



John Wallace Grant II

May 12, 1942 - July 12, 2023

John Wallace Grant, Ph.D., known to his friends and colleagues as “Wally,” was born in Weston, West Virginia, in May of 1942 and died in the New River Valley on Wednesday, 12 JUL 2023 at 81 years of age after a brief battle with cancer. He is survived by his widow, Joy Grant, his brother Richard Grant, his adult sons, Stephen, David, and John, his daughters-in-law, Alicia Kratzer, Sara Poorsattar, Stephanie Thornton-Grant and his grandchildren, Mathilda, Walker, Angus, and Azadeh Grant.

The oldest son of John Grant, a chemist with the American Water Company, and Grace Grant, an administrator with the Columbia Gas Company, Wally Grant grew up in Charleston, West Virginia, on the banks of the Kanawha River as the oldest of two brothers. When his father passed away suddenly, Wally was still in high school. Like many other times in his life, he shouldered the additional responsibility with strength, working at the Union Carbide process plant as an engineer while also attending coursework in Engineering at the West Virginia Institute of Technology in Montgomery. The opportunity to help build a state-of-the-art amines production facility for Union Carbide led him to Louisiana, where he met the woman who would be his wife for over fifty years, Joy Starring Grant.

He had a lifetime love of science and never stopped learning or researching. Wally graduated with his Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering from Tulane

University in 1973 and then worked as a research scientist for the Dupont Corporation until he joined the faculty of Virginia Tech's Department of Engineering Science and Mechanics in 1981, where he taught for over 30 years. Grant was instrumental in founding the School of Biomedical Engineering at Virginia Tech, serving as director and later department head until 2009. Grant was a dedicated educator, his teaching ranged from freshmen fundamentals in engineering up to advising a generation of PhDs whose research pushed the boundaries of biomedical engineering research. He was twice awarded a Certificate of Teaching Excellence from the college and the Frank J. Maher Award for Excellence in Engineering Education. He was appointed the first Kevin P. Granata Faculty Fellow in 2010.

Wally Grant had a lifetime commitment to the Scouting Movement, working with the Boy Scouts of America as the Scoutmaster of Troop 152 at United Methodist in Blacksburg for twenty years. He was a member of the Order of the Arrow and was awarded the Wood Badge, one of the highest awards for an adult leader in Scouts. His selfless work in the Scouts developed leadership skills and a love of the outdoors in an entire generation of young men in Blacksburg.

To the very core of his being, Wally Grant was an engineer. There was no machine he could not fix, no system he could not understand, from cars to blood centrifuges, to radio astronomy. His intellectual curiosity was never satisfied. He had an innate understanding of the physical world and its dynamics, which was cultivated in a lifetime of scientific research. His early work was in the fluid dynamics of human blood flow. He led a US Navy research program into pilot disorientation at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. His lab at Virginia Tech drove groundbreaking research into the mechanical operation of the vestibular system, the gravity-sensing part of the inner ear that allows all animals, including humans, to balance in space. He was widely considered to be the world expert in Vestibular Science.

He was a loving husband, a dedicated father, and a patient, doting, delighted grandfather. He was a world-class small water flyfisherman of the dry fly, the highest art of the craft he practiced his entire life. A quiet man, he expressed his love through acts of service. He was good to have with you in a tough spot, an optimist, a problem solver, and a source of strength to those around him. His love of life, intellect, and quiet dignity will be profoundly missed.

In lieu of flowers, please make a donation in his name to Trout Unlimited.

Friends, family, and colleagues are all invited to attend Dr. Grant's memorial service, to be held on Friday, the 15th of September 2023 at the Eastern Divide Brewing Company in Blacksburg, Virginia, from 1-3 pm EDT.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP **15**. 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ET)

Eastern Divide Brewing Company
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

AH

“ I am so sorry for this tremendous loss. Thinking so much of you, Joy during this very difficult, sad time. Sending you and your family much love. Take care of your dear self. Love, Anne Hammond-Tooke

Anne Hall - August 10, 2023 at 07:18 AM



“ Sad to hear the news.

I'm grateful for all the guidance and support Wally gave to me as an undergraduate and graduate student, as a post-doc, and as a faculty member. He always listened to my ideas and allowed me the freedom to find out how good they were (or weren't as was often the case.) I fondly recall how when I showed him good results how excited he got, and when they didn't make sense, how open and free the discussions were. I can still hear the humor in his voice when I was stuck on a problem telling me, "Well, chief, that's why I'm paying you the big bucks." (Translation: I trust you to figure it out.) I've never had a better boss.

Aside from research, Wally taught me how to be an educator. From my undergraduate days having him in the classroom, to working with him as a grader, to sharing discussions once I had classes of my own, so many of the positive things I bring to my students are what he showed me.

Sincere condolences to his family.

John Cotton - July 18, 2023 at 12:25 PM



“ A grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of John Wallace Grant II.

July 18, 2023 at 09:53 AM



“ Our research meetings would begin with some non-scientific chats. Admittedly I was a demanding student always charged with questions and challenges, and he might have wanted to relax me a little bit. The thought that I cannot chat with him any longer saddens me. I owe him a lot.

Jong-Hoon Nam - July 17, 2023 at 11:48 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of John Wallace Grant II.

July 17, 2023 at 11:37 AM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of John Wallace Grant II.



July 17, 2023 at 11:37 AM

JD

“ My deepest sympathies to Joy and the whole Grant family. Dr. Grant has been a huge influence on my life, introducing me to the intersection of mechanics and biology. I am forever thankful for his patience with me and his encouragement. Thank you Dr. Grant!

Jul Davis - July 17, 2023 at 11:27 AM

KD

“ I woke today to this tragic news and send my heartfelt sympathy to the Grant family. I did my undergraduate senior project in ESM with Dr. Grant, followed by a thesis Master's. He is the single greatest factor that led to my love of studying the inner ear for these past 30 years. He took a chance on a kid with ZERO biology training and a rough understanding of finite elements to open the world of life sciences and bioengineering and compassionate mentoring. He will be sorely missed. I know lab alumni will raise a glass at every ARO meeting. Cheers for a peaceful rest, Wally. -Keith Duncan and family

Keith Duncan - July 17, 2023 at 11:00 AM

JW

“ My prayers and love to the Grant family. We are so sorry for your loss. Wally was very special to so many - a kind, supportive, and gentle man. I first met him when I studied ESM, and he was a new faculty at VT. Wally will be dearly missed by all who were blessed to call him colleague, mentor, and friend. Jennifer Wayne

Jennifer S Wayne - July 16, 2023 at 08:38 AM

OP

“ I am saddened by this loss. I had Dr. Grant as a student in undergraduate and graduate courses. I was honored to work with him on coming up with textbook problems for one of his books. His kindness, encouragement, and support was genuine, authentic, and fundamental to me becoming an educator. My deepest sympathy and condolences to his family and loved ones. Olga Pierrakos

Olga Pierrakos - July 15, 2023 at 10:40 PM

BC

I am so sorry to hear of Wally's passing He and I went through wood badge together. He and Joy have been strong supporters in the Scoutnig movement.

Ben Crawford - July 17, 2023 at 12:08 PM

AM

I just recently learned of Dr. Grant's passing. He taught me in undergrad and was my Master's advisor. He introduced me to the world of research and influenced the rest of my career. More importantly, he was a kind, intelligent and genuine mentor. He will be missed. My condolences to his family.

Andrew Merkle - January 13, 2024 at 01:58 PM