

Obituary

LaVal Norman Cothran was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 29, 1930 to the late Edna Hester Cottman and Walter Cottman.

LaVal attended Philadelphia public schools, graduating from West Philadelphia High School in 1948. He continued his education at Lincoln University, PA where he earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1953 and where, in 1950, he was initiated into the legendary Epsilon chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated. After Lincoln, LaVal traveled to Alabama and entered the famed Tuskegee Institute where, in 1957, he was awarded the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree. Not yet finished with his education, he traveled to Michigan where he earned a Master of Science degree in Physiology from Wayne State University in 1964 and then he settled in the Washington area, where he was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree, also in Physiology, from Howard University in 1971.

LaVal was truly dedicated to education and had a long and distinguished career in medical education and research, which began in 1964 at Tuskegee. There he served as a Senior Researcher and worked under the tutelage of the legendary Drs. Edward W. Hawthorne and Walter T. Bowie. But, not to be bound by the walls of any particular institution and giving in to his love of travel, LaVal also served as a Visiting/Adjunct Professor at four fine institutions: Meharry Medical College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Florida A&M School of Pharmacy, and the George Washington University Medical School. His career seemingly culminated at the Howard University School of Medicine where he served as Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics until his retirement in 1999. After his retirement, LaVal continued working as a consultant and then answered a call to return to Howard serving as the Acting Director of the Animal Research Center up to his final days.

In the spring of 1957, in his final year of veterinary school at Tuskegee, LaVal met a young Tuskegee nursing student from Eufaula, Alabama, Mary E. Jones. Not to let her get away, he and Mary were married that summer, on August 13, 1957. From this union three children were born; Eric T, Judith A. and Valerie E. LaVal was a good husband and father, and doted on his children and took great pride in their accomplishments; he also loved his grandson Jonathon and cherished his time with him.

While in college, though he worked hard and was known to be a good student, LaVal also loved to have a good time – as he often said, he “knew how to party.” That love of partying and having a good time made Laval and Mary’s backyard pool parties legendary. He and Mary were consummate hosts to their friends and family and you never left their home feeling empty and rarely left without a huge doggie bag. LaVal had an engaging smile and an impish grin indicating that he was up “to no good.” So, you also rarely escaped his company without hearing a joke; but he always seemed to enjoy the joke a little more than the people to whom he was telling it.

Also in his leisure time, LaVal was an avid sports fan and enjoyed watching and going to the Skins’ and Bison’s football games and the Terps’ basketball games. He loved traveling back to Philadelphia to attend the Penn Relay Track Carnivals – from 1958 to 2005, he only missed two. And, spurred on by his love of travel and being with friends, every year for the past 25 or so, LaVal would arrange a trip to some foreign location – including Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and Latin America. Afterwards, he could spend hours talking in great detail about his activities on these trips whether you had been on the trip or not. He was also a founding member of the “Big Six” – childhood friends who have spent 56 consecutive New Year’s Eves together.

LaVal was a member of a number of associations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Heart Association, the Academy of Veterinary Cardiologists, the American Physiological Society and, the one of which he was proudest, the Tuskegee Veterinary Medical Alumni Association. He was also a member of the Beta Kappa Chi and the Sigma Xi Honorary Societies and a 55 year member of Kappa Alpha Psi.

More than just giving parties, doggie bags and jokes, LaVal gave generously of his time and talent to his family, his friends, his colleagues and his students. He was especially proud of his many students who have gone on to distinguished educational, medical and scientific careers. He touched many, many lives and he was a true and trusted friend to many more. So, LaVal will be remembered as a good and loving husband, father, grandfather and friend and also as a distinguished and accomplished medical researcher and educator who, through his guidance, commitment and encouragement, inspired generations of students to not only set, but attain lofty educational and professional goals.

LaVal will be sorely missed by his wife of 48 years, Mary E., PhD.; his son, Eric Tarleton, and his daughters Judith Ann, MD., and Valerie Edna, MD.; his grandson, Jonathon; his large extended family; and a host of other relatives and friends.