CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF

NILE KAMAU WILLIAMS



IN LOVING MEMORY

DRAKE & SON FUNERAL HOME, CHICAGO, IL
NOVEMBER 14, 2026 | AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

LIFE DATES

Born: 1:17 p.m., July 28, 1991, New York, New York

Transitioned: 12:05 a.m., October 30, 2026, Chicago, Illinois

Nile did not practice a particular faith.

He studied Religion at Colgate University, including Rastafari and Eastern religious traditions, and became an Ordained Minister primarily so that he could marry his friends and members of the LGBTQIA+ community who needed this service of community and love.



WELCOME

PROCESSION - FAMILY

Kamau (Father), Enith (Mother), Roena (sister) + family

Accompanying Nyabinghi Drumming, Valroy Dawkins

WELCOME

Alex Jakubowich, friend from Nile's time in D.C.

READINGS + PRAYERS

YULE'S PRAYER

A Prayer For Nile, Read By All

Dearest Maker and Builder of the Universe, we ask that You hear our prayers.

We ask for Your love, and that You comfort us in our times of trial.

We ask for Your grace and Your mercy, and that You forgive us for our pride.

We ask that You bless us with Your peace, and with Your love, forever and ever. Amen.

PRAYERS FROM THE GREAT FAITHS

FROM THE QURAN

Read by Casey Macaulay, friend

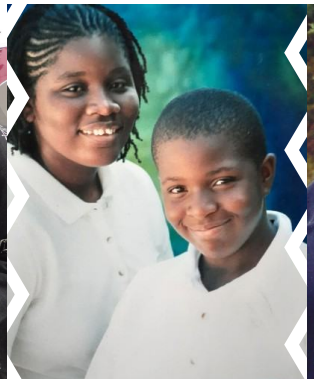
FROM THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

Read by Roena Williams, sister

FROM THE TORAH

Read by Dena Robinson, friend






MUSIC MEDLEY

Performed by Bill Grady, Chicago friend of Nile

"EDELWEISS"

Sung by all, Words by Enith (Mother)

Hello Nile, hello Nile,
You look happy to greet me.
Tall and strong, pure as light,
You look happy to greet me.

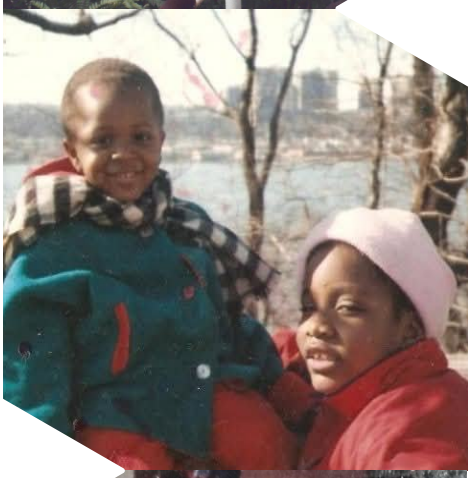
Fountain of wisdom, may you bloom and grow,
Bloom and grow, bloom and grow forever.
Hello Nile, hello Nile,
Bless our Earth life forever.

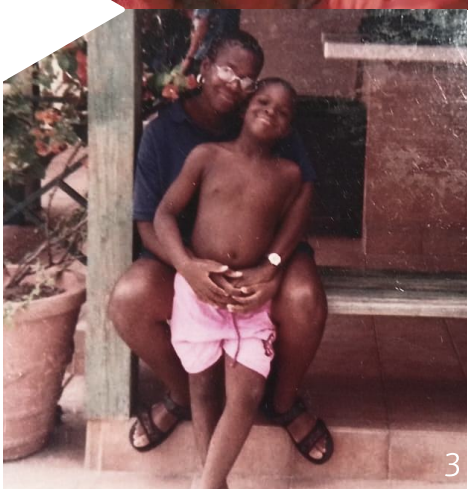
Hello Nile, hello Nile,
Every morning you greet me.
Tall and strong, pure as light,
You look happy to greet me.

Fountain of life, may you flow and flow,
Flow and flow, flow and flow forever.
Hello Nile, hello Nile,
Blessed be your good name forever.





















