



## Obituary

**Born:** Friday, May 17, 1929

**Died:** Wednesday, January 31, 2018

Paul John Fritz, scientist, educator, baseball player-coach, and author, of Lancaster, PA, formerly of Deptford, NJ, and Hershey, PA, died January 31, 2018, at Lancaster General Hospital. He was 88 years old.

Born May 17, 1929, in Belleville, IL, he was a son of the late John William Fritz and the late Edith May (Giessow) Fritz. He was the husband of 61 years of Lydia Victoria (Garcia) Fritz; brother of Sally (Fritz) Pope and the late Robert J. Fritz; and father of Katherine Fritz, Keri (Fritz) DuPree, J. Konrad Fritz, and Kurt Fritz. He also is survived by five grandchildren, three nieces and a nephew.

## Service Summary

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### Memorial Service

2:00 PM Sat Mar 03, 2018

Location: - *Not available* -

Paul was a 1947 graduate of East Peoria (IL) Community High School and a 1951 graduate of Washington University of St. Louis. A U.S. Navy and Korean War veteran, he served five years on active duty from 1951-1956 aboard the destroyer U.S.S. *John R. Craig* (DD-885), followed by three years in the Naval Reserve, retiring as a lieutenant. In 1962 he earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Auburn University, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship at Oak Ridge (TN) National Laboratory. Thereafter, he began a career in academia, teaching and mentoring graduate students, first at Auburn University, and then, with funding from the National Institutes of Health, also conducting cancer research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and, starting in 1969, at the Hershey Medical Center of the Pennsylvania State University.

In 1980, he shifted his research focus to plant genetics, studying the molecular biology of *Theobroma cacao*, with funding from the Chocolate Manufacturers Association of America. Ultimately he secured an endowment of \$1.5 million from the American Cocoa Research Institute to establish Penn State's first endowed research program, studying cocoa at the University Park Campus, where he and his graduate student team mapped the cocoa genome. He retired from Penn State in 1993, and after securing research funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, spent three years studying cocoa at the Center for Tropical Agriculture (CATIE) in Turrialba, Costa Rica. He was honored in 2016 at the 30th anniversary celebration of the Endowed Program in the Molecular Biology of Cocoa at PSU as its founder and first director.

Upon returning to the U.S. from Costa Rica in 1995, he began blogging and writing novels under the pen name Max Blue. The first, *For Those in Peril on the Sea*, published in 2003, was loosely based on his Navy experiences and early career in Auburn. The last, *Wild Blue Ponders: War*, an

anthology of excerpts from his 12 novels, focused on war and military service, was published in November 2017. Most of his literary work, including four books on baseball, and five collections of short stories, can be found at <https://smile.amazon.com/Max-Blue/e/B00BK9NZCK>.

A longtime Unitarian Universalist, he taught Sunday school at the Unitarian Church of Birmingham and served on the board of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg. He was one of the founders of the Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Fund at the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg. Paul was a member of the Society of American Baseball Research, the American Legion and the Tin Can Sailors Association.

While living in Alabama at the height of the Civil Rights era, he helped teach adult literacy to African-American employees at Auburn, and sent his children to the Head Start program at Tuskegee Institute to ensure there were enough students enrolled for the program to begin.

Paul met and married Lydia, the love of his life, in Hong Kong while still in the Navy. They would have celebrated their 62nd anniversary in April. The two traveled extensively throughout their marriage, visiting Europe, Africa, Central America, and Asia on multiple occasions, spent many hours fishing on the Juniata River, and became avid birdwatchers while in Costa Rica. Paul's life bird list had reached 448. He loved puns and writing limericks (his book *Phillies Journal: 1888-2008* included more than 1,000 limericks written over the course of three seasons), reading the local newspapers, and watching Masterpiece Theater and movies on TCM.

A gifted athlete, he was a four-sport star in high school in football, basketball, wrestling and baseball, but his first love was always baseball. In 1950, he was signed to a minor league contract by the St. Louis Browns, and played two seasons as a catcher and third baseman for the Appleton Papermakers in the Wisconsin State League. In Hershey 20 years later, he was player-manager of a slow-pitch softball team at Hershey Medical Center called the Aches (vs. the rival Pains), and in 1978, he coached the Hershey Teener baseball team to the Pennsylvania Area 3 VFW Championship. In later years, he liked nothing better than to watch his beloved Phillies and yell at the manager's mistakes.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m., Saturday, March 3, at the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations in his memory to the Oliver LaGrone Scholarship Fund, c/o Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, 1280 Clover Lane, Harrisburg, PA 17113 (checks payable to Unitarian Church of Harrisburg with OLSF on the memo line); the ACLU Foundation of Pennsylvania, P.O. Box 60173, Philadelphia, PA 19102 (<https://action.aclu.org/secure/tribute-aclu-pa%20>); or the

Southern Poverty Law Center, 400 Washington Ave.,  
Montgomery, AL 36104  
(<https://donate.splcenter.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=1367>).