



## Mr. Nathaniel Harris Sr.

December 20, 1925 - November 19, 2015

Nathaniel Harris, Sr. was born on December 20, 1925 to the union of Robert Harris, Sr.

and Rose Gray in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Laura Cornett Harris, his loving wife of sixty-seven

years, preceded him in death on April 2, 2015.

Nathaniel accepted Christ as his Savior as a child while living at Milwaukee County Children's

Home (1930). Nate thrived there becoming self-disciplined, developing athleticism in baseball and

boxing, and establishing his spiritual life as a Lutheran. He embraced leadership opportunities

and became very responsible. While living at the "Home", Nate developed many lifelong friends.

His formal education was completed at Milwaukee Lincoln High School where he lettered in

baseball, football, and boxing. During this time, he lived with Charlie and Mabel Myrick.

When World War II erupted, Nate enlisted in the United States Navy on June 27, 1944

and served until June 15, 1946 when he was honorably discharged. With his G.I. Bill benefits,

Nate enrolled in Kentucky State College in the fall. As a walk-on to the football

team, Nate's contribution put him in the Kentucky State Alumni Hall of Fame. On campus, Nate met the love of his life, Laura. He married his college sweetheart, Laura Jo, on August 16, 1947 in Hazard, Kentucky. Their union was blessed with three children: Jocklyn, Cynthia and Nate Jr.

During the early 1950's in Milwaukee, there was an unwillingness to hire people of color by most businesses. Nate's career in Milwaukee started with the U.S. Postal Service as a mail sorter, despite having his degree in business administration. Nate's spiritual life grew and he co-founded St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1955 where he served as church treasurer, council member, and president of the congregation during his sixty year membership.

In 1956, Nate became a caseworker for Milwaukee County Welfare Department. For nine years, he supervised eighteen caseworkers and worked as the day care coordinator for the Department of Public Welfare for four years. During this time, Nate completed his Master's degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee in 1968 along with additional coursework in education, social welfare, and psychology. In December 1970, Nate was appointed executive director of Day Care Services for Children, Inc. in Milwaukee, one of the largest in the nation which provided full day care for about 1,000 children daily.

In 1977, Nate made his most significant career change to take a personally appointed position to division administrator of the State of Wisconsin, Department of Health and Social Services. Nate was the first black man to work in this capacity for Wisconsin Governors Tony Earl, Martin Schreiber, Lee S. Dreyfuss and Tommy Thompson. In the late 1970's, Nate co-founded the Wisconsin Association of Black State Employees (WABSE) to provide a support network for black employees. He served as treasurer. Later he became one of the original founders of the Council of Elders (COE), former advisory committee of W.A.B.S.E. Here he also served as treasurer and remained active until the time of his death. Nate's political acumen on local, state, and national politics was a treasure. He called the President Barack Obama victory weeks before CNN or FOX News. He consulted on many decisions that have shaped the social, health, and human services for the state of Wisconsin. As an avid fitness enthusiast during younger days, Nate embraced golf, jogging, and weight training. He enjoyed watching the Milwaukee Braves/Brewers, the Wisconsin Badgers football team, but the Green Packers dominated his sports' interests. He was a cofounder and treasurer of the Boosters Club, a group of men who supported the Lavernway Boy's Club.

Nathaniel modeled the ideal husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. His love for Laura drove him to give her compassionate care during her last years. As a dad, he loved his children providing emotional support, sharing wisdom, and instilling a strong Christian foundation in their lives. His grandchildren felt his love, embraced his guidance and sometimes lived on his generosity. The great-grandchildren brought such joy to him, and he looked to a bright future for his family for many generations. Finally, Nathaniel's words from a speech delivered on June 21, 1971 express his fundamental life view.

"Today, I want to share with you my feelings and thoughts on how we may structure and re-structure ourselves in order to become more effective black men and women in a changing society. Each of us holds those fundamental beliefs which are basic to our everyday life, such as truth, honesty, love and friendship. It is important that we hold on to them and cherish them. These qualities can take us a long way and help us to create good relationships with others. Today, more than ever before, we see the young as well as the elderly reaching out for companionship and understanding among each other. I have found and I'm sure that many of you have found, that it takes all of this and more, if we are to be effective black men and women today. It takes a strong desire to better oneself, to make your place in this world, and to encourage that necessary motivation

which will bring about a positive change for our fellowmen."

Nathaniel Harris, Sr. departed this life on November 19, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Laura Cornett Harris. He was also preceded in death by his parents, and siblings: James Harris, Sr. and Mary Harris Figgs. He leaves to cherish his memory, his children: Jocklyn Smith, Cynthia (Dr. Daryl) Knox and Nathaniel Harris, Jr. His brother Robert (Mary Ann) Harris, Jr. His grandchildren: Adam Harris Smith, Aron Michael Smith, Jocelyn Eliza (Kevin) Jackson, Justin Alexander Knox, and Jessica Lynn Knox. His great-grandchildren: Elijah Aron Smith, Kaylen Eliza Jackson, and Bailey Grace Jackson.

Lifelong family members: Kenneth Combs, Clorine Harris, and Eloise Cornett. And

cousins: Eddie Laura Griffin and Mary Khelseau. Nate will be remembered and deeply missed by his nieces and nephews, other cousins and friends.

He was grateful for the help of the recent housekeeper Ella Turney. Special thanks to the clinical care team at Columbia St. Mary's Ozaukee Hospital and the staff of Horizon Home Care and Hospice.

# Cemetery Details

## Wisconsin Memorial Park

13235 W. Capitol Dr.  
Brookfield, WI

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

NOV **29**. 2:00 PM (CT)

St. Phillips Lutheran Church  
3012 N. Holton Street  
Milwaukee, WI