



Lawrence "Tito" Ashton

August 14, 2023

"I'll Be Loving You Always": Lawrence "Tito" Ashton Obituary

Some of our favorite and most beautiful songs are complex, made with multiple sounds and different textures. These songs are sensitive and soulful, complicated, and sometimes confusing. They make you want to laugh, dance, love, cry, contemplate, worship, fight, or rest. Some are sweeping and intense, and others are simple and pure. Whatever it is about these songs—the groove, melody, or lyric—they can make you feel deeply and intensely.

That's Tito. So many polarities and dualities. So full of love and so complicated. So fun and so sensitive. Both vulnerable and guarded, free and caged, his presence was gigantic, and yet, like a soul-stirring blues song, there was always just a drop of pain that lingered under the surface.

He was both a euphony and a cacophony, so when Lawrence Damian "Tito" Ashton, age 51, passed away at 5:33 a.m. on August 14 at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, it was a fade-out to a layered life that contained no obvious ending.

If we framed his life in the basic structure of a song, it would unfold this way:

The Intro: the essential elements that establish the key, tempo, rhythmic feel,

energy, and attitude.

Born on February 3, 1972, in Reidsville, North Carolina, to the late Lawrence and Jean Ashton, Tito—a nickname given to him by his father— was the younger brother of Darryl Burke (mother Anne) and the eldest brother to Norlisa Ashton and Gerard Turner (father Bruce). Tito had a big personality right from the beginning. Adventurous and high-spirited, he fit in well with an equally energetic bunch of cousins, uncles, and friends that loved all sports (football, soccer, wrestling, swimming, basketball, etc.), comic books, and cartoons.

He had a deep reverence for family and music from an early age. His father, Lawrence, was a singer and musician and introduced Tito to the classics like Motown, Sly Stone, and James Brown and taught him how to dance. Jean, a church girl from a musical family, introduced him to the different elements of gospel music. After moving back to Alexandria, Virginia, he loved visiting his grandfather Bishop Preston Graves' Church (Smyrna Church of Christ) in Reidsville. There, he was immersed in the hand-clapping, foot-stomping sounds of organs, drums, tambourines, and, his favorite, flat-footed, good singing.

While Tito's early years were filled with love and family, it was also punctuated with loss. In December 1981, at the tender age of 9, his father died after a bout with Lymphoma. Lawrence's passing would forever be a refrain throughout Tito's life.

Verse 1: Tell the story, and give the details.

By Tito's pre- and teenage years, he had blossomed into a social butterfly and was enraptured with hip-hop and pop culture. This meant the Incredible Hulk and SoulTrain on Saturday mornings. It meant hanging with friends and riding his bike from the morning until the street lights came on, playing Pac-Man at a local arcade or Centipede on his Atari, watching WWF wrestling, strategizing

during pencil-popping matches, and designing the most aero-dynamic paper footballs that were sure to catch air when plucked over index finger and thumb field goals. He was a quintessential 80s kid. He even had a paper route delivering Washington Post Newspapers with one of his best childhood buddies, David Stephan. And nothing was more 80s than MTV, BET, and discarded cardboard boxes for breakdancing. Best believe Tito spun many-a windmills on a treasured piece of cardboard.

He would often tell the story about his mom taking him to the record store on Richmond Highway in Alexandria to buy his first album, Candy Girl by New Edition. He'd also reminisce about the concerts he and his mother saw: New Edition, Prince's Purple Rain Tour, and even the Jackson 5's last tour. By the time Tito entered high school in College Park, Georgia, he was primed to join Atlanta's vibrant entertainment scene.

Verse 2: Continue the story. Build on the details.

Charismatic and gregarious, Tito found his people in Atlanta and was able to express his passions through wrestling, gymnastics, skating, dancing, and singing. It was the Miami Base and New Jack Swing Era, and along with his friends Troy West, Stacey Wallace, and Kevin White, Tito crooned, two-stepped, and skated all over the city and throughout the southeast. His exceptional dancing skills, together with his best friend Kevin, led to the creation of North Clayton High School's first-ever dance/step team, the North Clayton Steppers. Their performances were so popular that other high schools in the county followed their lead and started their own dance teams. The fact that the North Clayton Steppers are still in place today is a testament to Tito's legacy.

