

Remembering George Mayes

If you're lucky, you work with people who can turn a break in the day into a tiny vacation – people who create moments where work gives way to friendship and laughter. For Street Roots, that person was George Mayes.

All of us at Street Roots knew George as a great vendor and treasured friend, but in his passing we're learning how much of an impact he has had on so many more people, as a mentor, friend and family man.

"George was a good uncle to me," said Marcus Carson. "He taught me about being an independent man in world full of judgment, despair and destruction. He taught me how to drive. He supported me in any and everything that I wanted to do to advance in my life. All George wanted was to see me become successful and be good man and a good father."

George was born into a big family, the sixth of eight children, and raised in a Northeast Portland neighborhood shaped by a vibrant culture of days past.

"We was like a big family. That's like our whole block of Cook Street. It was like we were doing the whole team thing.

Everybody was cool, everybody was there, everybody was open. If you got in trouble, you could get a whooping five or six times before you got home. It was just that open. And it was cool. And you had to be straight or they'll say, 'Hey, boy, you know you're not supposed to be doing that.' It was good, I mean, it was *real* good," he wrote for Street Roots in 2014.

He was bused to schools in Southwest Portland – where the school had better books, he wrote. It was harder work, but worth it, he said.

His sister, Edna Denise Mayes, said "Myrie," as he was known, became a protector of his two younger siblings, herself and Darryel Mayes. "Never once in his 63 years has he failed his treasured duty so we salute our precious brother for his love and protection," Edna said.

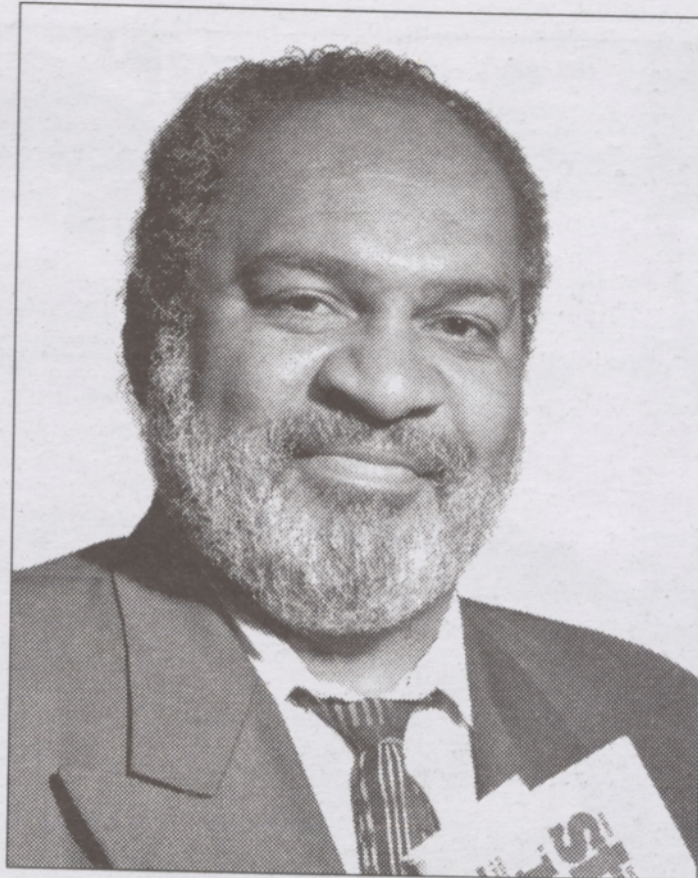
"George didn't have no strangers," said his sister ChyerRu Mayes. And no matter how mad you would get at George, she said, you would always leave with two things: a smile on your face and a personal story to tell about the experience.

While we know George for his work with Street Roots – dressed in a suit and tie, he was a regular vendor outside the Justice Center downtown – he was also known for building beautiful, custom birdhouses, often from reclaimed materials. Several of our readers have one of his made-to-order creations at their homes.

Within days after George's passing, his family and friends began sending in their memories to Street Roots. What is printed here is a selection of their writings, a testament to George's place in our community, and the lessons he has left behind.

A memorial service is scheduled for 11 a.m. June 8 at the Church of the Good Shepherd, 4566 NE 87th Ave., Portland.

– Street Roots



George Mayes
May 8, 1955 – May 3, 2018

I am being the best I can be

I am homeless

I am working

I am a carpenter

I am an artist

I am a poet

I am paying my way

I am a son

I am a brother

I am a friend

George Mayes

My uncle George was one of the kindest men in the city of Portland. He was compassionate, driven, kind, bubbly and always loved to spread the love.

