that this museum could and would, through its research and exhibitions, spotlight the history, culture, artistry and innovation of everyday people working to make a better day; that it would give them a voice and elevate their endeavors and accomplishment in a way that would be relatable to everyman – indeed, the essence of the Anacostia Community Museum brand of museology – that was inspiring to me as I watched her make it happen.

I am deeply saddened to say goodbye to my dear friend but I do know that the indelible mark she has made in my life and in the lives of millions through her work will not be forgotten.

I offer my deepest condolences to Portia's family and especially to Chris, her loving husband. Having been there, I know firsthand the loss of your soul mate remains, unimaginable. Time they say...

Marcia-May

Marcia Baird Burris,

Friend and Public Affairs Specialist at ACM

Just want to share the museum's website tribute to Portia at http://www.anacostia.si.edu/Content/img/Home/Portia_James.pdf which shows just how incredible she was.

Marcia Baird Burris - December 06, 2015 at 10:00 PM

VF

“ *Vera Calhoun Russell and Family purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker.*



Vera Calhoun Russell and Family - December 06, 2015 at 03:15 PM

DS

“ *It is with great sadness to learn of the passing of a dear, loving, and giving friend. Portia and I were colleagues on The Real McCoy black inventors project. She was instrumental in selecting me as a consulting reviewer for that enormously successful exhibition and catalog. She and I were featured in a newspaper article on black inventors during the scheduled showing. I am so grateful for her long friendship and proud to have been one of her dear friends. Portia always had time to spend a few minutes with me whenever I dropped by the Museum for various reasons, greeting me with her warm embrace and inviting smile. Portia now has gone to a new home on the wings of an angel. She will be sorely missed.*

Dr. Patricia Carter Sluby - December 05, 2015 at 08:56 PM

LR

I worked with Portia at the Anacostia Museum. I was part of a committee to seek justice for Chaplain Henry Vinton Pummer, a former slave who became the first African American chaplain in the US reg. Army. He was dishonorably discharged in 1894, and we successfully got the Army to change his dismissal to honorable. Portia was a delight to work with--smart, helpful, resourceful, and fun! I loved working with her. She enriched my life. I will miss her!

*Leigh Ryan
UMD Writing Center Director*

Leigh Ryan - December 09, 2015 at 12:21 AM



“ *Fairest of All was purchased for the family of Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker.*



December 04, 2015 at 07:30 PM

GC

“ *I met Portia when at the Anacostia 17 years ago when I arrived there as a Summer Research Fellow working on telling the story of Dominicans who participated in the Black Mosaic Exhibit. I had my infant son with me, and from time to time I had to bring him with me to the office. She welcomed us both, and conveyed her support for my mother-work/working mother efforts in words and deeds. Over the years I made sure to visit Portia and show her photos of my son whenever I was back in D.C. I am grateful to have had the chance to see her and connect last fall during the Black Mosaic's 20th Anniversary event at Anacostia. Then, as always, Portia was warm, generous, smart and lovely. She will be missed.*

Ginetta E.B. Candelario - December 04, 2015 at 01:24 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker.*



December 04, 2015 at 11:58 AM



“ *Portia was the person who hired me at the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington DC. She believe in me, gave me guidance, became my friend besides being my boss. Her loss is very painful to me although I am sure she is in a better place without pain. Her memory will be with me always.*



Alcione M Amos - December 04, 2015 at 10:52 AM



“ *Heavenly Grace Spray was purchased for the family of Mrs. Portia Pearl Booker.*



December 04, 2015 at 10:27 AM



“ *1 file added to the album Portia*



jmg - December 04, 2015 at 10:11 AM

ML

“ *May you find peace during this difficult time as you reflect on how caring our heavenly father is towards those who mourn as well as the hope he extends to all. (Rev 21:4) I am so very sorry for your loss.*

Ms Laverne - December 04, 2015 at 06:08 AM