



Damaris Searson

February 15, 1960 - December 9, 2021

On Thursday December 9', 2021 surround by family and loved ones, Damaris Navarro Searson transitioned to her eternal home. Damaris was born on February 15, 1960 to Ana Perez and Charlie Navarro in the Bronx, New York. She attended Catholic school in the Bronx and completed her secondary education in the Queens Public School System after moving to Queens with her mother and sister. Damaris graduated from Queens Vocational High School in 1978 and went on to receive her Bachelor's degree in Counseling from Springfield College in Massachusetts in 2011.

Damaris was always a hard worker and began her first job at Nathans when she was fourteen.

Driven by a passion for helping others, she started her professional career at Goldwater Memorial

Hospital on Roosevelt Island in New York City. At that time, it was the precipice of the AIDS

epidemic. People with AIDS were dying in large numbers often alone and unattended by loved ones.

Damaris volunteered to transfer to the Hospice ward at Goldwater hospital. For the next ten years,

with compassion, generosity and caring, Damaris assisted patients preparing for the end of

life. Throughout her professional career, Damaris was passionate about supporting patients and clients

through health, economic and emotional challenges in various positions in New York City and

Connecticut. She served as an HIV/AIDS case manager, a substance abuse counselor and provided

legal services as a paralegal.

In New York City, Damaris worked on behalf of those in need at Stand Up Harlem where she assisted HIV clients with transition to independent living. At Praxis housing Damaris continued her work as a housing specialist on behalf of HIV/AIDS patients who were without resources, often with legal and other administrative burdens. It was here that she met Ian who later became an adopted son.

He was a young man estranged from his family in London, without a legal visa and in severe economic stress. Damaris worked tirelessly to resolve his legal problems, to secure benefits and resources and to arrange reconciliation with his family in London. This enabled Ian to return home to London under the sponsorship and safety of his family. Ian and Damaris became lifelong friends and he remained a loving member of her family.

As a paralegal at Harlem Legal Services Damaris was responsible for ensuring that HIV/AIDS clients received the benefits they were entitled to under Federal and New York State laws. Damaris was regarded by her employer as passionate about and committed to her clients. "Damaris performed her duties with a high degree of integrity, bravery and professionalism not only tending to her clients but tending to her co-workers promoting cooperation and the development of team spirit"

Damaris continued her commitment to professionalism as her work transferred to Connecticut.

There she worked for such prestigious organizations as Hispanos Unidos, Inc., the Hispanic Health Council and for the last ten years, in various positions conducting cutting edge work at Yale New Haven Hospital. One of the first innovative contributions she brought to her community was introducing rapid HIV screening directly in the Emergency Department. She helped

demonstrate the value of this style of screening to patients and health care workers in order to facilitate it to become a standard of care. She also had a special way with patients that helped them feel comfortable getting this kind of on-the-spot screening and ultimately taking charge of their health and wellbeing. Her longest standing endeavor with Yale is Project Assert which centers its mission around caring for people being seen in the ED who are intoxicated or incapacitated due to drug and alcohol abuse, often experiencing homelessness, insurance and housing insecurity, and are primarily people of color. She worked to get them the dignified and comprehensive care they needed and deserved, as well as, vital resources that embraced their basic humanity such as warm clothing and sleeping bags. For countless people in need of individualized care, she facilitated their transfer of care to rehab facilities that were more likely to fit each individual's needs and give them a better chance of recovery. Damaris was also a force of change when it came to exposing disparity in the care received by white people and black people being seen in the ED for intoxication and overdose. She never hesitated to bring consequence to health care providers demonstrating racial and economic biases in their patient care and always fought for racial equity over pandering to political agendas that continued the status quo of racial injustice.

In 2001, Gloria and Damaris moved from the Bronx in New York to West Haven, Ct. They met in 1992 and were married for the first time in 2001 in Vermont. This was a loving and happy occasion and the wedding was attended by a large number of family and friends. However, the marriage was only legal in Vermont. Dissatisfied with this circumstance, in March Of 2005, Damaris and Gloria, amongst others, filed a lawsuit of first impression in Connecticut, challenging the State laws which prohibited same sex marriage and demanding that the Court hold the laws denying same sex couples the right to marry in violation of the Equal Protection Clause. The Plaintiffs

prevailed in this celebrated

case. And in 2009 the Registrar was ordered to issue marriage licenses to same sex couples.

Immediately, Damaris and Gloria were among the first, five, same sex couples married in the state of Connecticut.

Gloria and Damaris presided over a large and loving blended family. Damaris embraced her role as mom. She was unconditionally generous, loving and thoughtful. She made the house a home.

Damaris regarded the family as most important and put the children first. She had a unique ability to identify the family needs and paid special attention to each individual. Family tradition was important and everyone was celebrated with birthdays, holidays and family vacations. Caring for her family was central to Damaris' wellbeing. This same generosity of spirit was shared with her immediate family including caring for her mother, and sharing her life with her sister, nieces and nephews and all family members.

Damaris believed in people and this belief and caring spirit extended to her friends. She encouraged everyone and offered support whenever she could. She was particularly encouraging to friends who were gay and struggling with their identity and to parents of gay children struggling to understand their role. Friends in need of comfort would be invited to share the families' vacation to try and lift their spirits. Her friends saw Damaris as a source of comfort, guidance, support and fun. Damaris lived a good life and by her living made the lives of many so much better. Damaris was loved by many and will be missed by all.

Damaris leaves to carry on her legacy and cherish her memories: son Kwame Thompson

(Naomi), son Touri Searson (Christine), son Nate Green (Briana), adopted son Ian,
daughter

Star Neisha Warren, grandchildren Avery Searson, Nala Green, and Baby Thompson on
the way, her

sister Irma Rivera (Roman), nephew Emilio, his son Sean (Regina and daughter Violet),
and a host of

Aunts, Uncles, and cousins from all across the country including Puerto Rico: Aunt Nora,
Aunt

Brunilda, Uncle Louis, Uncle Cesar, Uncle Randy, Aunt Lucille, Uncle Joey, Cousins
Nancy, Iris,

Elizabeth, Magalie, Victor, Zina, Marie-Nicole, Randy Jr., Ronnie, Barbara, Christina,
Kaylin, James

and all their children and grandchildren. From Gloria's side, her brother-in-law Benny
McCants

(Mary), and cousins Wayne, Helen, Anthony (Nadine), Claudette, Sally, Michael (Lil)
Tiffany, Armani,

Madison, Charmaine, Akeila, Jonathan, Shaneese, Darnell, Taylor, and Amani Ballard.

Nieces LeAnn

(Elson) and Sheila (Brian)