



Leo V. Blatch

May 25, 1933 - January 24, 2023

Leo Velock Blatch, 89, of Washington, D.C., passed away peacefully in his sleep on January 24, 2023.

Born May 25, 1933 in Miami, Fla., to Mary and Arthur Blatch, Leo was the second youngest of five children. Both of his parents were born and raised in the Bahamas. He grew up in a close-knit community, almost all of whom were of Bahamian descent.

Leo was gifted academically from an early age, earning the childhood nickname “Gali-Leo”. He graduated high school two years early and was offered a full scholarship to become an Episcopal minister. To his family’s chagrin, he turned it down and instead completed his bachelor’s degree at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., majoring in political science. He was a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity. After graduating in 1954, he signed up for the U.S. Army — he intended to use the G.I. Bill to finance law school. At a time when the standardized tests administered by the Army were overtly discriminatory against Black people, Leo had one of the highest scores. Because of this, he was sent to the cold mountains of Germany to learn the math required to operate the long-distance guns then aimed at Hungary. (Leo was always grateful that they never actually had to fire the guns during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.)

Though the men in his unit were not officers, they were not ordinary GIs. It was an exclusive unit of highly intelligent men, educated at some of the finest Ivy-League schools, and deemed capable of mastering the complex math required to fire these guns. As the only Black man in the unit, Leo was met with stony silence. On the streets of Germany, he was sometimes followed by groups of children asking if they could see his tail. But when he aced the first exam, and everyone else flunked, his fellow servicemen took notice. In addition to his obvious intelligence, there were some in his unit who were also drawn to his extensive collection of jazz, which he played constantly. Over time, he did form a couple of friendships with members of his unit, including one very close friendship.

Following his military service, in 1957 he moved to Washington, D.C. to enroll at Howard University School of Law. At that time, the school served as a resource for civil rights attorneys, including Thurgood Marshal, James Nabrit, Spotswood W. Robinson, who were bringing cases throughout the South seeking enforcement of the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. Leo and his fellow law review classmates did research, worked on appellate briefs, and helped with mock oral arguments to support these cases. They played an active role in the discrimination cases that changed the nation. Leo graduated from Howard magna cum laude in 1960. He was first in his class and editor-in-chief of the law review.

After graduating law school, Leo joined the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) as an attorney in the General Counsel's Office of Advice, and later the Office of Appeals. He was the first Black attorney in the General Counsel's office and the first Black attorney promoted to a supervisory role in that Office. He was noted for his "steel-trap mind", and for his outstanding writing and editing skills. But Leo did a lot more than labor law. He continued his interest in civil rights and in 1963, he was a marshal in the March on Washington where he soaked his feet in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool while

listening to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. At work, a steady stream of employees came for free legal advice on civil rights issues, debt or credit issues, domestic relations etc. He also was a tax expert and ran a small tax business on the side, assisting small Black-owned businesses with their tax returns and advising on good business practices. He developed a reputation as "the people's counsel" because of his willingness to help others with their legal issues.

It was at the NLRB that he met his wife Lyn, then an attorney in the NLRB Office of Appeals. They married in 1970. They have two daughters, Mary and Sydella and raised them in the Shepherd Park neighborhood of Washington, D.C.. A devoted father, Leo coached a neighborhood soccer team, took his girls to amusement parks, and was always good for a late-night pick-up from the movies. He was incredibly patient, the best listener, and a steadfast comforter. He served as Deputy Acolyte Master, teaching his girls and other children how to serve on the altar as he did when he was a child. He was also an excellent cook — his Bahamian style fried fish, pigeon peas and rice, conch fritters, fried chicken, and mac and cheese were favorites with everyone. He was also known for his unique sense of fashion — everyone loved his bow-ties and vests.

Leo was a passionate sports fan from childhood on. He often told of the time when, as a kid, he was so focused on catching the football on a long pass that he ran straight into the goal post, suffering a mild concussion. As an adult, Leo was a dedicated golfer and Washington Commanders football team fan. He had season tickets for 25 years and could be found at East Potomac Golf Course working on his game whenever possible. Even when his many health challenges restricted him, he never lost the desire to be on the driving range or putting green.

