



# Rhea Myers Sumpter, Jr.

FEB 15, 1975 - JUN 12, 2019



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## **Rhea Myers Sumpter, Jr.**

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**R**hea Myers Sumpter, Jr., 44, passed away on June 12, 2019. He was born February 15, 1975 in Atlanta, Georgia to Rhea and Anne (Diveley) Sumpter. He grew up in Dunwoody, Georgia and attended Vanderlyn Elementary and Marist School. At Marist, he was student body president and voted Most Intelligent by his senior class. He was an avid cyclist and a competitive swimmer who, with his teammates, broke the school record in the 400m freestyle relay in 1993. Rhea attended Rice University in Houston, where he met his wife, Kathy. At Rice, he was known as a brilliant, friendly, generous person who was just as likely to spend hours tutoring a classmate in organic chemistry as he was to join Baker 13 or the Rally Club. He received a BA (magna cum laude) in Biochemistry in 1997 and was granted the James B. Walker Award for Outstanding Senior in Biochemistry. Rhea was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship and spent the year after Rice graduation in Buenos Aires working in the laboratory of Dr. Tomás Santa Coloma. He spoke fluent Spanish and loved a good asado as much as a native Argentinian. After returning to the U.S., Rhea entered the Medical Scientist Training Program at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. It was during his medical school years that he married Kathryn Maria Noack on July 7, 2001 in Spring, Texas. He completed a Ph.D. in microbiology with Dr. Michael Gale focused on the role of the RNA helicase RIG-I in susceptibility to Hepatitis C infection, work that contributed to the development of a cure for Hepatitis C. He graduated from UT Southwestern with his M.D. and Ph.D. in 2006 and then began his residency in Internal Medicine followed by a fellowship in Infectious Diseases at UT Southwestern. Upon completion of his medical training, Rhea began a postdoctoral fellowship in the laboratory of Dr. Beth Levine on the topic of cellular autophagy. Autophagy (“self eating”) is the process by which eukaryotic cells break down damaged proteins and organelles in response to various forms of stress; the discovery of autophagy was awarded the Nobel Prize in



## Obituary

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Physiology or Medicine in 2016. During his postdoctoral fellowship, Rhea made two important contributions to the autophagy field. First, he developed a novel genome-wide screening platform to uncover dozens of new genes necessary for selective autophagy in human cells. Second, he identified the Fanconi anemia group C protein (FANCC) protein as a factor required for the clearance of viruses and damaged mitochondria. These discoveries were published in the scientific journals *Nature* and *Cell* with Rhea as first author. Because genetic mutation of FANCC proteins causes developmental disabilities and certain types of cancer, Rhea's studies led to an improved understanding of the etiology of these diseases. In 2017, Rhea joined the faculty in the Department of Immunology at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. There, he established an independent research laboratory to continue his work on the role of selective autophagy in Fanconi anemia. He loved St. Jude and his colleagues there and spoke of his time in the lab as "recreation, not work". He was wholeheartedly committed to his role as a mentor to other members of his research group. Rhea had a voracious mind and could speak knowledgeably on almost any subject. He read constantly and took great delight in forwarding articles and books he thought friends would enjoy. He will be remembered for his quick wit and ever-present sense of humor. He was a generous host and consummate entertainer who opened his home to others freely. He loved his family and was the proud father of Rhea, III and Andrew. He is survived by his wife Kathy, sons Rhea Myers Sumpter, III and Andrew Richard Sumpter, parents Rhea and Anne Sumpter (Dunwoody, GA), brother Walter Sumpter and his wife Laura (Inman) Sumpter (Cumming, GA), along with many nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents-in-law, and siblings-in-law. A memorial service will be held at the FedEx Event Center at Shelby Farms Park on Friday, June 21st at 2:00PM. The family requests that you RSVP at <https://bit.ly/2ZrxtX4> if attending. Should friends desire, memorial contributions may be sent to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital ([stjude.org](http://stjude.org)) or the Fanconi Anemia Research Fund ([fanconi.org](http://fanconi.org)). Arrangements have been entrusted to Memorial Park Funeral Home and Cemetery, 5668 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38119 (901) 767-8930. "A Fitting Farewell for Everyone".



## Tribute Wall

**Rhea Myers Sumpter, Jr.**

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AN

**Ann N.** posted:

Dear family,I was one of those students who had the honor of being tutored by Rhea in the Weiss Commons for Orgo at Rice. I remember those cold nights when I walked over to Weiss to meet with Rhea, a very generous and patient upper class man with brown, curly hair. It was a long time ago, but I have never forgotten him and his desire to help another fellow student. He helped lessen the anxiety of being a Rice student during the first year there. I won't ever forget.Even now as a doctor, I recall fond memories of those days and I was hoping to see him again at Rice reunions and had even asked about him.Thank you for raising such a noble and kind being.I know that all of his wonderful attributes will be expressed and seen in his sons.With sympathy and sorrow,Ann Nguyen

October 3 at 5:30 PM

KL

**Kelly Livingston** posted:

Rhea, Anne, and familyOur thoughts and prayers are with you all at this challenging time. What a joy to know that Rhea Jr. was loved and lived such a full life. What a blessing that Rhea found personal and professional success in life and how fortunate was he to have such supportive and loving parents as the two of you! Much love always, Kelly & Casey Hutchins

June 25 at 1:10 PM

SA

**Shad Abid** posted:

My heartfelt condolences to you and your family. Rhea was a remarkable human being and extremely humble in his interactions with everyone. I knew him when he was at UT Southwestern and can never forget his help and guidance. Prayers for your family in this difficult time.

