

Ken Thompson Obituary

Kenneth Paul Thompson was born on March 14, 1966 to William and Clara Delores Thompson at Harlem Hospital in New York City.

A graduate of New York City public Schools, Ken was a dedicated and hard worker even as a child, serving his neighbors in Co-op City as a paper boy along with his brother, Dean, for several years.

A consummate independent thinker and always bent on community service, Ken campaigned on behalf of former New York Governor Mario Cuomo as a teenager. He also worked for Congressman Elliot Engel of the Bronx during those formative years.

His mother, Clara Delores Thompson, who was one of the first female police officers in the New York City Police Department to patrol the streets in 1973, instilled in her son a passion for fair treatment under the law. Following his mother's excellent example, and with a mindset to pursue a legal career, Ken attended John Jay College in New York City, from which, in 1989, he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice.

Thereafter his graduation, Ken was accepted to New York University Law School, where he received his J.D. in 1992 and was awarded the prestigious Arthur T. Vanderbilt Medal for his outstanding contributions to the law school community.

A man of intense faith, Ken accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior at an early age. Ken's relationship with Christ was shared by his sister, Cinda, who often prayed intently with him and encouraged him to trust God during challenging times.

Ken's strategic legal mind offered him the unique opportunity to serve as Special Assistant to the U.S. Treasury Department Undersecretary for Enforcement in Washington, D.C., and in the General Counsel's Office at the Treasury. During his tenure there, he assisted in the investigation and contributed to the report ordered by President Bill Clinton regarding the 1993 raid on David Koresh and the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas.

Ken later went on to serve as a federal prosecutor in the Eastern District of New York under the leadership of U.S. Attorney Zachary W. Carter. There, he delivered an impassioned and convincing opening statement that led to the successful prosecution of former New York City Police Officer Justin Volpe in the brutal 1997 beating and torture of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima.

With his career development well underway, he married his college sweetheart Lu-Shawn Thompson, in 1999. Their union was blessed with a daughter, Kennedy Olivia, in 2004, and with a son, Kenneth P. Thompson Jr., in 2006.

During his early career, Ken acquired a position at the offices of the prestigious New York law firm Morgan Lewis. He later went on to co-found the law firm Thompson Wigdor with partner Douglas Wigdor, where he represented victims of pregnancy discrimination, as well as those who had been subjected to unlawful prejudice due to their race, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

At Thompson Wigdor, Ken's commitment to pursuing justice propelled him to work on behalf of thousands of individuals, including Ms. Nafissatou Diallo, who had been sexually assaulted by Dominique Strauss Kahn; Mr. Gregory McCullough and Ms. Judith Bailey, the victims of the Con Edison steam pipe explosion; and Ms. Sharon Simmons-Thomas, whose lawsuit exposed and put an end to the "shop and frisk" practices at a major department store.

Ken also worked with members of Congress and the clergy to convince the U.S. Department of Justice to reinvestigate the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi.

As a family man, Ken enjoyed traveling, attending the theatre and going to sporting events with Lu-Shawn and the children. He was especially proud of Kennedy's exceptional strides in dance and Kenneth Jr.'s remarkable success in national chess tournaments.

He also applauded Lu-Shawn's dedicated work with Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, Inc., Jack and Jill of America Inc. and the Links, Inc.

Ken was elected as Brooklyn's first African-American District Attorney in 2013, having campaigned on the promise of restoring confidence in the criminal justice system. Among many innovations and initiatives, District Attorney Thompson established a model Conviction Review Unit, which, in only three years, moved to vacate or support the dismissal of the convictions of 21 people who were wrongfully convicted of murder and other offenses. He also implemented a groundbreaking policy not to prosecute low-level marijuana possession arrests in order to spare young people from the burden of a criminal record.

District Attorney Thompson died on October 9, 2016 at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital after a hard fought battle with cancer, with his family at his side.