

Speaker 1 ([00:09](#)):

I love to pick songs for our speak. So that was Gladys Knight is a landmark, the keeper of my heart. So it's 50 years in the future. I'm 60 today. So I'll be 110 still alive rocking in a rocking chair. Reflecting, reflecting as history is writing what we did on our watch. So how will history record us? The chairman and CEO of Kaiser Permanente died. Suddenly Bernard Tyson died in his sleep early Sunday morning. And a statement. Kaiser says Tyson was an outstanding leader, a visionary and champion for high quality affordable healthcare for all Americans. They put the company's first black CEO. Tyson was a champion for accessible healthcare, racial justice and workplace diversity. He was just 60 years old. The American heart associations mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer healthier lives. And our pursuit of that mission. We're having some amazing conversations along the way. Welcome to the special edition series on equity, honoring the life leadership and legacy of Bernard J Tyson. These are the stories of the relentless,

Speaker 2 ([01:30](#)):

And this is Tanya Odom. I am a volunteer with the American heart association and my day job is actually working in the field of diversity equity and inclusion globally for the last two decades plus, and it's my privilege to be a part of this podcast series honoring the life of Bernard Tyson. So today we have with us, Denise Bradley Tyson, the wife of Bernard J Tyson. Who's going to share some of her thoughts and her reflections about Bernard Tyson and the work and legacy that he's left behind. Hi Denise, thank you for being here and sharing some of your thoughts and memories with us all. Um, the world, new Bernard Tyson is a dynamic CEO leader of millions of people. And as a social change agent, as his wife of 10 years, you knew him even beyond that and beyond what we knew him to be. Can you tell us a little bit about your world together, who he was to you and why the American heart associations Bernard J Tyson impact fund, which as we all know, and for people listening is a national fund with a local investment focus, supporting and investing in evidence-based locally led solutions that are breaking down the social and economic barriers to health equity. Can you just tell us about your relationship with him and also why this fund is so important for James Tyson? My dearly beloved late has been,

Speaker 1 ([03:00](#)):

He was my friend before he became my boyfriend and my fiance and then my husband. But even when he proposed to me, first thing he did is he shared it with his three sons in terms of engaging them in the process that he was going to be asking me to marry him. And he told me to pack a bag and tell me where we weren't going. And he took me to Hawaii and she proposed to me at the very spot where during our relationship where I had gone to scatter some of my, uh, late mother's ashes, his father and my mother passed within a week or so of each other. So we shared that connection in terms of, you know, having lost our dearly beloved parents so closely. I thought I was just so thoughtful every time I see an ocean and a wave, I think of not only my mother, but now, now I think of Bernard Bernard.

Speaker 1 ([03:58](#)):

And my relationship was rooted in friendship first and foremost and respect in terms of the manner in which we met each other. And I think it was a gradual thing because we developed our friendship first, but just, I respected him so much. I loved the way he loved his children. I loved the way he loved his family. I loved the way he loved to staff, the loved and respected and supported his friends and colleagues, and both appreciated each other's sense of humor. A lot, which people don't always appreciate that we have no, because that's probably more rye in his could be in your face. I loved how he woke up in the morning, listening to his gospel music and, um, sort of getting, uh, powered up before

he spoke, listening to a Jay JZ and NAS and his, uh, rap music, which I sometimes had to ask him to turn down a bit.

Speaker 1 ([04:59](#)):

Yeah, there are just so many things I love the way people admired and looked up to him and how he didn't take that for granted and how he never forgot where he came from in terms of where he grew up to his route, to the, uh, CEO and chairman seat within Kaiser, that whenever he walked into Kaiser, he spoke to the people on the janitorial staff or the people in the records department, the same way he spoke to the doctors and the, um, presidents of his territories, where Kaiser had facilities, the love he shared with his colleagues and his peers, whether they were in the business council to the executive leadership council, to the corporate directors council, to, you know, his, uh, boys groups. He was a good man, good person who gave us the best that he had up until his passing. Now he gave one of his most powerful speeches.

