



Dr. Shirley M. DeShields

May 8, 1931 - April 17, 2019

AMHERST - Dr. Shirley M. DeShields, 87, resident of Amherst, MA, passed away on Wednesday, April 17, 2019 in her home of 44 years, in the presence of family and loved ones.

She was born Shirley Ann Manson on May 8, 1931 in Manhattan, NY to father, Lawrence Manson, and mother, Myrel Lestelle Valentine.

Following graduation from high school, Shirley completed both a BA in Elementary Education at St. Paul's College and an MS at Virginia State. A born educator, Shirley taught sixth and seventh grade elementary school in Virginia and Washington, DC public schools.

Shirley held two marriages: her first, Samuel Arthur Wilkins and second, James I. DeShields. In 1972 she moved with her family to Western MA, where she received her Ed. D at UMass and MSW at the Smith College School of Social Work in 1999. In 1973, Shirley became Director of the Communications Skills Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where the mission of her work was to ease the learning process with those students with dyslexia, ADHD, and other learning disabilities. In 1975, as faculty at the School of Education, she taught both graduate and undergraduate courses in Learning Disabilities and Language Learning Problems. In 1991, Hampshire College hired Shirley as a Skills Specialist to counsel and teach students of color,

where she went on to direct the James Baldwin Scholars program. Meanwhile, she was conducting a private therapy practice which began in 2001. Using her therapeutic approaches, she addressed a multitude of issues such as blended families, divorce, bipolar disorder, bi-racial youth, and other complexities and marginalized identities. She also served as a Child and Family Services Therapist and Director of Domestic Violence/Sexual Unit at the YWCA in Springfield, MA. She maintained her private practice, called Interventions, until 2015. Shirley touched the lives of many and her presence, altruistic nature, and sense of humor will certainly be a loss for a multitude of friends and family. Among her many interests, Shirley enjoyed camping, reading, and traveling the world. She traveled 45 of 50 of the United States, Canada, Mexico, and various countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe. She is well known for frequently using catch phrases such as “You take good care”, “Isn’t that something”, “How about that”, and pushing Vitamin D.

Shirley is survived by her daughter Kim DeShields, son Michael Wilkins (and partner, Paula Colby), stepdaughters Velma Anderson (and husband Pershing Anderson), Stephanie Stewart; granddaughter Alexis Reed, nephews Dylan Anderson and Cleon Stewart; beloved companion Melvin Smith; brother Mack Smitherman; and cousins Lorraine Stephens, Jackie Murphy, Sondra Henderson, Fim Grammer, Gavin Rollins, and James Haynes. She was predeceased by her son Arthur Wilkins.

A celebration of the lifetime of Shirley will take place Sunday, May 5, 2019, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Campus Center 10th floor from 11am to 2pm. Shirley’s memory will always be carried in the hearts of the many she imparted wisdom and generosity upon.

New England Funeral & Cremation Center, LLC, 25 Mill Street, Springfield, MA has been entrusted with the arrangements. Please visit www.nefcc.net