

Sharyn Rochelle Duffin



Obituary

March 15, 1947 ~ August 5, 2021 (age 74)

Sharyn Rochelle Duffin was born to Norma Hill Duffin and John H. Duffin and grew up in a close-knit Rockville community knowing her obligation to honor its history and challenges. She attended Rock Terrace Elementary School, helped to integrate Broome Junior High, and graduated from Richard Montgomery High School. She assisted family members in demanding equal education, better job opportunities, fair housing, and equal service at restaurants. As a teenager, a rare illness nearly took Sharyn's life, leaving her blind and able to get around only by wheelchair. Nevertheless, with strong support from family and friends, she overcame obstacles to earn degrees from Montgomery College and Antioch College. A night owl, she became a ham radio operator, making friends around the world.

For the next half century, Sharyn researched local history topics ranging from slavery to neighborhood development, building her reputation as a vital source and collaborator with other historians. She interviewed civil rights leaders, organized teens to research public records, and enlisted readers and friends to follow lines of inquiry that she organized and analyzed. In 1976, she authored a ground-breaking history of Lincoln Park that was distributed nationwide by the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development.

Sharyn was an extraordinary individual who brought history to life in multiple ways. For years, she orchestrated a Leadership Montgomery class focusing on Lincoln Park—for many attendees,

their first exposure to a traditional Black community. She treasured her role as official historian of Jerusalem-Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church. Sharyn was a founding member of the Montgomery County Chapter of Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS), hosting chapter meetings and planning programs. She also served as main informant for the Lincoln Park History Project, an online archive maintained by Rockville Memorial Library. She wrote major sections and contributed to exhibits on subjects ranging from "Rockville on the Road to Brown" to the noted linguist Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner.

In 2017, an 1867 petition by 20 Rockville Black men pledging their support of a school was the impetus for Peerless Rockville's Community Education Series "Emancipation to Integration", about the long struggle for equal education in Montgomery County. Sharyn was adamant that this little-known but truly important historic event be remembered. Sharyn served as a resource and reviewer for Peerless Rockville's 2019 Forging Freedom: Endurance, Escape, and Rockville's Underground Railroad exhibit. Throughout her life, Sharyn pursued a passion fueled by family memories and connections. The story of William B. Gibbs, Jr., a local black schoolteacher who in 1936 sued for pay equity with his white colleagues. This case brought NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall to Rockville, and is recognized as one of the first steps toward the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned school segregation. In 1979, Sharyn was a key organizer of a Lincoln Park tribute to Mr. Gibbs; later she was instrumental in the County's naming an elementary school for him as well as the city's public artwork and street name in Rockville Town Center. Her research with Dr. Alonzo Smith on Mr. Gibbs was published in the Montgomery County Story in 2020.

Sharyn's lifelong research and enthusiasm to commemorate the struggles of the generations before her inspired others. Her determination, indomitable spirit, investigative mind and knowledge of African American history were impressive, as was her memory. Time and again, Sharyn brought others into her quests for history and assisted many others with their research. In 2018, Sharyn was honored with the Montgomery County Neal Potter Path of Achievement Award for her lifetime achievements.

Family members and friends mourn Sharyn Duffin, who will live on in our hearts and memories. She is survived by aunts Bessie Corbin and Barbara Talley, uncles Charles and Robert Hill, devoted Friends Anita Summerour, Rev. Jane Wood, Eileen McGuckin, Dale Pastor, Chiquita Sorrels, Carolyn Thompson, cousins, aunts-in-law, classmates, friends, members of the Montgomery County chapter of AAHGS genealogy group and her caregivers Germaine Douf and Maxine Budd.

Contributions in memory of Sharyn may be made to Jerusalem-Mt. Pleasant Building Fund, restoration of the sanctuary stained glass windows, 21 Wood Lane, Rockville, MD 20850. Sharyn initiated the project to document the stories behind persons and organizations memorialized in those windows and it was recently presented during a Peerless Rockville tour and program.