



## Leon Knopoff

*July 1, 1925 - January 20, 2011*

Distinguished scientist and beloved family man, Leon Knopoff passed away January 20 at home in Sherman Oaks, surrounded by his wife and three children.

Professor of Physics and Geophysics, Leon joined the UCLA faculty more than 60 years ago, in 1950. He was known as an outstanding educator who took great joy in teaching and in seeing his students develop into scholars. Thirty-eight of his research students were awarded PhDs, and 39 postdoctoral scholars from 17 countries worked with him. Many of them became colleagues with whom he worked on scientific projects in the years that followed.

It was Leon's research that brought him the greatest honor and recognition. Leon and his students, postdoctoral scholars and colleagues made seminal and pioneering discoveries and contributions in a wide variety of fields, including geophysics, nonlinear earthquake dynamics, earthquake statistics, theoretical elastodynamics, music studied as a complex system, and even archaeology (he was co-discoverer of the thermoluminescence method of dating ancient pottery, a method still used today in archaeology and art history). Some of the papers he wrote decades ago are still cited today. Two of them establish what are widely considered founding principles of modern seismology. He was author or coauthor of more than 222 scientific papers in refereed journals and author or coauthor of 134 other publications. He continued to work until very recently, coming up with new ideas and working on scientific papers. His positions at UCLA also included Research Musicologist, and he was one of the original members of UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology at its start in 1960.

In 2004 Leon received an honorary doctorate from the University of Strasbourg, France, and also was named the first Honorary Professor of the Institute of Geophysics of the China Earthquake Administration, Beijing. Over the years he received medals from the Royal Astronomical Society (UK), the European Geophysical Society, the German Geophysical Society, and the Seismological Society of America. His international ties were strong, and he was a visiting professor at the universities of Cambridge (UK), Karlsruhe (Germany), Trieste (Italy), and Chile (as well as at Harvard and Caltech), and a visiting scientist in Venice (Italy). The entire family enjoyed living in other countries during Leon's sabbatical leaves from UCLA.

Leon was honored with membership in the three top honor societies in the US: the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was invited to deliver honorary lectures before numerous academic groups and was named UCLA Faculty Research Lecturer in 1972.

In 2000 an honorary symposium was organized at UCLA to mark Leon's 50th year on the UCLA faculty and his 75th birthday. Former students, post-docs, and colleagues attended from around the world. The symposium led to a publication in his honor, a Festschrift volume of Geophysical Journal International of more than 200 pages.

Leon served on many committees, boards, councils, and panels, often in a leadership position, in service to UCLA, to scientific journals, and to international science, including as Secretary-General of the International Upper Mantle Project (1963-71).

A man with broad interests, Leon had a deep love for and encyclopedic knowledge of classical music. He played piano and harpsichord and for many years hosted chamber music sessions at home. His backpacking expeditions in the Sierra Nevada and in mountains in far-flung parts of the world were among his happiest times. He loved the mountains and could recall the name of every feature of the landscapes he had hiked through. He took a keen delight in travel, especially with his wife and children, and they shared many adventures together.

Leon was a wonderful husband and an extraordinary father, greatly beloved by his wife and his children, Katie, Rachel, and Michael. His friends and colleagues knew him as a man of integrity, brilliance, wit, generosity, and modesty. He was an extraordinary human being.

Leon was married almost fifty years to his dear Jo, and they had a remarkable life together. She is grateful for their years together and for her overwhelming happy memories.

Leon's survivors include his wife Joanne V.C. Knopoff; children Michael Knopoff, Rachel Knopoff, Katie Knopoff Wadley; son-in-law Adrian Wadley; and a grandson.

A memorial gathering will be planned for a later date.

In lieu of flowers, should you wish to contribute in memory of Leon, please consider the Leon & Joanne V.C. Knopoff Fund, to endow a career development chair for a young scientist at UCLA. Checks should be made payable to UCLA Foundation with memo indicating the Leon & Joanne Knopoff Fund #9395 and sent to Kerri Yoder, UCLA Director of Development, Physical Sciences Div., 1309 Murphy Hall, Box 951413, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1413.