REFLECTIONS

Early Years — Childhood, New York + Jamaica

Reflections

Khemet Calnek, friend since birth

Prayer + Reflections

Read by Anu and Julian Henriques

Others from this time of Nile's life are encouraged to share.

Colgate Years

Reflections

Shannon Jackson + Noah Goldberg, Nile's RAs

Dena Robinson, friend and ALANA Colgate member

Others from this time of Nile's life are encouraged to share.

Early Career – Washington, DC

Poem

Suzi Plasencia, friend from time in D.C.

Others from this time of Nile's life are encouraged to share.

Chicago

Prayer + Reflections

Ruben Adorno + Quinn Albrecht, friends from Chicago

James Rowe, friend from Chicago

Travel Memories

Zoe Jakubowich, travel companion

Others from this time of Nile's life are encouraged to share.

Family Reflections

Keisha Lindsay, Family friend

Lorna Harkins, Cousin

Others from Nile's family are encouraged to share.

REMEMBERING NILE

Written by his mother, Enith Pearl Martin Williams — November 2026
Read by Frank Harkins

These tributes are usually called obituaries, but to me that word feels cold, clinical, and worn. Dates and milestones can record a life, but can they capture someone we will remember for the rest of our lives? I call this a remembrance: a gathering of memories, an attempt to hold a spirit. Memories shaped by experience can change, be interpreted or misunderstood, and take on new meaning. In time, I know our memories of Nile will reach beyond today's pain, while his spirit stays with us forever.

Among his papers, I found an essay his college advisor, Professor Reinbold, had returned to him. He wrote it to her before entering Colgate in fall 2009 as part of the "legendary Class of 2013." At Colgate, 13 holds a special, even sacred meaning. This gave his place in the class a certain resonance for someone like Nile, who is so attuned to the movement of spirit and unspoken realities.

Professor Reinbold returned the letter during his final semester, wishing him well and inviting him to "enjoy the trip back to 2009." I am grateful she did. Reading it, I hear his voice again: seventeen, candid, hopeful, and already considering what he would leave behind.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

"I was born on July 28, 1991, in New York City," he began. "My family had been living in Harlem at the time, but we soon moved to Riverside Drive on the West Side of Manhattan, after I was born." When he was four, his father and I separated. I took Nile and his sister, Roena, to Jamaica, where both his father and I were born. His father, Kamau, planned to join us after finishing his graduate degree, but never did. We lived there for eight years. Nile wrote: "I consider it one of the most formative experiences of my life. I still have a strong bond to Jamaica, with a lot of my close friends still living there."

Jamaica stayed with him — in his music, his study of Rastafari at Colgate, and his lifelong friendships. Anu and Julian Henriques, who knew him as a child there, are here today. Nyabinghi drumming carried Nile into this chapel after he left us. It will carry his spirit home.

He was equally candid about the difficult years. Returning to New York at twelve meant adapting to a new, though somewhat familiar, culture. When you combine that with our family's struggle to regain our financial footing and his entry into puberty, with all its joys and challenges, it was a difficult and trying time for him. At Fordham Prep, he wrote about the depression he struggled with during those years and what he learned from it: "Although my journey has not been perfect, by any stretch of the imagination, I am appreciative of the experiences I had, both good and bad. The good times are things I'm proud of as part of who I am and my life experience. The not-so-good times, I feel, have helped to make me stronger and more resilient."

That was Nile at seventeen: truthful, without

self-pity, determined to move forward. He was never ashamed of who he was, even when some communities left little room for him and so many others to live that truth fully.

HIS HOPES AND PURPOSE

The joy of the future he envisioned in that letter moved me deeply. He stated that he intended to double major in Physics and Political Science, pursue graduate studies in civil engineering, and work in sustainability. He explained that the environment needed people who understood both science and politics. He even proposed a sustainability major at Colgate. Having studied German for three years, he hoped to study in London or Germany, and had carefully compared engineering programs elsewhere. He also wanted to try rugby or crew, write for the newspaper, and debate. "I did say I am quite ambitious," he admitted.

