



# Tanya Williams

DEC 8, 1970 - DEC 13, 2012



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## **Tanya Williams**

DEC 8, 1970 - DEC 13, 2012

**T**he beautiful and brilliant Tanya Lynn Williams was born in Big Springs, Texas on Dec 8, 1970. She grew up in Clearwater, Kansas with father Lawrence Robert (Bob), mother Mary, and sister Monica. Her love for science was fostered by night time excursions with her father to gaze at the heavens with their telescope.

After fiercely battling metastatic breast cancer for many years, Tanya was taken from us much too soon, and is survived by her husband David Freed and 7 year old son Drake Freed. Words cannot describe how much she will be missed. Tanya began her formal education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, initially majoring in architecture but quickly succumbing to her inner scientist and switching to the biological sciences. She excelled in her studies and was motivated by her faculty mentors to pursue an advanced degree. In 1994 she finished her B.S. Double in Chemistry and Biochemistry and began her graduate studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The same year she met her future husband David, another MIT graduate student, and they were partners in love and life ever after. Tanya opted to pursue biochemistry to satisfy her need to understand how biological processes work at the molecular level. After completing several scientific publications and her dissertation on DNA transposition, Tanya received her PhD from MIT in 2002. Tanya and David then relocated to the lovely San Francisco Bay Area where Tanya started her post-doctoral research position at the University of California, San Francisco. In the ensuing years as a post-doc and eventually a staff scientist in Elizabeth Blackburn's lab studying telomeres, it became evident that Tanya was not only a talented and passionate scientist but also a skilled technical writer and communicator. In addition to designing and carrying out experiments and analyses to support her research interests, and publishing her results in respected scientific journals, Tanya applied her clear thinking and writing skills to assist with key grant proposals for her lab. As a long-time lab member she



## Obituary

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became a relied upon reviewer and mentor, and fostered great professional and personal relationships with her colleagues, including her advisor, Professor Blackburn, recipient of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. As much as she was a passionate and dedicated scientist, Tanya discovered a new dimension of love and devotion when her son Drake came into the world in 2005. Tanya embraced motherhood and found ways to balance it with her career, always putting family first but excelling in her work nonetheless. Tanya became deeply passionate about education, and eventually parleyed her talents into supporting Drake's school as a parent volunteer. This included preparing and leading weekly science experiments in Drake's classes during her final years. Tanya became known and loved as the 'science lady' at Brisbane Elementary School, and also worked on education grants to help with financial support. Tanya enjoyed the time with the kids immensely, they adored her, and Drake was so proud to have Mom making science fun for everyone. While still a young mother and ambitious scientist, Tanya was diagnosed with metastatic disease in the summer of 2007. For 5 ½ years, Tanya overcome the fear and physical challenges of her disease and associated treatments to lead an active life full of love, achievements, and adventure. She loved nature and the outdoors, hiking and camping, wildlife viewing, and environmental conservationism. She loved reading, especially science fiction and fantasy but also just stories about the human condition. She loved art and anything that was unique, special, out of the ordinary. Most of all she loved sharing these with family and friends. Tanya was caring and generous, a loyal friend, easy to be around. Tanya loved to cook and invented delicious and nutritious recipes to manage her son's food allergies. Tanya knew how to listen, how to empathize, how to connect. Tanya was sharp as a tack, brilliant but never arrogant. Tanya loved being a mom. Tanya was a ray of sunlight streaming through the clouds. Tanya faced her condition and everything in life with dignity, grace, and courage. On December 13, 2012, we lost an incomparable, beautiful person inside and out. She died peacefully in her home, surrounded by her family and cherished friends. Tanya departed much too early, but her spirit lives on in our hearts and she will never be forgotten. A memorial ceremony for Tanya will be held at 10:00am on December 20, 2012. Flowers may be



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sent to Skylawn Funeral Home and Memorial Park or can be arranged by calling Blossoms (650.376.5070).



## Tribute Wall

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**T.Beaman** posted:

Tanya and I were best friends in Clearwater. My family moved away and we eventually drifted apart. We connected again briefly in college. I was recently searching for her on the internet to reconnect again when I found this obit instead. How heartbroken I was. I remember Tanya to be a fun-loving, intelligent, and loyal friend. I loved reading about her life and accomplishments and none of it surprises me. She always was a determined and hardworking person. RIP sweet friend. I'll reconnect with you on the other side. Oh, and guess what? I have a son named Drake too! Love to you!

August 28 at 3:25 PM



**Anonymous** posted:

Youre so cool! I dont suppose Ive read such as this befroe. So nice to locate somebody with some authentic applying for grants this subject. realy thank you for starting this up. this site is something thatÃ¢ââs needed on the net, somebody if we do bit originality. helpful purpose of bringing a new challenge to the web!##imported-begin##Rahul##imported-end##

January 3 at 11:05 AM



**Anonymous** posted:

Words are never enough in these most painful and challenging of times. Tanya's memorial is a fitting testament to a life well lived, and a family full of love.##imported-begin##Tony##imported-end##

December 21 at 5:37 PM



**Anonymous** posted:

Tanya, I will miss our talks, our vents, our scheming, our shared experience. Leo will miss your science lessons. Troy will miss your inclusion. You have been a wonderful friend and a fabulous mother, and our community now has a gaping hole without you. I hope you hurt no more. Love, Danielle##imported-begin##Danielle Bonequi##imported-end##

December 20 at 2:20 PM



## Tribute Wall

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**Anonymous** posted:

What an amazing woman. I didn't know Tanya well but I always admired her spirit and tenacity in the face of this terrible disease. She didn't let it stand in the way of being a wonderful mother and contributing member of our school community. I am so sorry for her family's loss.##imported-begin##Jessica Aloft##imported-end##

December 19 at 7:04 AM



**Anonymous** posted:

On behalf of Ken, Isaac & Eleanor, Dave & Drake, and both of your families, too, we cannot tell you how saddened and shocked we are that Tanya is no longer here, atleast in the physical realm, for I am certain that the scientist in Tanya will continually find ways to send you messages and signs that she will never, ever be leaving you. It has been my complete honor having such a kind, and true, caring, funny, creative & extremely bright friend as Tanya, and I hope I told you enough, Tanya, how much I truly respected you. You carried yourself always, no matter what, everytime I saw you, with such grace & humility, always that little gleam in your eye. I know that is due to your love for your amazing husband. And Drake. Oh, My, how you adored that little boy. It is so incredibly unfair, how you've been taken from them so soon, Drake is so young, but I know Drake will go through life, carrying with him all of your love, all of your lessons, everything that you did for him w/ Dave, this will serve Drake as he goes through life and be like a blanket always wrapped around him, your never ending love. The balance you achieved between your work that you were so passionate for and talented at, with the love and devotion you had for your family was something to behold. And we want you to know we are all here for Dave & Drake now, though this is of such small comfort for them, I know, they only want you back. As we walk through the beautiful, serene woods here in Northern Ca., we will feel you, and hear you and see your lovely face, and be so thankful for knowing such an incredible woman! Get some rest now, Tanya. And know how loved you were, and always will be. I miss you so much already, Diane##imported-begin##Diane Epstein##imported-end##

December 18 at 4:07 PM



**Anonymous** posted:

Dear Dave and Drake, My condolences on your lost. I never knew Tanya but can only imagine based on what you have written that you have lost a loving mother and companion. She will always be with the both of you in spirit and heart. May she rest in peace.Phoi-Tack (Charlie) Lew##imported-begin##Charlie Lew##imported-end##

December 18 at 11:45 AM



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Tanya by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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