Speaker 1 ([06:04](#)):

The weekend before he passed, we were at a museum where he had helped to underwrite the soul of a nation at the de young museum through Kaiser, to him having come back to seven, spoken to 80 and D's diversity group. Now his last talk was actually with Afro tech on the stage with the founder that was so powerful for young black and Brown folks who were in technology. Some of the youth who had gotten funded through Kaiser's venture capital group, but he was tireless in terms of giving back to all of us at every level. And I so love that about him and even not feeling well, not realizing that that would be his last evening on earth. He wanted me to go and accept an award on his behalf from black women, female doctor organization, out of LA. And he was fine to stay home, but just in terms of how he trusted and respected me and appreciated my counsel and saw me as one of his trusted advisors and why is important for me to undertake working with the American heart association and establishing the Bernard J Tyson impact fund is that I think that Bernard who works so hard selflessly on behalf of all of us, that he left so much work left to be done.

Speaker 1 ([07:33](#)):

I think he laid an amazing framework, just him having reshaped, how we even think about healthcare and looking at social determinants that feed into one's health and wellbeing. That was Bernard who led that discussion as sort of reframed how we look at it. He could only do so much in his all too short, 60 year life here on earth while you lay the groundwork. Now it's up to us to execute on all of the issues that he, um, enlightened us to. So that's what motivates me. This truly is about the love of Bernard and knowing how much of himself that he sacrificed for the greater good that now I think is sort of, this is the opportunity for us to step up and to sort of follow through on all the things that he used his platform to educate us both granular level individually to the community level, the corporate level nationally and internationally, based on the many stages where Bernard had the opportunity to talk about his message.

Speaker 2 ([08:43](#)):

Thank you for that, Denise. So talk about the mission and to remind us all about issues of health equity and the issues of inequity at any given point. Um, just from listening to many, the conversations with him that I've seen online, I'm just reminded each time I hear him say something different that he has left this impact that you've talked about and so many different places. So this question is a little bit different from some of the other questions you may be asking, but if a couple has a secret sauce or what makes

the couple dumb or the couple work, what was yours? And can you share a little bit more about your love story with Bernard Tyson?

Speaker 1 ([09:22](#)):

One of the things that was key to my and Bernard's relationship that we were both grounded in faith and our faith and spiritual connection and prayerful times together were sort of the ties that bonded us, but also keeping a lens of hope in terms of, you know, being deeply pain by human suffering and thinking about how we together could do our part to, to change outcomes. That really was so part of our, sort of our secret sauce.

Speaker 2 ([09:59](#)):

That's beautiful. I love your language of this notion of being connected by both of your awareness and caring and compassion of human suffering, um, and, and what you could do about it. So, as you know, this is a five-part series we're doing on equity and honor of Bernard we'll honor the critical issues where he was both a leader and a pioneer each episode, we'll have a respective focus on the need for equity, as it relates to access to care, how inequity impacts dignity of life, which addresses issues such as racial profiling, how equity impacts mental health and wellbeing, including homelessness, financial, and social stresses, mental illness, and more how equity impacts having a seat at the table, breaking the barriers of structural racism, unconscious bias, professional development, and growth, mentorship, and sponsorship. And of course, how equity impacts the heart health, looking at stress access to healthy food security and more. So, which of these issues that you just heard me go over, which of these issues speaks to you most?

Speaker 1 ([11:09](#)):

So many issues that were near and dear to Bernard as it related to the social determinants of health, the biggest underlying in terms of all the issues that Bernard devoted his 35 plus years in healthcare that resonated with me and all of them do from access to health care to mental health, to homelessness, to health equity, police brutality, probably the biggest one was around systemic injustices as it relates to economic disparities and that sort of access to opportunities where people can achieve their full potential as working contributing citizens to take care of themselves and their families, their communities. And, you know, he demonstrated that through, uh, being a big champion of the billion dollar round table initiative for corporations with their dollars or their dollars going to minority suppliers, ensuring that those folks were given the opportunity to present their cases, to working, even with the, um, the venture capital community where black and Brown people and particularly black people and black women specifically get access to less than 2% of all the venture capital dollars that are allocated that the whole notion that the saying about is the difference between giving a person a fish versus teaching them how to fish in terms of them having the opportunity to earn for themselves and for their families.

