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Dr. Robert Katz (1917-2011), Obituary

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The following obituary appeared in the *Lincoln Journal Star*, Sunday, March 20, 2011.

KATZ

Dr. Robert Katz, 7/17/17–3/12/11, emeritus professor of physics at the University of Nebraska, died peacefully at his home Saturday March 12th following a brief illness. He and his sister Gladys were born to immigrant Russian Jewish parents in New York City, who operated a delicatessen in the Bronx, not far from Yankee Stadium. He remembered Babe Ruth stopping by for hot dogs, a huge man driving a little sports car; and seeing the NY Giants' Carl Hubbell pitching a 15 inning shutout at the Polo Grounds where double-headers cost \$1.

He came to the University of Nebraska in 1966 from Kansas State University where he had received their Distinguished Graduate Faculty Award for 1962–63 as an outstanding lecturer, and researcher. He had developed soft X-ray techniques for assessing insect infestations as well as methods for testing grain density; he co-authored a popular physics text, "*Physics*" with Henry Semat in 1962, and was author of "*An Introduction to the Special Theory of Relativity*" in 1964. He began the study of cosmic ray tracks left in photographic film retrieved from high altitude balloons. These tracks look something like meteors piercing the night sky. It was while at Kansas State that he first developed a theoretical model correlating these images with the effects of radiation on human cells during cancer treatment.

He had earned his B.A. from Brooklyn College in 1937, his M.A. in physics from Columbia University in 1938; and after working as a civilian physicist at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio during WW II., he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in 1949. While at Wright Field, he addressed the problem of radio interference on aircraft by designing "pigtailed," which dissipated excess static electricity. He also developed X-ray techniques to identify fatigue fractures in airplane castings. While at the University of Nebraska, he turned his attention to the study of radiation effects and developed the Katz Theory, a computer model capable of predicting experimental results when biological tissue was irradiated, especially the implications for cancer treatment.

Following retirement, he collaborated with Francis A. Cucinotta at NASA to develop an application of his model now used to calculate cancer risks for its astronauts. In retirement he also enjoyed membership in Polemic Club and Torch Club, where he gave a series of thought-provoking presentations. Recently, he witnessed a scholarly renaissance thanks to UNL's on-line institutional repository, Digital Commons, where the works of active and emeritus professors are publically accessible. To his surprise and delight, he learned that his site was visited frequently and his articles and texts downloaded. He was also featured in a UNL publication, *The Scarlet*, an article titled, "A Century of Achievements," a look back at sixteen outstanding University of Nebraska professors.

He is survived by his special friend Harriet Turner; sons Steven Joseph Katz and John Hewitt Katz; daughter-in-law Ileana Luisa Soto; nieces Joan Field Lakin and Elaine Field; nephews Ken Field and Richard Field. His former wife, Mildred Popov Katz and his sister, Gladys Field predeceased him.

A memorial gathering will be held at 4, Friday, April 1st at the Unitarian Church, 6300 'A' Street, Lincoln. Reverend Charles Stephen will officiate. A reception will follow. Donations on Dr. Katz's behalf can be made to The Southern Poverty Law Center at www.splcenter.org/donate. Arrangements by Butherus, Maser, and Love.