Tito and Kevin, who met while singing in the choir at Live Oak Baptist Church in College Park, became the dancing duo Red & Black, respectively, and

performed at talent shows, on local television programs, and for a teen dance show where Red & Black were the featured dancers. As dancers, they backed up Miami Base pioneer MC A.D.E. and other hip-hop artists like Lance Romance. They also carved out time to share their passion with the local kids in College Park by teaching dance at Club True Flavor, a dance club owned by Kevin's brother. In 1990, the same year Tito graduated from North Clayton High School, Tito and Kevin had the honor of dancing for the second inaugural celebration of Atlanta's first Black Mayor, Maynard Jackson.

If dancing was Tito's roar, then singing was his peace. From church solos (His Eye is On the Sparrow was his go-to) to school programs, Tito loved to sing and leveraged every opportunity to do so. While actively dancing, Tito, Kevin, Stacey, and Troy performed as the group "No U-Turn," often taking the stage with other up-and-coming Atlanta acts, like the group "Precise" (now known as Xscape). Plagued by knee injuries, Tito's ambitions for dancing professionally waned, but he would continue to use his voice in the next chapter of his life.

If his formative years were shaped by ambitions to entertain, his early adult years were marked with extreme joys, like the birth of his first daughter, Kazumi Nina (with Melinda Hughes), and deep rumination about his life's next steps. It was no secret that Tito loved to have a good time. His gravitational pull—stamped with a big smile bright enough to make your day and an open-mouth, hearty laugh—often made him the center of attention.

This pull, coupled with real-world demands, was often at odds. In 1993, Tito began working for the Washington Post as a copy aide. The job provided him and his young family some stability. Simultaneously, he was singing, writing, and producing songs with his brother Darryl and playing percussion in bands at clubs around the D.C. area. Most notably, he played percussion with the band Moja Nya, a Reggae group that Darryl was a principal member of, and the Blues Band, for which he was the lead singer.

In 1995, Tito and Meredith were introduced at a Cheers-esque bar on 15th Street in D.C. that Post employees frequented. Thanksgiving of 1999, on a trip to Bahrain, where Meredith had recently moved for work, Tito proposed and soon joined Meredith in the Middle East. They married on July 14, 2000.

While living overseas, Tito and Meredith traveled to many countries, which he delighted in. And when they welcomed their daughters, Olivia Simone and Rhyanna Skye, wanderlust became a family affair. While abroad, Tito visited Hong Kong, Thailand, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Greece, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Tito would tell the most vivid stories about their travels, from the food he ate in Hong Kong to the elephant ride in Thailand to seeing Stevie Wonder in concert in Abu Dhabi.

Pre-Chorus: Build anticipation for the chorus.

His buoyancy was often a mask for something brooding under the surface. Tito once said, "I am a simple man. I like yellow mustard." It is true that he liked yellow mustard, less true that he was simple. The throughline of his life was beautiful highs in which he relished. Still, there was a shadow that followed him from childhood. It kept him ensnared in the lows, and so he struggled with depression quietly and intensely.

Chorus: Lays out the Main Themes or Message.

He was a creative and felt feelings genuinely and deeply. He was certainly not a simple man despite his mustard affinity. Music was always integral to his soul as he enjoyed listening to it and the process of making it and collaborating to create it. But his heart belonged to his family, especially his wife Meredith, beautiful daughters, and energetic grandson, Henry Norris. He was always proud of his babies and constantly bragged about their accomplishments.

