

Arthur A. H. Ezra

My Reflections About His Life

by Ann Ezra Erickson

My father, Arthur Abraham Hyam Ezra, passed away in April 2020, ^{at} the age of 94. He would have been 95 this summer. We celebrate today a remarkable life of an amazing man.

He was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) India in 1925. He grew up in a small enclave of Iraqi Jews (about 2-3000) who had settled in Calcutta in the 1920s, primarily for reasons of commerce. In addition to being Iraqi Jews, the family were British subjects, and Dad's father (my grandfather), Meyer Silas, worked for the British railroad. Dad grew up in a family who loved and adored him and who prized education. He also loved and adored his four sisters and stayed close with them throughout his entire life. Dad was the middle child and the only boy sandwiched in between his two older sisters, my aunts Myrtle and Helen and his two younger sisters, my aunts Aziza and Seemah. They made sure that he did his lessons, and during the WWII, Dad tutored Aziza and Seemah at home so that they did not fall behind and even moved ahead of their peers in their lessons. Dad attended Jesuit schools for his primary and secondary education.

When it was time to go to college, Dad went to the University of Calcutta (now the Bengali College of Engineering) where he first earned a two-year degree in math and then went on to the 4-year professional school to get his bachelor's degree in civil engineering. Dad graduated first in his class, and if you happen to go there for a visit, look for a plaque with his name on it.

After WWII and after Independence in India, Dad emigrated to the United States in 1947 where he attended the University of Michigan for his master's degree in civil engineering. I once asked him how that was, moving from Calcutta to Ann Arbor, and he replied (shivering), very cold. It was extraordinarily cold, and he came with no coat. His roommate was Max Jaffee, another Jew, and they became lifelong friends. Dad told me that Max introduced him to blueberry pie, a heavenly confection that he had never tasted before he went to Michigan. He said that he had a piece of blueberry pie every day for a month until he realized that he did not fit into the clothes he brought with him so (in his words) he had to knock it off. I remember as a kid my dad taking me to the House of Pies in Denver but had no idea then that the blueberry pie he ordered brought back fond memories. When Dad finished his master's degree, he married Harriet, a scientist, and headed to California. In California, he worked as Harbor Master at the Port of San Francisco, and he welcomed my brother and sister Mark and Rachael into his life. He started classes at U.C. Berkeley for his PhD.

Dad and Harriet divorced after a few years of marriage, and subsequently Dad moved to Palo Alto and moved his PhD studies in Applied Engineering Mechanics, a combination of Civil and Mechanical Engineering to Stanford University. He married Judy, my mother who was a

social worker, in 1956 and welcomed my brother David, his stepson, as his son. When Dad finished his PhD, he moved the family (himself, Judy, and my brother David) to Denver, Colorado where he started a job as an engineer at the Martin Company (now Lockheed Martin.) In this job, he worked on rocket propulsion and was in charge of explosives formation to create large parts (such as nose cones) for rockets. During this period of time he invented and patented technology that was subsequently used on the lunar vehicle. He also wrote a book entitled "Principles and Practice of Explosive Metal Working." He would have enjoyed watching the SpaceX launch yesterday! My brother Danny and I were born in Denver during the early 60s. After almost ten years at Martin, Dad moved from Martin to the Denver Research Institute where he was a research scientist and where he taught engineering at the University of Denver.

In 1972 when I was twelve, Dad moved my mom, my brother Danny, and me to Bethesda, Maryland where he took a job as a director at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C. In this job, Dad gave out a number of scientific and engineering grants to individuals and universities for research, exploration, and applied technology. He traveled a lot as a technology expert on business, and he continued inventing. In the late 1970s, he started a consulting business called Technology Frontiers where he testified as an engineering expert about motorcycle safety with the goal of improving motorcycle safety standards. Dad stayed at the National Science Foundation for about 15 years until he retired in the mid 1980s. Dad and my mom Judy divorced around this time, but they remained lifelong friends until she passed away in 2004.

In 1987, Dad married Phyllis, a professor and research scientist, and moved with her to her home on Long Island. On Long Island, Dad took a job as Dean of Engineering at SUNY Farmingdale. He loved this job, especially because of the interaction he had every day with other faculty and with students. Also, during this period, Dad invented a wheelchair with moving slats on its seat that would keep paraplegics from developing and would even cure ulcers or sores. Dad worked with his friends Lee Jacknow, Paul Hug, and Perry Calhoun on this project. When Dad moved to Long Island, he was welcomed into Phyllis's large circle of family and friends, and Dad and Phyllis enjoyed life together there and also in Wellington, Florida for almost 33 years until they both passed away this year (5 days apart) due to complications from Covid-19. Phyllis's kids Ellen and Danny and their families were a huge part of Dad and Phyllis's lives, and someone from the family visited them and cared for them almost every day. Phyllis's family was also Dad's family, and he loved them unconditionally.

I wanted to mention some of the other characteristics of my dad that made him who he was. He was a problem solver, a teacher, a writer, an inventor, a tennis player, and an avid reader who loved keeping up on and discussing current events. During Watergate, which happened exactly when we moved to Washington, he loved nothing more than to run to the front door when the Washington Post arrived to read the latest from Woodward and Bernstein. He used to comment then that "local news was national news." He loved playing tennis and watching tennis, and he played tennis as often as he could until he was 81 years old. He was a wonderful teacher, and I will never forget him teaching me long division when I was in 4th grade. He made what seemed like an impossible subject easy. When I was in high school, he

taught me all about monetary and fiscal policy (I still have no idea how he knew so much about American economic policy) and we spent many hours talking about whatever was happening at the Fed and in Congress.

A couple of final stories I have to tell is about Dad trying to keep up with the latest popular trends. In the late 60s, he decided that what he needed to be cool was some bell bottoms, so one day he came home with two pairs of polyester bell bottoms. One pair was baby blue, and the other was gold. He wore those hideous pants to work for at least a decade until we let him know that they were no longer cool, if they ever were. (Side note, Dad's fashion improved dramatically after he married Phyllis.) Back to the bell bottom pants – one thing that made them even worse was he liked to dance around in them while listening to a song called “In the Summertime” by Mungo Jerry. Download it sometime for the full dad experience. He thought this song was rock and roll. As a teenager, I made sure to avoid standing next to him at any time. Also, around the same period of time, running or “jogging” as it was known at the time, became popular. So, Dad, on freezing winter days in Maryland, would faithfully don a pair of summer shorts and a Colorado ski coat brought from Denver and jog around Walhonding, the street we lived on. I joined him once or twice until I decided that not only was this uncool, it was freezing.

While it's been sad to lose Dad, Arthur, Bunny, Grandpa, I take comfort in the fact that Dad lived a life he loved and that he had numerous family members and friends all over the world who loved him. He was a gifted mathematician and engineer had a successful career in a variety of industries including aerospace, science research, teaching, government, and academia. He loved his family and friends and celebrated having a multitude of children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He lived a long and happy life.