

# PROCLAMATION

## IN MEMORIAM OF HARRIETTE GILLEM ROBINET

**WHEREAS**, the Oak Park community joins the family and close friends of Harriette Gillem Robinet in mourning her passing on May 17, 2024, at the age of 92; and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette is survived by her husband McLouis “Mac” of 64 years, whom she walked hand-in-hand with to Mass at St. Edmund’s Parish every weekday. She is also survived by her children, Stephen, Philip, Rita, Jonathan, and Linda, and four grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her daughter, Marsha; and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette Robinet had a full career as a microbiologist before moving to Oak Park and launching a second career as a children’s book writer. Born and raised in Washington, DC, she received a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of New Rochelle and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Catholic University of America. Following graduation, she worked as a bacteriologist for hospitals including Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC and as a biology instructor at Xavier University of Louisiana; and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette’s first national exposure as a writer came in *Redbook* magazine in 1968, telling the first-hand account of her young Black family moving onto an all-white block in Oak Park and humanizing the tragedy and triumphs of the fight against racism and modeling positive steps toward building a more racially integrated America; and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette has received many honors throughout her career, including the Carl Sandburg Award. Her award-winning books of historical fiction feature children during notable periods of American history. Each of her books includes a character who is physically challenged, as she believed “disabled children need to find themselves in books,” and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette’s maternal grandfather had been enslaved by Robert E. Lee; her paternal grandparents were enslaved people in Maryland. She and her husband Mac were active in the civil rights and fair housing movements and in 1965, the Robinets tried to purchase their home on the 200 block of South Elmwood using a so-called Straw Buyer. They had saved \$10,000 for a down

payment and seven times deals fell through once it was learned they were Black. White friends purchased the house they so wanted and immediately sold it to the Robinets. Harriette and Mac lived in their house on Elmwood together for nearly 60 years; and

**WHEREAS**, Harriette's warmth and compassion were paired with steely strength and courage. In 1966, less than a year after moving into Oak Park, she was a leader in weekly marches to protest unfair real estate practices and worked with others on advocacy that led to the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing ordinance. Her graciousness, kindness, and empathy for her fellow humans were legendary and she and Mac became the anchor of their block and the valued and admired elders for many in their neighborhood and the entire community of Oak Park.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by Village President Vicki Scaman and the Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park that the sympathy of the officials and citizens of the Village of Oak Park be expressed to the family of Harriette Gillem Robinet and that this Proclamation in Memoriam be forever preserved in the official records of the Village of Oak Park.

**DATED** this 18<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2024.

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Vicki Scaman  
Village President

**ATTEST**

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Christina M. Waters  
Village Clerk