His life took a different course. Instead of engineering, he studied religion — Rastafari, Eastern traditions, and spiritual questions. Nile never settled into one faith, but his spirituality was expansive, and he later became an ordained minister not to preach, but to marry his friends and demonstrate his allyship and commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community. As you heard in his playlist earlier, his musical taste reflects this expansive, playful side: Disney, Destiny's Child, Beyoncé, and reggae, together without apology. To be around Nile was to be joyful — generally happy in life — except if you dared to wake him before he was ready. What a grouch! But you loved him even then, for his honesty: Do not wake me, I am dreaming!

Bill and Hannah are bringing us the music he loved today. In the end, he achieved his ambition: a life with room for it all.

HIS CURIOUS MIND

Among his papers, I found every essay he wrote for his religion major. Their subjects reveal his wide-ranging mind. He wrote "Jamaican Popular Music and Language" while studying abroad at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, where both his parents had studied — his mother as a visiting student from her American liberal arts college. He explored Rastafari through historians Barry Chevannes and Michael Barnett and wrote "Human Suffering and the Book of Job" for his senior seminar. Other papers examined class and women's status in Egyptian society; Nietzsche's religion, in a three-page response to the philosopher who declared God dead; Richard Niebuhr's radical faith; and, prophetically in 2013, the United States' failure toward the women of Afghanistan. In "Darśanic Exchange with the Divine," he considered Hinduism not as one uniform religion, but as many deities and traditions that varied across the Indus Valley and beyond. Nile had an extraordinary mind, with a genuine curiosity about and respect for people and cultures.

Beyond his Religion major, Nile devoted himself to ALANA — the African, Latin, Asian, and Native American community — and The Colgate Maroon-News. He worked on the newspaper for four years, serving as Executive Editor in his graduation year. In his final column for the paper, "Just Listen," he reflected on what Colgate had taught him:

> *I have been on the Maroon-News for the past four years. It has been the one stable presence throughout my entire Colgate experience. I have met some of my closest friends through my work on the newspaper... I was Commentary Editor for the paper for two years... Just going through the process of having to read the words of someone I might have disagreed with forced me to engage their viewpoint in some way. I had to take what they were saying somewhat seriously, if at the very least to articulate why I disagreed with them... I would have to acknowledge that people had real reasons for holding the opinions that they did, and while what people would say did not necessarily change my mind on things, I would at least have to think about what they were saying and why.*

Nile had already learnt what most of us never do: that listening — especially to people we disagree with — is how a curious and generous heart grows and develops.

HIS CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL MIND

After graduation from Colgate, he moved to Washington, DC. He carried with him an epic collection of amazing friends he had made in college, many of whom also moved to Washington: Annalize and Suzi, among others. He was later recruited to work in Chicago, and that marked a major turning point in his life and how he lived. He found a city he loved and his tribe: a welcoming, accepting circle of friends with whom he built deep, life-affirming connections. After moving to Chicago and becoming Ordained, one of the first marriages he officiated was for Hannah and her wife.

Nile built a distinguished consulting career, primarily serving financial services organizations: first at Gartner in Washington, then at Spencer Stuart, Euromoney, and the tech giant LinkedIn, owned by Microsoft. Most recently, he worked at Moody's in Chicago, where he served as Associate Director of Business Development. He excelled at the demanding, human work of connecting his firm's complex market research and analytics to meet the needs of a range of professional services firms — primarily Fortune 100 and 500 legal and financial services firms. He loved his work and was good at it. He genuinely enjoyed meeting the needs of the professionals across the table, and he earned their respect and that of his colleagues and supervisors for his intelligence and insights. These are not just a mother's words. Among his papers, I also found some of his employee evaluations: he consistently rated himself a middle performer, giving himself a 3 out of 5, and his supervisors consistently revised his ratings upward — to a 4, or even a 4.5 out of 5.

While his early career plans might have changed, the purpose beneath them did not: to help the people around him. When you were stuck, Nile showed up with a plan, a solution, and a genuine understanding of your unique needs. That was his approach to life. Despite the ups and downs, his enduring legacy has created its own waves in the world, leaving a legacy that will endure through time. We all love him, and he will remain in our hearts forever.