Speaker 1 ([12:52](#)):

I think that that's the one that resonated mostly with me, because if people have the opportunity to, to earn a fair living, that then they have money to provide for healthcare. They have some of the stresses that come from me, the mental health are generated because of sort of the economic challenges that people face. That that's probably the biggest one for me,

Speaker 2 ([13:16](#)):

Bernard Tyson made it okay for us to discuss some difficult issues. And he modeled discussing difficult issues as an example, mental health, which we'll address more in one of our upcoming episodes,

Speaker 1 ([13:29](#)):

Him being a pioneer in healthcare. He took the mask off of the mental health issue because I think for many of us particularly being an African American, you know, we are taught to be strong and we, you know, we internalize a lot and you don't know the ways in which that manifests itself. If you're not having a conversation about being willing to be open and be vulnerable about I'm struggling with this issue, I could use some help or guidance that he really made it okay for us to have those conversations. And I think one of the sort of most, um, sort of shocking statistics he shared with me when he was undertaking this work was around just how many youth we lose teenage youth and girls in particular to suicide. And we're not often sort of tune to paying attention to the signs where someone may be having an issue in terms of just not being communicative, swings out, you know, bursts to, um, job performance, dropping off to substance abuse.

Speaker 1 ([14:51](#)):

That all those for me are sort of a function in terms of being mentally unwell. And he really, and truly, um, made it okay to talk about it. One of the most that put an exclamation point on it, for me, with him having that conversation was having the opportunity to hear him be on stage with, at Davos at the world economic forum. And he was a panelist among others with the prime minister of New Zealand with Prince William future King of England. One of, I think, well, psychiatrists for the whole country of Zimbabwe and a few others, and then hearing them have that same conversation at a dinner with, uh, Chuck Robinson, the CEO of a Cisco and hearing everyone's perspective. And that it's a global issue. And you don't know what's going to trigger it postpartum depression to PTSD in terms of those who have been traumatized by gun violence in their communities to having been on the front line, serving in war torn areas that those things manifested themselves in so many ways.

Speaker 2 ([16:10](#)):

Yeah. So I think trauma is an incredibly important topic and how we relate to trauma, understand trauma impacts communities and workplaces. When we think of the trauma and challenges that we're facing, the current political climate has the world and especially in our country, so divided, but Bernard was able to work across political lines to get things done. What was the strategy that might help move us forward in a productive way that you saw Bernard use and utilize the important work that he did?

Speaker 1 ([16:41](#)):

I think that Bernard's secret sauce was it wasn't about politics, but it was about people and Bernard lived by office life that, you know, there's more that unites us than divides us, enabled him to, you know, work across administrations and you know, where he worked for 34, more than 34 years having broken ground where he became the first African-American to hold that post, where he kept the needs. So the underserved communities in mind that, um, even in our breaking ground, newly elected vice president, Kamala Harris, who was born at a Kaiser Permanente hospital, Oakland hospital. And I think with that being the North star, it will enable administrations going forward to do the right thing.

Speaker 2 ([17:33](#)):

I'm sure there are many different accomplishments and things that Bernard Tyson was very proud of. And that you're very proud of if you had to choose one, what do you think would be Bernard's proudest moment or accomplishment?

Speaker 1 ([17:46](#)):

And how many have asked me? What, what Bernard proudest moment being in his life and, you know, he had so many from his family, you know, starting with his sons, to me, our relationship to his Kaiser Permanente family. But I think the one thing that Bernard may have been proudest about that he didn't have the opportunity to realize, even though he had worked on it for 10 years, was the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J Tyson school of medicine. The board made the decision after Bernard's passing to change the name of the medical school from just the Kaiser Permanente medical school to the Kaiser Permanente, Bernard J Tyson school of medicine. Cause I think that that sort of represents sort of a culmination of all of his work in terms of looking at the disparities that he talked about. So often the social determinants of health and the disparities that are related to that to rethinking how doctors are trained.

Speaker 1 ([18:53](#)):

And so he led Kaiser Permanente in creating a forward-thinking medical school that represented an emphasis on health equity for all, and a culture of inclusion that encourages diverse perspectives and backgrounds. So for him, it was about those students. The first class just entered and I have the opportunity to meet a few of them with the unveiling of his portrait done by a young African-American artists that graces the entry of the medical school. First class of 50, just matriculated the mission that Bernard helped to outline for the school where those students are being trained to be advocates for not only their patients, but for their communities, how to prepare healthy foods, regardless of what kind of food you had access to an Alice Waters, if claimed chef even advised, um, setting up at the kitchen where these medical students who by the way are, are getting their medical school training for free, because we're not recognize that one of the things that for him, it's having a more diverse medical score doctor community is the fact that kids of color, often they get into medical school, but they don't have the financial resources to complete their education.

