

In Loving Memory of James A. Shannon

People were his passion. The energies and efforts of his life were dedicated to motivating, inspiring, uplifting all whose paths he crossed...especially the Youth.

Commitment characterized his life. This commitment permeated his relationships with both his nuclear family, as well as, his community at large, who he nurtured as an extended family. His marriage to his beloved Helen spanned 53 endearing years and was defined by a mutual respect that was palpable. Truly he cherished her and remained an exemplary provider throughout their union. His daughters Sheryl (Shannon) Young and Iris Faye (Shannon) Graves were his great joy. His pride in their accomplishments was evident and he remained inextricably connected to them despite the intervening miles. He was a proud grandfather. The latest milestones in the lives of Dorian, Tori, and Roland were ever present in his conversations. A shared enthusiasm for sports fostered a father son relationship with both sons-in-law John Graves and John Young. He was the driving force as the National Coordinator, behind the Shannon Family Reunion for a record 27 years. These events produced a cohesiveness that still resides today at the core of the Shannon Family. The students he molded via teaching and coaching for almost three decades remained his focus and they continued to gravitate to him.

James Alphonso Shannon was born on April 2, 1922, in Montgomery, Alabama to the late Lilla Charity Forte and William McAlpine Shannon. He was preceded in death by brothers, Edward L. Shannon and Claude Shannon. He confessed Christ at an early age and was baptized at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1927. He served his church home faithfully, in positions such as Trustee and Usher, until the Lord called him home on Saturday, October 14, 2000.

A quintessential leader he could dispense discipline yet garner devotion. As a mentor and a motivational coach, his positive energy was infectious--- it propelled many a young person over the "finish line" in life.

His educational accomplishments included a B.S. (Ed.) from West Virginia State College in 1949 and a M.A. (Ed.) from Alabama State Teachers College (Alabama State University) in 1956. Even his high school graduation was noteworthy. He was in the first graduating class of Booker T. Washington High School. He was most proud of the fact that he subsequently taught at his alma mater until its closing in 1970.

He taught health and physical education for 28 years at Booker T. Washington and Robert E. Lee High Schools. During his tenure at Booker T. Washington, he served as athletic director and head coach of the track and basketball teams. His heralded track teams won numerous state and local championships. While at Robert E. Lee, he coached football, basketball, and track. "Coach Shannon" was inducted into the Robert E. Lee High School Hall of Fame and the Montgomery Area Sports Hall of Fame. The City of Montgomery recognized his commitment to youth and recreation programs by renaming a park in his honor.

His love for athletics extended beyond coaching. He officiated basketball, football, and track for the Alabama High School Athletic Association, the College Basketball Officials Association and the College Football Officials Association. Additionally, he served for 17 years as director of the Girls and Boys Track Program in the Central Alabama District. He was facility manager at Lagoon Park Golf Course for 11 years. Upon retirement, he returned to his alma mater as the golf coach of Alabama State University.

The longevity of his loyalty was legendary. It extended to: his neighborhood of Mobile Heights where his pioneering efforts continually elevated the quality of life for all; his active contributions to his alma mater, Alabama State University; and his brotherhood of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. His outstanding leadership in Omega was confirmed via the Omega Man of the Year Award and Outstanding Basileus. Incredibly each of these associations spanned over 50 years! Fortuitously, he had interacted with all of these entities immediately prior to his passing. As was typical, he left us contributing to the ideas and entities he loved.

His community and civic involvement included board of director positions with Capital City Boys Club, Family Guidance Center of Montgomery, Weed and Seed and the Opportunity Industrialization Center (OIC). He was a member of the Montgomery Airport Authority Board; as well as, founder and president of ISTAP, an association to support the ASU athletic program.

He was known by many names, such as Jimmy, Daddy, Daddy Jim, DJ, Papa Shannon, Uncle James, Uncle Jimmy, Uncle Shannon, Coach, Chief, Brother Shannon, Hutchinson Street, Quick, Grits and the Mayor of Mobile Heights. The monikers, by which he was called, epitomized his positive and caring spirit. His life was a living testimony of his desire to uplift the community.

Because of his tireless energy, tenacious commitment, tender compassion and towering presence, his essence will remain for us to treasure. He is survived by his devoted wife of 53 years, Helen Pitts Shannon; loving daughters, Sheryl (John) Young, Irvine, CA and Iris (John) Graves, Detroit, MI; three caring grandchildren, Dorian Young, Phillips Ranch, CA, Tori Young, Berkeley, CA and Roland Oliver, Detroit, MI; two faithful brothers, William (Betty) Shannon, Chicago, IL and Robert F. Shannon, Sr., Detroit, MI; supportive sisters and brothers-in-law, Dorothy Franklin, Montgomery, AL, Robert Pitts, Mobile, AL, June and Richard Lewis, Worthington, OH, and Monica and Wilbert Pitts, Montgomery, AL; committed godchildren, Rapier (Phenon) Smiley, Houston, TX and Riche' (Dev) Outlaw, Burlington, NJ; and numerous grateful nieces, nephews, family members and friends.

His legacy will live through the many lives he touched as a Husband, Father, Family Man, Educator, Coach, and Community Leader. He has now passed the proverbial baton...his signature gesture. We can only hope that we can raise our standards to the phenomenal level of the bar that he set. His life is typified by the adage: "The man lives twice who lives the first life well."