A FRIEND WHO WAS ALWAYS THERE

His travel companions know this well. Nile was reliably, genuinely seasick, yet he joined them on cruises around the world, year after year, because his friends wanted to travel that way. He preferred to jet around, often nabbing the buddy pass of whichever friend worked for an airline. Highlights of his adventures included flying to Paris to see Beyoncé on her World Tour, and exploring Berlin, Munich, Spain, and Portugal. His father recalls calling him on two separate occasions, only for Nile to casually answer, "I am in Brazil," or "I am in Australia." I am told by his travel buddy Shannon that their next planned trip was to be Patagonia. In fact, there is a special section in his photo tribute titled “Around the World with Nile.” My boy saw this big, glorious world, and I am so happy he did. His Chicago Tribe, his Colgate and Jamaica friends, and his family all remember times when he showed up with help, laughter, or a blessing.

THE LEGACY HE IMAGINED

At the close of that letter, he answered his advisor’s question about the meaning of legacy:

> *“I feel that legacy is essential to the evolution of people and society. Without legacy, the work of previous generations before us would be completely lost to time. However, I do not feel that you need to have a huge impact to leave an important legacy. Influencing one person is just as important as helping an entire generation. Because moving forward is a collective effort, and just by simply living a good life I think we all can help with that effort.”*

Nile did not grow old, but he lived those words. He touched one person, then another — in Kingston, the Bronx, Colgate, Washington, and Chicago — until he reached a generation of friends who carry him forward today. His father, his sister, and I will carry him in our quiet ways: in a drumbeat, a favorite song, and the memory of a tall young man, pure as light, delighted to see us.

Dr. Sandra Becket, a family friend in Geneva who knew Nile before his birth, sent these words: “I am horrified and in deep mourning for all of you. Nile lived the life of a comet — too short, sooo bright, everyone noticed. Rest in peace, young Prince.”

THE WORLD HAS LOST A LIGHT, BUT NILE KINDLED MANY OTHERS.
MAY HE REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER.

In partnership with Colgate University's Department of Religion and ALANA, the family is establishing a memorial in Nile's name. We will share details when they are available.

IN CLOSING

PRAYERS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Prayer from Rastafari Religion, Kamau Roy Williams, Father

RECESSIONAL

"FLY AWAY HOME TO ZION"

Performed by Bill Grady + Valroy Dawkins

Fly away home to glory
Fly away home
Fly away home to glory
Fly away home

'Cuz one bright morning when my work is over we will
Fly away home (fly away home)

Oh the hill it gets steeper (steeper) and the road it gets so tough
I need you to guide me oh Lord by your tender touch (by your tender touch)
If I fall by the wayside Lord I know you'll be there for me
Pick me up and I'll follow to where you want me to be
And I will fly away home to glory
Fly away home
Fly away home to glory
Fly away home

'Cuz one bright morning when my work is over I will
Fly away home (fly away home)

Lord the hill gets steeper (it's so steep) and the rivers run dry
Every time I see, tears come from my eyes (there are so much tears)
Lord I never, never knew a friend like you in my life

Still I can't forget about Zion
And I will fly away home to glory
Fly away home (fly away home)
Fly away home to glory
Fly away home

'Cuz one bright morning when the work is over we will

Fly away home (fly away home)
Fly away home to glory
Fly away home
Fly away home to glory
Fly away (fly away home)

'Cuz one bright morning when the work is over we will
Fly, fly away home (fly away home)

































WITH DEEP GRATITUDE

The family of Nile

— his mother Enith, his father Kamau Roy, and his sister Roena —

would like to thank you all for your outpouring of love and your shared grief during this time of extreme bereavement. Your calls, texts, hugs, and tears have helped to lighten our burden.

RECEPTION

Please join the family immediately following the service for a reception in the Banquet Hall, featuring a photo tribute of Nile's travels around the world.

THE BOOK OF PRAYERS AND POEMS FOR NILE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN ITS ENTIRETY AS AN E-BOOK. DETAILS TO FOLLOW.