Speaker 1 ([20:22](#)):

It's, it's already established as one of the top five or seven medical schools in the country. And it just opened while Bernard didn't live to see the schools opening that I think that that would be one of his proudest moments. It wasn't so much about the naming of the school for him, but I think it was the fact that the school existed in was going to be opening in of again, just how selfless for not wise and caring about all of us,

Speaker 2 ([20:52](#)):

What a great memory to think about the ribbon cutting for the medical school, and to think about the fact that these students are starting on their path to being doctors, as you said, and not just in this building named for Bernard Tyson, but they're really following a legacy of someone who's made such a difference in the lives of so many people and how to impact in the sort of health care, the way we think about healthcare and the way we think about wellness, you must be so proud of this amazing legacy.

Speaker 1 ([21:23](#)):

I cried when I heard that they were going to name the school in his honor,

Speaker 2 ([21:30](#)):

In closing, I've heard that Bernard was known for his quotes and I've even read some of his quotes and heard him as I've heard on these videos and interviews that I've been reading. Can you share one that sparked to what made him relentless?

Speaker 1 ([21:47](#)):

Probably the biggest one for me is his of reminder. He's where he said that, um, every day he woke up and was blessed to wake up and have another day that he always tried to find a beautiful moment in each and every day. It was true to who he was from the smallest things to the biggest things. And I think with so many issues that we're faced with every day, I think that it's just a wonderful reminder for us all. Just taking pause and giving. Thanks for a beautiful moment in the day, whether it's looking at the sunrise or the sunset, seeing the smile on your child's face, when they get they problem solve something correctly to somebody or family being happy with the enjoying a meal that you may have prepared that there's so many beautiful moments in life. And it's kind of hard sometimes think about sort of the essence of life

Speaker 2 ([22:54](#)):

As a mindfulness practitioner. I resonate so deeply with those thoughts, whether it's looking at a sunrise or sunset, and I actually happen to love sunset or a child's face, it's just reminding us of the blessing of each day and have these moments during the day. So finally, you've been so generous with your time, um, and sharing of your stories and Bernard's legacy. It's been one year as we talk about Bernard Tyson and, and with people that knew him and know his work, how are you doing?

Speaker 1 ([23:27](#)):

Yeah. I feel sadness personally at the loss of someone who I love deeply, you know, who was my best friend, but at the same time, I feel a deep sense of gratitude. That one that I was to, for us to be in each other's lives and the manner in which we were first as friends and then as has been life for over 10 years to working with the American heart association and friends, wonderful friends, and step back something I know you're talking to and companies who are working with us to keep his legacy alive through the Bernard J Tyson impact fund. And also I haven't had the opportunity to hear from some of the first recipients of the grants that have been given to them that I find gratifying and uplifting, because I think that, uh, through all of that, you know, Bernard's legacy lives on through all of us while it's hard. It's also gratifying in the light of what Bernard's life was that I find a great sense of comfort people long to all of us and not just me and his immediate family in terms of just his life's mission.

Speaker 2 ([24:55](#)):

Thank you so much for sharing his legacy and his light with all of us. Indeed. His light continues to light the way for the many people that are trying to do and continue his work, the work of mental health, the work of wellness, the work of healthcare that really looks at people as whole people and looks at communities as whole communities. This is a powerful conversation, and I'm looking forward to all of the episodes coming up after there, I used to argue early on that it was about equality that everybody has to be treated equally. And I later discovered that's not the right framework. That's not the right narrative is about equity. Everybody gets what they need to get the same outcomes. Thanks for being a part of the American heart association, hit stories, learn more about the Bernard J Tyson impact fund@heart.org forward slash BJT impact fund. And if you enjoyed what you just heard, please press

share, tell a friend and leave us a review. Your next episode is on the way stay tuned. As we discussed Bernard's impact on how equity impacts having a seat at the table. [inaudible].