

## LEON LEDERMAN

*(July 15, 1922 – October 3, 2018)*

During a visit to the Physics Faculty (University of Havana) in 1999, Leon Lederman talks to undergrad students.

Perhaps there is no better way to describe professor Leon Lederman than the words of his wife, Ellen Carr Lederman, shortly after his death: “What he really loved was people, trying to educate them and help them understand what they were doing in science”. Out of love for people, he visited Cuba in 1999 and 2003 –perhaps devoting more time to talk to students than to experienced colleagues. In the first occasion he visited the Physics Faculty, University of Havana,

as well as the “V. I. Lenin” high school for science-oriented students. In 2003, he participated in the “VIII Inter-American Conference on Physics Education”, celebrated in Havana. He said in an interview offered in Havana: “During my many trips by these lands [Latin America] I use to ask why they don’t make a big Latin American Lab where all their countries collaborate, because that may build up enough critical mass to become one of the best labs in the world. In the same way, I also propose a Caribbean Laboratory that would study problems like disaster mitigation”.

Lederman made great contributions to our understanding of the fundamental forces and particles, especially by the discovery of the muon-neutrino, for which he shared the Physics Nobel prize in 1988. He also coined the word “God’s particle” for the Higgs boson in 1993, when it was just a theoretical idea.

What professor Lederman would have never suspected is that his Nobel Prize medal would be sold to help pay his mounting medical bills. He had begun to suffer from memory loss in 2011, and finally died from dementia. Fortunately, people like him will always be in our –much less volatile– collective memory. Cuban physicists will never forget his wit and warmth.

E. Altshuler