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Rosetta Webster Graham, founder of the Family Bereavement Center, dies

Dr. Rosetta Webster Graham, the founder of the Family Bereavement Center in the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office, who had been a pioneering African American social worker in the Johns Hopkins' child psychiatry division, died Feb. 12 at Dulaney Valley Assisted Living. She was 101 and had resided on Kingsway Road.

Her niece, Lolita D. Tyler, said she died of old age.

Born in Baltimore and raised in Canton, she was the daughter of Freddie Graham, who owned a series of businesses, and his wife, Rose Webster Graham, who died when her daughter was five years old. She was a Frederick Douglass High School graduate and earned a bachelor's degree and doctorate at Morgan State University and a master's degree at Howard University.

She began her career in 1946 when she took a summer internship at Rockland State Hospital in a pilot program that accepted both Black and white social worker students. She also joined the Homewood Friends Meeting in Baltimore, where she remained a congregant. After graduating from Morgan, she worked at a school for delinquent Black girls in Glen Burnie and later got a post as a social worker at the Johns Hopkins University.

"At Hopkins, I taught medical students, social work students and psychiatric residents. I was the first Black appointed to the Board of Pediatric Psychiatry," she wrote in an autobiographical sketch.

She then founded the Family Bereavement Center sponsored by the Baltimore City State's Attorney's office. The center provided counseling and support for family members of victims of homicide. The program was featured on "Street Stories" with TV host Ed Bradley.

"If people can sit down and talk to you about their problems and trust you, then they have given you something," she said in a 1991 Baltimore Sun article that explored her work with survivors of murder victims at the bereavement center and that described her as "soft spoken."



Dr. Rosetta Webster Graham was founder of the Family Bereavement Center.

“I didn’t think it would be very depressing,” Dr. Graham said in the article. “I have always been sensitive to working with other people’s grief. I had worked with dying children, I had worked with the parents of dying children, I had worked with a disturbed population.”

She observed: “Relief from grief doesn’t happen in a smooth consistent fashion. It goes back and forth.”

“With murder victims’ survivors, usually much of the grief comes from not having had a chance to say goodbye; there’s no closure,” she said. “Also, someone has violated you, someone has taken from you what was yours.”

In the article, she revealed how her childhood provided lessons that served her in later life.

“What I do goes back to growing up in a community where there was so much concern shown for others,” she said of her years in Southeast Baltimore.

“Everyone who knew Rosetta would agree that she was truly an encourager. One of her students recalled she presented ‘a word of the day,’ that represented strength, steadfastness, or inspiration,” said her niece, Lolita. “Most of all, she was a strong voice for the defenseless and vulnerable. She greeted you with a witty sense of humor, a thought-provoking observation, and her enchanting smile. ”

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. March 15 at the Homewood Friends Meeting, 3107 N. Charles St.

Survivors include numerous nieces and nephews and great-nieces and great-nephews.

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