



## Ms. Deborah Jean Patton Smith

October 28, 1951 - April 20, 2026

\*\*\*NOTE: Per request of the family of Deborah Jean Patton Smith, a cremation has taken place and a private service to celebrate her life is being planned for later date

A Video Tribute will be available on our website soon

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The Obituary:

"A Life Well Lived"

Deborah Jean Patton Smith passed away on April 20, 2026. She was born on October 28, 1951, in Battle Creek, Michigan, the middle child of Jeanine and Daniel Patton, Jr. She was preceded in death by her beloved parents and her brother, Daniel Patton II.

Deborah attended Battle Creek Central High School, where her love for swimming led her to join the swim team, earning a varsity letter. Inspired by her parents, both dedicated educators, she pursued higher education at Western Michigan University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Education, with a focus on Counseling and Personnel.

She began her distinguished career in education in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and, at the age of 25, became one of the youngest principals in the State of Michigan. After relocating to Kalamazoo in 1978, Deborah continued

her academic journey, earning a Master's Degree in Counseling and Personnel. She served with excellence as a teacher, counselor, instructional specialist, and later as principal of Winchell Elementary School. Her commitment to lifelong learning led her to pursue a second master's degree.

Deborah devoted her life's work to ensuring that all children, regardless of their personal circumstances or economic background, received quality education. Her leadership and dedication ultimately led her to serve at the administrative level within Kalamazoo Public Schools, where she left a lasting impact on students, families, and colleagues alike.

In 1978, Deborah married Nathan Smith. They were married for 18 years, and from this union they were blessed with a son, Nathan Lamar, born in 1982. Deborah was a faithful member of Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church in Kalamazoo for many years. She was also an active and proud member of The Links, Incorporated, and a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, where she cultivated lifelong friendships and contributed meaningfully to service and community initiatives.

In 2016, Deborah relocated to Florida, where she enjoyed several peaceful and fulfilling years. She found great joy in traveling, spending time with dear friends, and shopping. An avid swimmer throughout her life, Deborah especially loved the beach and being near the water.

Deborah leaves to cherish her memory her loving and devoted son, Nathan Lamar Smith. She is also survived by her sister, Denise Hobson (Robert); cousins Donna Odom, Michael Williams (Tiffany), Gina Kimbrough, and Jonte Kimbrough; her daughter of the heart, Sylvella Boggan, and her dearest friend of many years, Mariel Crutcher of Ruskin, Florida.

Her memory will also be treasured by her former sisters-in-law, Patricia A.

Smith of Baton Rouge, LA and Dawn Gardner Smith of Kalamazoo, MI, and a host of nieces and nephews in Baton Rouge, LA: Derek Thomas, Tealyta Crockett, Monique Smith, Tomako Smith, Chaketta Scott, Iscavate Hayes, Richarda Jones, Emanuel Smith, Scentelia Smith, and Shemietra Rogers.

# Tribute Wall

AH

“ *My deepest condolences to Ms. Deborah Smith’s family and loved ones. I am wishing you all God’s peace and love during this difficult time.*

*Ms. Smith taught me in the 6th grade at Woods Lake Elementary School, in the first year that Woods Lake existed after being renamed from Oakwood Jr. High – this would have been the 1981-1982 school year. She was hands down one of my two favorite teachers in my years in the Kalamazoo Public Schools (kindergarten through 12th grade). Coincidentally enough, my other favorite KPS teacher’s last name also was Smith, but I didn’t have him until Loy Norrix and so Ms. Smith was my first favorite teacher.*

*Ms. Smith was wonderful. She was smart, kind, sophisticated, and generous of spirit. Her love of teaching was obvious to all who were fortunate enough to have Ms. Smith as a teacher, and her interest in her students and their well-being was beyond measure. I can say this with some confidence because here we are, all these years later, and I still have very fond memories of Ms. Smith.*

*I moved from Michigan in 1991, and I did not do a good job of keeping up with Ms. Smith in the years since. I visited her once or twice when she was the principal of Winchell, and I spoke to her on the phone once or twice after she had retired. But despite my infrequent contacts, I often thought of her. A few days ago, almost 45 years after she taught me, I was thinking of her, and I jumped on Google with the idea of tracking her down and calling to say hello. So, I obviously was surprised and saddened to learn that she had passed away recently. And yet, the light she shined on me all those many years ago remains as bright as ever. Ms. Smith was such a tremendous gift to all who had the good fortune to know her, and I am grateful that, in a very small way, I was one of those fortunate people. -- Andrew Hall (Decatur, GA).*

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**Andrew Hall** - May 27 at 02:24 PM

SH

“ Stanley Hall lit a candle in memory of Ms. Deborah Jean Patton Smith



Stanley Hall - May 16 at 10:26 PM

DM

“ My sincere condolences to the family of Ms. Smith. She was one of the first Black School Administrators in Kalamazoo that I worked with in KPS. Ms. Smith was an elegant, articulate, and intelligent woman, and I am keeping you in my thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.



Delores Marshall - May 15 at 03:42 PM

BW

“ Barbara Watson lit a candle in memory of Ms. Deborah Jean Patton Smith



Barbara Watson - May 10 at 03:36 PM

PB

“ Paul & Margaret Best lit a candle in memory of Deborah Patton Smith



Paul & Margaret Best - May 01 at 06:54 PM

MR

“ My heartfelt condolences to the family of Ms Patton-Smith. Although I didn't know Ms Patton-Smith personally, I did know her father. Daniel Patton, Jr. replaced David Salters as principal at Lincoln Elementary school in Battle Creek, MI when I was in second or third grade. Mr.Patton called all the classes together to tell us that he would be taking a leave as he would be going to have surgery to remove a growth. He never returned. Mr. Patton was a wonderful mild and fair man. He was an exceptional educator and role model for his students. Reading Ms Patton-Smith obituary gives me joy in knowing that she followed in her father's footsteps. May God comfort and bless the family during this difficult time.

Sincerely,  
Mary Ann Riley  
Former Student of Daniel Patton, Jr

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**Mary Riley** - April 27 at 11:38 PM

AS

“ Prayers are with the family 🙏



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**Anthony and Gwen Smith** - April 26 at 11:43 PM

DF

“ May God Bless and Keep the Family. Daniel Family-Lillie, Patricia and Teresa



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**Daniel Family** - April 25 at 10:12 AM

SW

“ *Selena Walker lit a candle in memory of Ms. Deborah Jean Patton Smith*



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**selena walker** - April 25 at 09:35 AM

SM

“ *"In Loving Memory of a Wonderful Friend"*

*Deb was a special gift to have as a friend.*

*Deep in our hearts, your life is kept to love, cherish and not forget.*

*The memories of you, Linda Gail and I will always be in our hearts.*

*Until we meet again!*

*Sharon Miller*

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**Sharon Miller** - April 24 at 09:40 PM