“God gave us two ends - one to sit on and one to think with. Success depends on which one you use. Heads you win, tails you lose.”

- Unknown
Thursday, January 10, 2013
at 11AM

THE REV. KEITH JOHNSON, Priest-In-Charge
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George Bernard Benta was born on September 3, 1921 in New York City, the second child of George Alexander and Margaret Jane Sharry Benta. Margaret Benta passed away when Bernard (as he was called) was 3 years old. His father then married Helena Fyre Benta, who helped him raise his children and was lovingly referred to as “Aunt Helen.” Bernard shared a special bond with his sister, Bernice Benta, with whom he was very close and who unfortunately passed away in 1984.

Bernard attended Frederick Douglass Jr. High School, PS 139 where the famed writer Countee Cullen was his teacher. (In later years Bernard proudly told of how Countee Cullen referred to him as brother Bente.) He received his high school education at Townsend High School.

At 17, although he was not legally old enough, (dibs on about his age) he enrolled in the 369th infantry, and became a proud member of the National Guard. He later joined the United States Army where he ascended to the rank of Corporal. During his tour of duty he was stationed in Oswego, New York and was transferred to Hawaii after the tragic bombing of Pearl Harbor. He was later sent to Okinawa but was discharged a couple of weeks after his arrival. He served in World War II from 1941 to 1945.

After receiving an honorable discharge from the Army, Bernard returned to New York and worked in the U.S. Post Office with his father. Shortly thereafter, Bernard’s father left the postal service to begin the family business with a partner in 1928. The business was known as Reed and Benta Funeral Home, Inc located on 135th Street. Bernard, always wanting to make his father proud and follow in his footsteps, attended the New York School of Embalming and Restorative Arts, and became a licensed funeral director. Upon graduation he assumed his place in the family business with his father and step-mother at the funeral home.

As an adolescent attending St. Philip’s Episcopal Church Bernard befriended Pearl Marjorie McLeod and relentlessly proclaimed “I’m going to marry you one day.” True to his word they were married in 1946 and remained so until her passing in 1989. To their union, three children were born, Karen, Kevin and Kyle. Bernard’s children remember him as a strict but loving father who would give lectures about behaving well as he walked them to school.

Being a stickler for higher education Bernard encouraged his children to attend college as well as mortuary school. He was very proud that Pearl and each his children became funeral directors.

The business started by his father later became Benta’s Funeral, Inc. where it operated from a brownstone on 135th Street. The family lived on the top floors and operated the funeral home on the first and parlor floor. Under Bernard’s leadership he convinced his father to make the bold move to build a new facility, a larger funeral home. The structure he envisioned materialized into an apartment building and funeral home, which was the genesis of the Wilmack Holding Corporation. The funeral home was moved from the brownstone to its present location in Harlem in 1964. Ambitious and constantly striving to improve, he always reinvested in the business by frequently updating the interior décor and facilities. He was a leader and innovator in the funeral home industry, being the first to use hearses in colors such as red, gold, green and brown. He continuously strategized on ways to raise the level of service to the families he served. Bernard Benta has led Benta’s Funeral Home for over forty years of its eighty five years of service. He later founded Allegory Coaches, a luxury car and limousine service.

Bernard’s commitment to the community was evidenced by his generous contributions to numerous local causes and institutions, as well as serving as a member of various boards, some of which were: The Chauncy M. Hooper Towers, The Greater Harlem Nursing Home and the Antigua Progressive Society. During his lifetime and more recent years he was a member of the National Funeral Directors and Mortician’s Association, (Empire State Funeral Directors Association, Greater New York Funeral Directors Association now known as Empire Funeral Directors Association), National Funeral Directors Association, 369th Veterans Association, and the Harlem Business Alliance.

He was class personified. He carried himself with dignity and respected everyone, whether they were a family that trusted him to carry out the home going of their loved ones or a member of the community. He was trusted by many families in the Harlem community and beyond. He personally supervised the funerals of some of Harlem’s notable figures such as James Langston Hughes, Hall Johnson, James Baldwin, Sandy Sadler, Elta Jones, Paul “Hucklebuck” Williams, Coleman Hawkins, Paul Robeson, Alvin Ailey, Adolph Caesar, Pearl Primus, De John Henrik Clarke, William "Pop" Gates, Matthew Henson, and many others. He left a legacy of superb service to the extent that even after his retirement, his family continued to value and help other families celebrate the legacy of their loved ones, whether they were neighbors from around the block, African royalty, judges, politicians or number runners. He often said it is the regular, hard working people of the Black community that kept Benta’s in business.

Due to his exposure to the cultural richness of the Harlem Renaissance, Bernard was a history buff on all things Harlem. In 1990, Bernard married Marilyn (White) Benta and the two enjoyed a happy marriage for 22 wonderful years. Marilyn was very devoted to Bernard (or “doll baby” as she called him) and took great care of him until the day he passed away.

