

In Loving Memory of Joseph Ben-Ur

Dr. Joseph Ben-Ur was born in Baghdad, Iraq, on March 3, 1940, the son of Moshe and Flora Kiflawi (Yehuda), and passed away on May 7, 2023.

He was a full professor and much-loved mentor at the University of Houston at Victoria (UHV), where he served 23 years as professor and twice as president of the Faculty Senate. Always looking out for the best interests of all his colleagues, students, and community, Joseph received the UHV Distinguished Faculty Service Award and was named the fourth Professor Emeritus of the university. Then-UHV-President Bob Glenn said, "His work has made a lasting impact on our university."

He earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics and Master of Business Administration at Hebrew University and Doctor of Philosophy in marketing, with research on buyer-seller relationships, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He published scholarly articles in political marketing, chaired sessions in international conferences, and was a senior editor for the Journal of Political Marketing.

Joseph had a keen curiosity about the world and loved to share it. Within a few years of his family's move to Israel at age 10, he and his brother Abe pursued a decade-long passion for designing and building free-flight model aircraft for national competitions and world championships; Joseph mentored many aero modelers older than himself along the way. He studied physics and mathematics before focusing on economics and marketing. And Joseph sparked delightful adventures with his daughters and granddaughters—from soda-can-propeller-boat science fair projects and everyday paper airplanes, to "the car will decide the direction" drives, to stories from his Iraqi-Jewish childhood. These formative experiences will be missed and remembered.

Joseph is survived by his loving wife of 53 years, Tamar (Levav); daughters Nurit and Ela Ben-Ur; granddaughters Maia and Dalia Katz; brother Abe Karem; and many nieces and nephews. He is preceded by his brothers Isaac and Jacob Kiflawi.



Ela at Joseph's funeral

My dad never wanted me to cry about him (though about anything else was OK) and made me smile and laugh and I've failed all week but I'll try here. And he brushed it off whenever I tried to thank him—but I'm going to do that now.

I'm grateful for all that he was personally and professionally that has infused and inspired me and my daughters and enriched our lives. His family, friends, and colleagues that reached out to us and posted on his tribute site shared many of the same things, and I'm grateful for that and pulling your thoughts in here as well.

So some of those things that he was and live on in us, in roughly biographical order.

His love of his Iraqi Jewish culture, inspired by stories of his childhood in Baghdad, and wonderful food we enjoyed together in the simplest settings.

His appreciation for what he had and mindfulness with money, rooted in his self-made father having to emigrate from Iraq with nothing.

His way of jumping into making things with his hands—from matchbox cars he made as a child, to the model airplanes he designed, built and competed nationally and internationally in his teens. And all the science projects and paper airplanes and walnut-shell boats with me and my girls who now, also, jump into making things.

His originality and spontaneity and curiosity and love of exploration—always learning and questioning in his work and life. His “The car will decide the way” drives. And his always asking us—annoyingly at the time, and now, clearly so importantly “How do you know that?”

His honesty and caring so deeply about what he does, and doing good through it. As we heard he served in so many formative ways at his university because he believed that universities should be Just, fair and friendly. I see his tireless drive to work for good in me and see it in my girls.

And his way of caring about every single person he was involved with. We can hear how he mentored so many people at UHV. That was his respect for and deep belief in the capacity of the people that he mentored and children he raised, and dedication to supporting them however they want to go. He didn't just encourage me as a little girl to make a doll bed out of a tissue box, but to photograph it and write about it because someone would surely be interested to follow my design. And didn't hesitate to use real terms when talking about planes with my girls even when they were 2. From my childhood to our conversations as adults, he encouraged me to find who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do, go after it, and take care of myself and I aspire to do that for our daughters.

I'm going to leave us all with some of the advice he shared again and again with us, and my girls have heard, again and again—that I personally always want to hold in my mind and heart.

Let the car decide where to go. Fly. But hold the wing. Use your head—but keep it on your shoulders and be careful. You can't buy a new head in Kmart.