



Julien Lafontant

November 6, 1933 - February 23, 2013

Surrounded by his beloved wife of 52 years, his brother and his sister-in law, Julien passed away peacefully on Saturday, February 23, 2013 after a short battle with cancer. Julien was born in Port-au Prince, Haiti to Joël Lafontant and Eva Chéry. Julien is survived by two older siblings Joël and Éliane. Julien received his formal education in Haiti. He married Blandine in 1960 and both migrated to Liberia where Julien worked as a translator and a teacher. At the end of 1972 they moved to Binghamton, NY. where they pursued their studies. Julien earned his Ph.D. from SUNY-Binghamton in 1976 and taught at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln for one year. He was hired by the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1977 as an associate professor in both the Foreign Languages department and the department of Black Studies. From 1977 to 1985, he served as department chair for Black Studies and in 1981 was awarded the UNO Excellence in Teaching Award. He was promoted to full professor in 1985 and continued teaching after his official retirement until 2009. In an interview with a Gateway (the University newspaper) reporter, he explained his passion for teaching: "Monolingualism is a disease. In this world, you must be bilingual, trilingual, if it is possible." Julien enjoyed the company of friends and relatives. Julien has touched many lives and will be remembered for his outgoing personality and his generosity.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Moffit Cancer Center Foundation or the American Cancer Society .

Tribute Wall

TS

“ I started teaching my children French, and I was fondly remembering Dr. Lafontant. I googled him to learn of his passing. I wanted to share how wonderful I thought he was. He was actually one of my favorite teachers. I learned the most from him and he took the time to really help me. He was the reason why I eventually became fluent in French. He was well known as one of the toughest teachers, but I can't tell you how many hours I spent annoying him with questions until I understood what he was teaching. He never seemed to mind and was never bothered by my constant questions. I never felt proud about earning a B until Dr L. He was actually quite kind and passionate about his students and helping rid the world of monolingualism. The multilingual world is a little sadder due to his passing, but greater in number for his mentorship.

Tiffany S. - September 18, 2024 at 10:48 AM

AT

“ Dr. Lafontant was a great professor. I met him in 1977 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The courses he taught me were "The Negritude Movement" and "Contemporary Novel in Black Studies." Dr. Lafontant helped me realize that "I am an African in diaspora." I was just thinking of him today and decided to Google his name. I am honored to leave this post. He was a great man and educator!!! Angela HawkinsTibbs 2024

Angela Tibbs - May 13, 2024 at 09:42 AM



“ *Julien Lafontant*

October 06, 2023 at 12:11 AM



“ I am saddened to hear about M. Professeur Lafontant's passing. When I heard the cruel words about Haiti this week, I immediately thought of him, and how he is who I always think of when I hear about Haiti. Le Professeur was the toughest french teacher I have ever had. He didn't let you slide, and he had tremendous pride that his accent and his French was as perfect as anyone born in France. My condolences to him family.

Deneen Rowe - January 13, 2018 at 01:08 PM

FF

“ Je m'appelle Françoise Raphaël, je suis une amie de longue date. Joel call me 514-573-7064

Françoise Raphaël - Montréal - Friends - November 08, 2015 at 12:00 AM

MS

“ Dr. J, as I affectionately nicknamed hm, and I arrived t he University of Nebraska Omaha the dame year and semester, August of 1977. We became immediate friends and over the years, aligned ourselves to do battle with a number of controversies. I created an award, The Julien Lafontant Perpetual Trophy which has somehow disappeared from the department. He was a great mentor and always admonished me: "Ma-chew: put some eater in your wine." He and I joined forces to bring Maulana Karenga to campus in April of 1980, and he allowed me to teach my first class, "Issues in Black Communities" in Spring semester 1982. He was a good friend as was his wife, Blandine. HE WAS AN INCREDIBLE MENTOR. He will be missed.

Matthew C. Stelly

Matthew C. Stelly - Omaha, NE - protege/former student - August 08, 2015 at 12:00 AM

BA

“ My daughter, Alison, was born in Liberia in 1971 when I was teaching economics at Cuttington College. Julien was on the faculty with me. Since he was one of the few Catholics on campus, we asked him to stand in as godparents at Alison's baptism.