Bernard is survived by his wife, Marilyn Benta, his children, Karen Patricia Diane, George Bernard Kevin and Kyle Phillip Michael, his daughter-in-law, Carol Benta, Robin Benta, Dorrence Benta and his grandchildren, Elsa Rodriguez Williams, George Jason Alexander Benta, Whitney Gayle Benta and Olivia Eduvigis Pearl Benta and a host of extended family and friends.

“The being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.”

– Lao Tzu
Growing up I recall Grandpa always giving us ‘crash course’ lessons on running the business. He inspired all those around him and touched the lives of many.”

— Jason

 legacy of inspiration
We knew him simply as Grandpa, but there wasn’t anything simple about that title. He was so much more than we can express in words. He was a mentor, a cheerleader, a teacher, a motivator, a father and a best friend. Simply put, he was the greatest grandfather in the world.

Countless times, Grandpa took us to McDonald’s or to get ice cream, each time explaining to us that we had to let him have a bite of whatever we ordered because it was his responsibility to remove the top layer of “poison” from our food. So there we were, young and unknowing, each of us lined up to give him the first bite of our burger or the first taste of our ice cream so he could remove the poison. This went on for years until we finally realized that this didn’t make any sense because if there truly was poison in our food, Grandpa would have been sick!

Jason remembers Grandpa always coming to watch him speed skate, even though it meant Grandpa was at the rink freezing, even in his long johns. Whitney remembers Grandpa as a good listener because he would listen to her go on and on about her day at school and whatever else she wanted to talk about because everyone knew Whitney could talk! For Elsa, she remembers him as the person that stepped up to be the father that she needed when someone else didn’t take care of their responsibility. We can all still remember how afraid he was to pick up Olivia after she was born because she was “so little” he thought she’d break in his arms. Olivia remembers him playing with her when she was little. When there weren’t any other children around, she could always count on Grandpa to be her playmate.

Grandpa would put us in the car on Sundays and take us to the “grandchildren’s” brunch where we’d laugh, talk and enjoy our time with each other (without any interfering parents). He taught us the importance of education, that if you get an education and work hard, the sky was the limit. He taught us how to be business minded. He stressed the importance of “think for yourself” so that we were steered to become leaders, not followers and so that we would never succumb to peer pressure. We learned that home training will take you far in life, manners and respecting ourselves and others are traits that would help us in all facets of our lives.

Our grandfather often told people how proud of us he was, but the truth is that we were equally as proud of him. There are no words that can truly express what he meant to us, but hopefully we’ve given you a glimpse of who this man was, not as “Bernard”, not as “GB” or “dad”, but as Grandpa.

Grandpa, we love you, we will miss you and we will continue to strive to make you proud. Thank you for everything you have done for us and everything you were to us, we appreciate your presence in our lives. We are so blessed to have had you as our Grandpa. We can only pray that our children will one day have a grandfather like you.

“Grandpa took pride in building a pillar of inspiration in the Harlem community.” — Elsa
**BERNARD’S TREASURE CHEST**

We can go through a lifetime without ever truly knowing an individual so we wanted to share with you the best kept secrets about our loved one, Bernard.

**You would most often hear him say:**
- “Don’t hang your hat where your hand can’t reach it”
- “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”
- “Thank you Jimmie Lunceford”
- “Don’t woke him, let him slept”
- “Every tub stands on its own bottom”
- “A hard head makes for a soft behind”
- “Always reinvest in your business”
- “Buy land, they aren’t making any more”

**His absolutely favorite food:**
Rice

**Favorite dessert:**
ICE CREAM!!!!!!

**His most outstanding personality trait:**
His sense of humor

**His greatest accomplishment in our eyes:**
Following in his father’s footsteps and exceeding them

**Most proud moment:**
Showing his father the location of 630 St. Nicholas Avenue

**Favorite past times:**
Long walks, traveling, watching the history channel, reading

**Favorite movie:**
Rambling Rose. Bernard loved the movies and even named his daughter after an actress

**Who he most admired:**
Besides his father, Bernard admired Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr.

**Something most people don’t know:**
He lied about his age to get into the army, He was a very emotional man

“Bernard never forgot a favor.”
— Mr. Herman Geiser

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To Father Victor, Father Goode, Father Johnson, Father Chisolm and Deacon Blake: The word of God and words of comfort you offered were comforting and will be long remembered.

Thank you to the doctors, nurses and staff of Columbia Presbyterian and Allen Hospitals, Isabella Nursing Home, MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care for the support and loving care and for making sure all our needs were met during Bernard’s illness. You performed your job with a sense of deep compassion and genuine concern balanced with professionalism.

Paula was a major part of his life by providing excellent care. We are thankful for all the love and support we received from her.

There are friends that you have polite chats with, and there are your best friends. Our friends have been people who supported us no matter what. Thank you to our friends.

We appreciate the prayers and concern offered by Bernard’s professional colleagues.

To the employees of Benta’s Funeral Home, Alegacy Coaches and Wmack Holding Company, we are eternally grateful for your many years of hard work and dedication. We recognize and appreciate your service.

The comfort of family during this loss has strengthened our bond with all of you. Thank you!

**REPAST**

Londel’s Supper Club @ 3:30PM
2620 Frederick Douglass Boulevard
New York, NY 10030