

## U. of I. Ph.D. student who died in Brazil memorialized as someone who made a difference

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Ashley Walls

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Ashley Walls lived by a simple motto, according to her siblings: "Dream — but don't sleep."

At 29, the late daughter of community activist and former mayoral candidate William "Dock" Walls already had earned two master's degrees and started her own company when she embarked on a summer trip to Brazil to research for her doctorate at the University of Illinois.

"When she landed, she hit the ground running, going in to the neighborhoods and talking to the citizens there and really getting into the culture," her sister Anika Wheaton said before a memorial service Saturday at UIC Forum.

Ashley Walls contracted bacterial meningitis while traveling in South America and died June 23 in Brazil.

On Saturday, flanked by large screens with photos of Walls, family friend Sandra Robinson told hundreds of mourners: "Ashley did more with 10,890 days than a lot of people do with a lifetime."

Inspired by her parents' community involvement and her upbringing in South Shore, Walls was studying sustainable communities and the role of education policy.

A graduate of Jones College Prep, Walls shared her talents for playwriting and poetry with students in after-school programs and inspired her younger sister Davin Green to write her own poems.

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Her siblings often found her sitting cross-legged on her bed surrounded by books, researching and writing on her computer.

“School, to her, was more than just school,” Green said. “It was everything. Learning was life to her.”

At 26, Ashley Walls co-founded a consulting company, SydneyMalcome, working with businesses in underserved communities.

She often encouraged her sorority sisters in Delta Sigma Theta to “stay live,” said her friend and mentor Chandra Gill.

“All too often, African-American women in this country have to deal with a glass ceiling,” Gill said. “Well, she didn’t have a ceiling.”

Walls is survived by her father, her mother Darlene Patrick and her three siblings.

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