Alison just asked me about her godparents and Julien's name came to mind. I googled him on the off chance of finding out something and ended up here. It sounds as if Julien had a wonderful career after Liberia and I am saddened by his passing.

Bill Eastlake - Boise, ID - old acquaintance - January 18, 2015 at 12:00 AM

KS

“ *Best. Professor. Ever. I still tell stories from my French classes at UNO. A remarkable, fantastic man. He is one of the reasons I am a professor. I think of him often after 20+ years of having the honor to be his student.*

Kimberly Southern - Spotsylvania, VA - Student - December 13, 2014 at 12:00 AM

FS

“ I met Dr. Lafontant as a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the Fall 1980 semester. I was a student in his "Introduction to Black History" class.

As a child who grow up in St. Louis, Mo. the 1960's I lived through many incidents of racially periods in America. My parents were both social workers working in the black community, particularly the government housing projects. I was intrigued as a young adult by the evolution of Black conscience literature, concepts, and ideals. Dr. Lafontant opened up a new world for many of us. He spoke of the story of the Haitian Revolution with such passion and emotion that I could feel power and strength of Toussaint Louverture. I will always be grateful for his teaching style, his love for his craft, and his genuine gentle demeanor... but also for his power! For us young Black men on campus he was our leader. He simply was a great man.

Fred Willis Jr. - Pembroke Pines, FL - Student - July 29, 2014 at 12:00 AM

GS

“ I have to write, because I am speechless... I just found out about Julien's passing, and I simply cannot accept it. Lafontant was my french professor at UNO during both my undergraduate, and graduate programs. The lessons he taught me are still with me, as are all of my french books, class notes, exams, exercises... I kept everything. We lost touch after I graduated, but i never stopped thinking about him. He had often mentioned retiring in Florida, so I am glad to see he got to do that. I wish I had tried harder to have contacted him in the last few years. But i was fortunate to have spent a lot of time with him, and now more than ever, I will treasure every memory. I would love to be able to talk to Blandine, but their Omaha phone number must have changed, as I've tried that with no success. Lafontant was a warrior for freedom, for education, for equality, for justice, and i was a better person because of his wisdom. He changed my life, and I will miss him deeply.

Glucia De Oliveira Steckelberg - Hebron, KY - Friend/Former Student - January 25, 2014 at 12:00 AM

DS

“ The best professor I ever had by far. Condolences to his family, he touched my life forever, and taught me so much more than French.

De'Anna (Wilcoxson) Carlson, Class of 1999 - Houston, TX - Student - November 29, 2013 at 12:00 AM

SF

“ Julien taught several of my first college French and Black Studies courses in Lincoln and Omaha when I was a much younger geology student at the University of Nebraska.

We became friends mostly because of a kindred spirit, but also he felt comfortable speaking with me about many subjects because I was married to a West African Medical student at the time.

I am white with light hair and blue eyes and we spoke often about the prejudice and mystique between different races, religions, and the human condition in general. Julien had a passion for education and the power of positive thinking and he often read my writing material, helping me to edit the French translations.

He was not only an exemplary teacher with high standards for all of his students, but he was a superior mentor for someone like me who thought outside the traditional box but needed focus. He encouraged me deeply from the beginning of our friendship to write and follow my own calling. He was my true academic father and I love him for that.

What's more, I never had the pleasure of meeting Blandine, his wife, but he spoke often of her in a gentle and loving way. He had tremendous respect for her as a woman.

Finally, Julien's influence lives on in me, as he is the most influential adult in my life, besides my parents. I have told stories to my two daughters about him and how his special spiritual take on life has affected me and helped shape who I am today. In dark times of my own, looking back, it was his influence that often helped me survive abuse and disaster...to think quick on my feet and to problem solve with discretion and compassion in my heart.

He occasionally gave me very glowing professional recommendations and I spoke with him not long before he retired. I can only hope I communicated to him adequately how profoundly he had influenced my life.

SusiKay Williams - Omaha, NE - former student, academic friend - September 07, 2013 at 12:00 AM