On September 24, 2022, Wilfred “Fred” Otis Easter Jr., beloved father, grandfather, Twins fan, jazz enthusiast, teacher, administrator, Go player, softball coach, and friend, passed away at 81 after a long battle with cancer.

Fred was born May 26, 1941, in Harlem, New York City, to Mae Smith Easter and Wilfred Otis Easter Sr. Fred attended George Washington High School, where as a starting guard, he led the basketball team to the Tri-State Championship and won. He graduated from The Gunnery in Washington, Connecticut (now known as the Frederick Gunn School), in the first class that included Black students, and received his undergraduate degree from Harvard University, where he was one of eighteen Black students. During his time at Harvard, he married Mary Easter (née Moore). They had two daughters together, Allison and Mallory. Fred was married two subsequent times, to Donna Maxey and to Deb Stepek. Fred ran the A Better Chance program for the western U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was head of MESA in California, and ran The City Inc. in Minneapolis, MN. A man of incredible intellect, Fred spent his life helping Black and brown students gain access to higher education at schools including The Windsor Mountain School in Massachusetts and Carleton College, where the Fred and Mary Easter Endowment was recently announced in recognition of their contributions to the college, together and separately, inside and outside the classroom.

Fred had a sharp wit and a steady countenance. He was very playful: he often made duck noises at small children, and took delight in amusing them by closing one eye at a time without moving the rest of his face. He knew several phrases in over 40 different languages and loved surprising native speakers by slipping into their native tongue. He had a laugh that echoed through his whole body. He was a fascinating storyteller and a brilliant writer. He kept his childhood friendships from NYC’s Dyckman Houses and Harlem River Houses the whole of his life. Fred was a steady, good man, and the scope of his goodness is such that it defies a more specific word. He was a good man who led a good life and he will be dearly and deeply missed.

Fred was preceded in death by his parents and his brother, Douglas Easter. Fred is survived by his daughters, Allison and Mallory, his son-in-law Preston Polk; his grandchildren Marcus, Mason, Charlotte, and Vanessa Polk; two nieces, a nephew, Groepen and Morral godchildren, and countless colleagues, students, friends, and strangers whose lives he touched.

The family wishes to express gratitude to Fred’s devoted caregivers, June Phillip and Jen Moore, and to Trish Lewis and all his friends who sat with him in the final weeks of his illness. A memorial service will be held at Skinner Chapel on the campus of Carleton College on Saturday, November 5 at 2pm.