Leo was particularly passionate about jazz. He often said that if it was not such a hard lifestyle, he would have been a musician rather than an attorney. He saw all the jazz greats in person and had an outstanding music collection. Wherever Leo was — at home, in the office, or in the car — he had his music playing. He was always happy to introduce others to jazz and share his in-depth knowledge. He always said his only regret in life was not learning to play the upright bass.

Leo was a lifelong learner with an inquiring mind, as well as a prolific reader and crossword puzzle aficionado. He was knowledgeable of much of the world's faiths and mythologies. Everyone loved him – he was smart, funny, and had an easy-going nature. Though gifted intellectually, he never put on airs or set himself above others. Leo had the ability to put anyone at ease, by making them laugh and instinctively making them feel welcome. At the same time, he was fearless in pursuing what he felt was right, whether on behalf of someone else, or his family's interests. He was one of the community leaders who defeated the attempt to build a Wendy's fast-food outlet in the neighborhood and instead establish the Shepherd Park Library. He was not a regular 'church-goer' but was a deeply spiritual man — his Episcopal hymnal was worn and threadbare from use. He sometimes read from it before holiday meals with the family. He also regularly participated in fellowship with others in pursuit of spiritual progress.

Leo was preceded in death by his parents, his sister Barbara Brooks, and his brothers Norman and Arthur Jr. His first marriage to Rita Clinkscale (deceased) ended in divorce. He is survived by his wife Maralyn Geiger Blatch (also known as Lyn Blatch), their daughters Mary (Robert Lee) and Sydella (Khari Alexander), their grandchildren Josephine and Christopher Lee, his sister Gloria McPhee, and many nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations be made to N Street Village,

www.nstreetvillage.org. Leo admired the services it provides to D.C. residents.

Previous Events

Visitation

FEB 11. 10:15 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Unity of Washington DC
1225 R St. NW
Washington, DC 20009

A celebration of life will be held at 11AM on February 11, 2023 at Unity of Washington DC at 1225 R St. NW and streamed live on the church's YouTube channel. Visitation begins at 10:15AM. In lieu of flowers, contributions to N Street Village (www.nstreetvillage.org) may be made in his honor.

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Tribute Wall



“ *Genesis Cremation & Funeral created a Webcast in memory of Leo V. Blatch*



Genesis Cremation & Funeral - February 03, 2023 at 05:03 PM

ZB

“ *Best uncle ever. I said to uncle, do you know your humor and mannerisms are like Bill Cosby? He said, "If I had a penny for every time someone told me that, I'd be rich." I loved getting calls from him because I knew he'd help me with whatever I was doing. He'd pave the way by taking on a task that would make it simpler for me to accomplish via his smarts, his litigious insight and his heart of gold. .*

Zenaide Barnard - February 07, 2023 at 09:15 AM

DB

Uncle Leo,

You've gained your ticket to go home to be with your Lord. Congratulations. You'll be missed by us earthlings. Know that every encounter with you has been met with love, fun and family. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Till we meet again my dear uncle.

Dee Anne Barnard - February 11, 2023 at 12:42 PM

PW

To the family of Leo Blatch. May you find peace and comfort during this difficult time. My sincere condolences to you. You will be missed! May God continue to guide and protect you throughout this journey. Sincerely, your cousins Clara Mae and Phyllis.

Phyllis s Wilcox&Clara - February 12, 2023 at 04:45 PM

HS

Dear Lyn, Yesterday I had a thought about Leo, so I googled his name and I got this obituary, sensitively and thoughtfully written by you, I have no doubt. In my last conversation with Leo he told me about you. He assured me that you were a good lawyer and an attractive gal from Wisconsin, the next state over from Minnesota, where I'm from. I'd like to share memories of this man, one of the best friends I have ever had.

May I ask you to e-mail me at Harrison.Sherwood1@ntlworld.com

Hope to hear from you soon.

I just got back from a photography shop when I had a couple of prints made from ancient slides. I'd like to send them to you and your girls, but I'll also need your street address

*Sincerely, and with my deepest sympathy,
Harrison Sherwood (living in England, a widower for these last 3 1/2 years)*

Harrison Sherwood - April 23, 2023 at 11:36 AM