Wherever he went, he carried his smile with him. George was a pioneer for peace and equality in his hometown of Portland, and he dedicated his life to communicating and working with others in the community for this peace and equality.

My uncle had a wonderful talent of crafting birdhouses, and those birdhouses are a representation of the beautiful soul he had. He was creative and lived so freely, and that is what I loved most about him. He loved his family and his community and he will be dearly missed and remembered forever.

– Da'Naya Mayes, niece

One of my favorite memories was when I was in the 8th grade. I was watching George play basketball for Benson High School in the '70s. I think it was George's senior year. What I remember from that time was witnessing an incredible athlete.

Back in the day, you watched how the older guys played the game so you could learn what to do. Watching George taught me that working hard was a way to get ahead. George was always willing to teach you something, even if you didn't ask him. He was always a positive person with a positive message.

– Robert Barber, friend

George Myron Mayes. My friend, my family. Some of you may know him as the birdhouse guy. I know him as an extension of my family and several chapters in my story. Our journey began in the '60s. I still remember meeting him in grade school at the summer program at Jesuit. Throughout the years I watched his talents grow in athletics. He was always proud of the 1973 State basketball championship trophy at Benson High School. We were teammates then and continued that into life.

It was in high school that he introduced me to his family. This is when I truly began to see why I was drawn to him. His family always accepted me. Getting to know his family helped me understand and build our friendship. I learned from him and about him. He always showed how important his family was in shaping his life. The matriarchs in his life teaching values of putting God first, being a thinker and seeker in social justice.

Though we attended separate colleges, our relationship's strength never weakened. In college, he pursued business and communications to round out his talent in building and construction. After graduation, George started Back in the Neighborhood World Peace. A program working with the youth of Benson. There are countless stories I could share about my life with George, but I will keep it about our friendship and the great man he was.

George was like the rest of us, imperfect. Maybe his challenges contributed to him leaving sooner than we would have wanted. But I have learned this was all a part of God's plan. These are the things we talked about and shared. God, prayer, family and friends. Those values grew and shaped our relationship and I am convinced are the reason our friendship spanned over 50 years. I will always respect his desire to give back to his community. He loved to talk and be around all people. He wanted to help so many and was the least judgmental person I have ever known. I don't think he really ever understood how much he helped me. He had been there for me through our friendship as I faced my challenges and when life seemed perfect. He was sweet, real, tough.

George was a creative man who expressed his talents with his art and his communications within the community. He was never afraid to say I love you. He was Uncle George to my boys and he was family to my wife. But to me, he was my friend. To say he will be missed will never be enough.

– David Alberti, friend

Through the years, George made it his concern to always check on our family. When our youngest daughter was 12, she told her Uncle George she wanted a Barbie house, and her Uncle George said he will build her one. About two weeks later George came back with a 6-foot Barbie house he built with five bedrooms, kitchen, family room, living room, etc. All he wanted was to see her eyes light up.

We applaud George's love of family – always impeccable. His faith and love of God was strong and unchangeable. And now, my dear brother George, you have embraced the King of Kings, you have been welcomed in your heavenly home and have heard the words so many pray to hear, "Well done my good and faithful servant, well done." I love you George, we love you so.

– Willie, Marsha, Jenelle and Jynnefer Jack, family

I grew up in the Northeast Portland neighborhood with George Mayes and his siblings. George was an excellent athlete. We played basketball, football and baseball against each other while growing up.

George Mayes was a competitor. He worked hard and played hard. He was a very friendly, kind, caring and compassionate individual off the court. I always knew that when playing against George, if you got elbowed, that it was not personal but just part of the game. If you did not like it, well, you need to get off the court.

One of my fondest memories of George is his saying, 'it's the kind of thing whereas ...' George was a great orator. He always had profound statements regarding his belief in God, respect for mothers and fathers, and all humanity.

You would always see George on the street corner standing tall, back straight, with his head held high, shaking hands and preaching to the world.

I will miss George but I know that he is in Heaven, probably at the Pearly Gates, standing with his head held high, back straight, hand held out and saying to all that will enter in, "You know, it's the kind of thing whereas ..."

– Wilbert Warren, friend

Most leaders don't take long to figure out together everyone achieves more. I'm sure that's one of the many reasons George pushed people to be the best version of themselves. That's one of the many things he did throughout his life. A carpenter that helped build homes, bridges, and most importantly the people around him.

Greatness doesn't come without a cost. Eventually, we are all faced with having to let go of a special loved one who embodies it. Even if we aren't ready. His life is a blessing well worth giving thanks for. His contributions and memory will continue to be a reminder of the one of a kind man we had the opportunity to get to know. He'll always be deeply loved, cherished and missed!"

– Mario Duke, friend