June 24 at 2:06 PM

SM

**Supra Vishwanath And Nanhi Mitter** posted:

Dear Sumpter family- We wish you and your family love and kindness during this very difficult time. Our prayers and love are with you. We love you deeply.

June 23 at 7:12 AM



## Tribute Wall

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WB

**William Brusick** posted:

Dear Kathy and family, Jeanne and I send our love and our prayers of comfort and peace to you. It is at times like these that I am so glad for the faith that we share which tells us that this is not the end – it is only a temporary separation – and even in the most tragic of my losses, I have found hope and comfort in this. We love you dearly and hope to see you the next time you are in Texas. Sincerely, Bill and Jeanne Brusick

June 22 at 6:07 PM

BK

**Brian Keller** posted:

Dear Kathy and Family, I am so saddened to hear of Rhea's passing. He was a brilliant physician-scientist, full of life, a great mentor and a friend. As the senior graduate student in the Gale lab, Rhea was the epitome of inquisitiveness, drive, and excitement. He showed me how a scientific question could enthrall you and how, with dedication and hard work, you could make an impact in your field. I will always remember Rhea's smiling face and the wonderful times we had together in the Gale Lab. He will be truly missed. I pray for peace for you all in this difficult time. With love, Brian Keller

June 21 at 10:27 AM

SS

**Shyam Sirasanagandla** posted:

Dear Kathy, I am deeply saddened by Rhea's passing away. I gained his trust and friendship in the five years that I had worked for him. Though he was my boss, he treated me as his family. I can't describe how much I am going to miss him. He will always remain as my idol.

June 20 at 3:51 PM

XD

**Xiaonan Dong** posted:

Dear Kathy, We are deeply saddened to your loss. No words can fully express our sorrow of losing a best friend. Rhea is one of most generous and thoughtful men we have ever met. He always lends his hands to other people, and is loved by everyone who knows him. He will live in our hearts and memories. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family in this difficult time. Xiaonan and Luequn

June 20 at 9:51 AM



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SM

**Sandra Madariaga** posted:

Our thoughts and prayers are with the entire Sumpter family during this difficult time. So sorry for your loss. Joe and Sandra Mihalka

June 19 at 7:33 AM

AN

**Ank Nijhawan** posted:

Dear Kathy, We were saddened to hear about Rhea's death and our hearts break for you and the boys. We have such fond memories of Rhea from our time together at UT Southwestern. He was kind and smart and someone who we always enjoyed spending time with. Rhea was someone you could count for a candid and thoughtful conversation and also a lot of fun. You and Rhea were a wonderful resource for us when we moved back to Dallas. We will miss him Love Ank and Deepak

June 19 at 4:56 AM

JC

**John Chandler** posted:

Rhea and Anne. We're so so sorry to hear about your son. Rhea and I have worked together at St. Joseph's Hospital in Cardiac Surgery for thirty years or so. I loved working with Rhea and Anne everyday. Rhea and Anne, our prayers are certainly with you each and every day. You are truly a special friend. John and Debbie Chandler

June 17 at 2:35 PM

JC

**January Streeter Carmalt** posted:

Dear Sumpter family, I am deeply saddened to hear of your tragic loss. I did not know Rhea personally, but remember him as someone supremely admired, respected and genuinely liked by ALL who had the fortune of befriending him. His legacy makes for inspiring reading. What a remarkable human being. The Sumpters are pretty special people and my thoughts are with you during this time.

June 17 at 8:52 AM

PW

**Puja Gupta Whitlow** posted:

To Kathy and the boys, I was sadden to hear of Rhea's passing. Though it has been a long time since we were all in Dallas together, I remember Rhea being sweet, friendly and welcoming. My thoughts are with your family at this time of great sorrow.

June 16 at 3:25 PM



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RB

**Roger Bedimo** posted:

Dear Sumpter family, It is with deep sadness that I heard of Rhea's passing. I had the privilege of knowing and working with him as his Fellowship Program Director during his Infectious Diseases training at UT Southwestern. He was a brilliant mind, yet humble, friendly and collegial. His fellow trainees and myself would like to express our deepest sympathy, and wish you courage.RB

June 16 at 6:56 AM

NI

**Natasya Ikbal** posted:

I am so saddened to know about Rhea's passing. I am thankful to have known him and that his brilliant mind touched so many. I will always remember his caring smile. Kathy, I hope you find comfort in the glimpses of Rhea imprinted on your boys.

June 15 at 11:46 AM

KB

**Karen Buttermore** posted:

Dear Sumpters, What a tragic loss for your family. Rhea's brilliant mind has left a legacy in medical science, and his generous loving example will remain in your hearts forever. We are praying hard for you during this sad time. With love, Karen andKing

June 15 at 7:14 AM

MG

**Michael Gale, Jr.** posted:

Dear family,I am sorry for your loss, our loss. Rhea was a family man and a talented medical scientist. I had the pleasure of his brilliance while we were both at UT Southwestern, and his friendship ever since. He loves his family.My best wishes, MG

June 14 at 2:54 PM

JS

**John And Daniela Stephenson** posted:

Sumpter's, Our thoughts and prayers are with your entire family, as well as those of the extended PSA family in Atlanta.We all love you.John & Daniela Stephenson and the entire PSA family

June 14 at 3:29 AM



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**Trudy Coan** posted:

Precious Sumpter family, Our hearts are breaking for you! Rhea Rhea was so special to our family. We are praying for you as we recall the many memories we have of that most talented and loved young man. We love you, Trudy and Frank

June 13 at 9:16 AM



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

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



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