While it broke his heart when they passed, Tito was a devoted son to his mother and grandmother, Ivadell Graves. He was so proud of who they were and appreciated their unconditional, unwavering nurture and love. Tito adored his siblings Darryl, Norrie, and Gerard and had a unique bond with each of them. He also shared a special kinship to his uncle Quan, who was more like another brother. He was over the moon to be an uncle to his nephews Jude, Myles, and Locke. Tito loved the kids and was thrilled to be a boy-grandad and a boy-uncle.

Bridge: Variation from the rest of the song.

Parts of Tito's life were a masterpiece. His children, his travels, his talent, his ambition, and even his imperfect relationships. And other parts were like scratches on your favorite record. They were frustrating, deep enough to feel, easy to hear when playing back, and showed how hard he could be on himself. He was wholly human, and despite his inner challenges, the reverb on his life was beautiful. Tito had a kind heart and would feed stray cats or happily give the clothes off his back when his girls wanted it. Meredith once said that if Tito had a million dollars, he would have generously given it all away.

Even in moments of solitude, Tito would extend his heart uniquely– with sparse and pithy language, family pictures, funny memes, and, yes, through a song or a playlist. It was quite common to get a text message from Tito at odd hours in the night...or morning. The message was usually a picture capturing a moment in time and often tagged "This is us." Or the message was a curated playlist with a personal image and vibey title to match. Or it was a text with a link to new music or a new artist that he was up on and captioned "Ooweee!" and stamped with his signature emojis (fire heart and the muscle flex) ❤️🔥💪.

His mind was brilliant. Tito was a news junky and was eager to have political debates. There was a time in his life when he was consumed with novels. Thrillers, sci-fi, mystery, and superhero stories kept his insomnia busy. This was equally true for movies and TV series when his zeal for reading faded.

A perpetual jokester, he loved catcalling his kids if he saw them walking down the street or jumping out during a quiet part in a scary movie. Tito had a healthy laugh from the bottom of his belly that exited his mouth with a boom and sizzle. It was infectious (unless you were the grumpy lady who lived across the hall at the Dorchester Apartments in Washington, D.C. She once called the front desk to complain about him laughing too loud. Of course, that only prompted more laughter.)

Outro: Conclusion. End the song with a variation fade-out.

It's important to tell Tito's story because there was some darkness, but there was more light. His life was full of lovely melodies, harmonies, and wildly staccato experiences. Toward the end of his life, he began to open up about his joys, his heartbreak, his truth. Tito felt he, and everyone else, should live authentically and unapologetically. And those closest to him know he did everything his way in his time.

Tito's words to live by were, "Do You." He did him to the best of his ability, but most importantly, he did love.

As for the perfect fade-out? Here's an "OooWeee," rated lick approved by Tito and written by Stevie Wonder:

"As today I know I'm living
But tomorrow could make me the past
But that I mustn't fear
For I'll know deep in my mind
The love of me I've left behind

'Cause I'll be loving you always."

Lawrence "Tito" Ashton is survived by his wife, daughters, grandson, sister, brothers, nephews, and a host of rockstar uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends.

Cemetery Details

Mount Comfort Cemetery

6600 S. Kings Hwy
Alexandria, VA 22306

Previous Events

Family Visitation

AUG 25. 10:30 AM (ET)

The Garden Alexandria
5380 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA

Memorial Service

AUG 25. 11:00 AM (ET)

The Garden Alexandria
5380 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA

Interment

AUG 25. 1:30 PM (ET)

Mount Comfort Cemetery
6600 S. Kings Hwy
Alexandria, VA 22306

Tribute Wall

LW

“ *My Brother and I used to hang out with Tito from around 4th grade until the 8th, until our family moved to Chicago. We had a Breakdancing Crew called K.A. Crew. I truly regret the we lost contact. He was like a big brother to me while we lived in Mt Vernon Square Apartments. He was a Grade ahead of me at Hollin Meadows and then Carl Sandburg. Love and Blessings to him and his family.*

Larry D. White Jr.

Larry White - October 07, 2023 at 10:50 AM

LT

“ *Thank you for these heartfelt words.*



LT - August 24, 2023 at 07:07 PM