



Monica Rene Hastings-Smith

January 22, 1965 - June 14, 2021

Monica Hastings-Smith was born in Oakland, California on January 22, 1965. She was lovingly raised by Albert and lola (Williams) James. After a yearlong battle with cancer, she ascended to eternity on June 14, 2021.

From an early age, Monica was a star. She showed remarkable intelligence, engagement, and creativity from the beginning. By first grade, she had already been identified as a GATE (Gifted and Talented) student. Her parents supported that talent by educating her at the Anna Head (now Head-Royce) School, Bishop O'Dowd High School, and the University of California at Berkeley.

As a child, Monica showed a passion for music and art. She played piano, studied jazz and tap dance, gymnastics on horseback (vaulting), and was even a baton twirler with the "Star Steppers." But while other friends were dreaming of what they wanted to be when they grew up, Monica had only one dream in life: to become a mother.

After college, she married Michael Hastings-Smith on Nov 4, 1989. At age 25, their first baby Pilar, joined the young family, followed by Maya (born 1991) and Niles (1994). At first the Hastings-Smiths were packed into an apartment in a building that they managed, then moved to more spacious housing in Oakland, and later to Walnut Creek.

Monica was a doting mother, becoming PTA president of Grass Valley Elementary School, a soccer mom, a track and field mom, and a band mom -- all while working full time at U.C. Berkeley.

For sixteen years, Monica was a marketing communications professional in the Housing and Dining Services Department at Cal Berkeley. Every day she commuted from Walnut Creek to work and transport her children to their various activities.

After becoming an empty-nester in her retirement years, she dedicated her life to her growing passion: to make and perform the music she had grown to love, starting with the Afro-Brazilian beats she learned from Carlos Aceituno as a member of the drum bateria of Fogo Na Roupa, the award-winning San Francisco Samba school. After assuring that her children were well taken care of, she started living her life, exploring a new identity, new avenues for her creativity, and becoming more involved in the local community.

Throughout her adult life, she was associated with several organizations, including: Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, Fogo Na Roupa, SambaFunk!, and Boom Shake -- and she treated the members of each one like family. She brought the leadership skills she showed as PTA President to new roles as musical director of several drumming groups. She helped found the grassroots organization "Soul of Oakland" to defend Oakland's African American culture from rapid gentrification. She and other drummers and black churches were harassed by unwarranted police encounters by noise complaints from new Oakland transplants who did not understand or appreciate the local culture. As an Oakland native, and one of the drummers who was arrested at Lake Merritt, Monica became a spokesperson for this issue and spoke out about gentrification in television, radio and community meetings until all charges were dropped.

She brought her intense maternal instincts into her new career as an artist. Aside from performing, she became a music teacher at public schools and summer camps including Manzanita SEED and the Urban Promise Academy. Just as with her own children, she believed in the importance of passing musical and cultural traditions to younger generations. With Iwalani Venerable, she co-founded the music duo “Everyday Party” to write, perform and record music especially for young children.

She considered Oakland's creative community to be her extended family. But in 2017, through Ancestry.com, she was able to locate her biological family. This life-changing discovery and reunion led to great peace of mind, comfort, reconciliation and an understanding of her own inherited physical and personality traits. She was no longer an only child; she met siblings she never knew existed. She became the newest member of a brand-new, large family.

Monica Hastings-Smith was an artist, a musician, a composer, an activist, a mother, a daughter, a leader, a connector and collector of people, an organizer, a teacher, and a friend. She was creative, compassionate, confident, and charismatic.

She is preceded in death by her parents Albert and Lola James and her biological parents Jerry Weeden and Marilyn Orenelas. She is survived by her children Pilar, Maya (Adam Ledbetter), and Niles, her aunt Odessa Pegus, and her biological siblings.

If she had a motto or slogan that described her view of life, it would be “Live Your Truth.” She would want to be remembered as a friend to everyone, a personal, professional and artistic mentor to many, who exemplified the ideal of learning and sharing culture, the arts, and history with others.

If you look up at the night sky, you may see her star twinkling and shining with love.

"Five Point Star"

By Monica Hastings-Smith

Lyrics:

Don't hide your scars anymore

What you find could save me

Put it into a book

Don't forget to let me look

Help me make my future

We all are

Five point stars

Don't keep yourself dim

waiting for him

To love you from afar

We all are

Five point stars

Our job is to shine

Just as we are

Just as we are

Right where we are

Right where we are

Don't hide your tears anymore

Once you've cried

You're broken

Open

Let someone in

Let them swim in the ocean of your feelings

We all are

Five point stars

Don't keep yourself dim

Waiting for him

To love you from afar

We all are

Five point stars

Our job is to shine

Just as we are

Just as we are

Right where we are

Don't hide your wisdom again

(Candela, I need you)

It seems like the dark is getting darker

I don't know if I'm even near you

We all are

Five point stars

Don't keep yourself dim

Waiting for him

To love you from afar

We all are

Five point stars

Our job is to shine

Just as we are

Just as we are

Right where we are

Just as we are

Right where we are

Shine where you are

(Recorded March 24, 2016)

(LISTEN)

https://soundcloud.com/mhs_clearly/five-point-star-2-mast

Previous Events

Service

JUN **20**. 2:00 PM (PT)

Estuary Park
Oakland, CA 94607

Tribute Wall

JB

“ I met Monica my first year teaching at Girls Rock Camp. Witnessing the power and participating in that first Boomshake workshop, I knew immediately it was something I wanted to be a part of. I was blessed to have been able to take classes with her for some time, though not nearly enough. New to the west coast, Boomshake gave me a space to learn about what community is, to love myself as a poc, to sing without fear, to be loud af, and to always (!) practice with my metronome. That was all Monica. She was the type of person you wanted to be better for and were better for, just by being in her presence. As a music teacher, myself, watching her with the little ones was nothing short of inspirational. I was always in awe how she was always her same self, no matter what the age of her students, and how willing and happy we always were to follow her wherever she would lead us. I learned so much by watching her teach and Monday nights were always the best nights for a long time.



Admittedly, I really can't imagine a future rock camp without Monica's presence. "Empowering" is the word our staff always used to describe Monica's workshops and they were always, always, ALWAYS, the best days at camp. I have a distinct memory of one of our summers, while walking through the halls to my classroom after lunch and the morning Boomshake workshops, EVERY classroom was playing their own version of Funk in their classrooms. The power and energy was infectious and no one wanted to stop drumming. Another special memories that I'll never forget- one particularly grumpy teen with rolling eyes and a limp-wristed stick hand who didn't want to play. Monica gave them "that look" and said something along the lines of "why aren't you playing?" Begrudgingly, the teen began to play and by the end of the session everyone was laughing and smiling and no more grumpy faces. As an observer who already knew the outcome of those words, I had to laugh at that transference of magic and joy.

I'm going to miss Monica so much. During the pandemic, as we all sought to look ahead to better days, there was so much I was looking forward to and the biggest, most important things involved Monica. I am so grateful for the time that I got and only wish there were more of it. There will never be another Teacher Aunty Monica. Rest in power, Teach Aunty Monica.

Jess Barbosa - June 21, 2021 at 12:21 PM