



# Michael Lieber

DEC 28, 1936 - DEC 23, 2024



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## **Michael Lieber**

DEC 28, 1936 - DEC 23, 2024

**M**ichael Lieber died December 23, 2024, just a few days shy of his 88th birthday. He was born in Brooklyn, NY on December 28, 1936, the oldest son of Joseph Lieber and Sara (née Schwartz) Lieber. After graduating from Stuyvesant High School in 1953, he attended Cornell University on a state scholarship, where he majored in physics and math. After graduating from Cornell in 1957, he went to Harvard University where he received his Ph.D. under the guidance of Nobel laureate Julian Schwinger. En route to the Ph.D., he had experience in industry, primarily at Avco Corporation where he was chief of the Scientific Problems section. After finishing his Ph.D., he accepted a post-doctoral research position at New York University. In 1970, he accepted an offer to join the faculty of the Physics Department at the University of Arkansas as an assistant professor, where he spent the rest of his career, rising to full professor and serving as department chair for one term. He retired with the rank of professor emeritus in 2011, but he was coaxed from retirement a few times to teach specialized classes, and he continued to come to campus daily to meet with his colleagues until the pandemic changed his routine.

Mike enjoyed music and the theater, especially opera, and he attended TheatreSquared, SoNA, Walton Arts Center, Opera in the Ozarks, and Live from the Met productions. He also loved to travel, with his most recent excursions including Singapore, Cambodia, Machu Picchu, and the Galapagos Islands. He had been looking forward to visiting Germany and Prague in Summer 2025.

As much as he enjoyed expanding his horizons, he prioritized his family over everything else. He loved connecting with relatives near and far, those closely related and more tenuously; if the relatives were college-aged and could benefit from tutoring, advice, or just a good argument, even better. He took pride in everyone's accomplishments and delighted in following everyone's



## Obituary

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adventures as though they were his own. And because he was an expert worrier, no one else had to worry very much at all.

Mike was pre-deceased by his parents, his brother Edward, and by his son, Kenneth. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Eileen (née Saffron), his brothers Stephen and Richard, his two accomplished daughters, Laura (Scott Strain) and Debbie Deere (Tom), his daughter-in-law Dana, and six grandchildren.

Cremation arrangements were under the direction of Nelson-Berna in Fayetteville, and a memorial service will be held in the spring. Condolences may be given online at: [www.bernafuneralhomes.com](http://www.bernafuneralhomes.com). Donations may be made to Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas, P.O. Box 3723, Fayetteville, AR 72702, and, as per his own wishes, mourners are encouraged to lift a glass of their best Scotch whisky in his memory. L'chayim to a full life, well-lived to the very end.



## Tribute Wall

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**Laurent Bellaiche** posted:

Mike was an extraordinary person. So knowledgeable on so many different topics. So many anecdotes to share. It was always a joy to have lunch with him. I miss him tremendously. Laurent Bellaiche.

March 19 at 2:33 AM



**Anonymous** sent an Enchanted Cottage to the Lieber family.



January 13 at 8:50 AM



**Anonymous** planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Michael.



January 13 at 8:50 AM



**Keith Andrew** shared 3 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

I am deeply saddened by this loss and extend my heartfelt condolences to the family. I was fortunate to have Dr. Lieber as a mentor and guide during my academic journey, taking several courses and seminars with him and having him as an advisor for two graduate degrees. With my office next to his, I had the privilege of engaging in a constant exchange of questions and ideas—from discussions on LIGO to Elba and Ebla. These collaborations, paired with conference trips and meetings that extended well into my career, were invaluable. His vast knowledge, insightful guidance, and unwavering inspiration made seemingly impossible goals achievable and difficult challenges surmountable. Equally significant were the warm visits to his home, where his family's generosity and kindness provided critical support and encouragement throughout the years. Dr. Lieber always made time to be a visiting colloquium speaker and theory school presenter, captivating everyone with his engaging presence and unparalleled expertise. He was an extraordinary role model, and his loss leaves a profound void. He will always be deeply missed, but his legacy and impact will endure forever.



January 1 at 11:59 AM



## Tribute Wall

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**Edwin Hach** posted:

My deepest condolences to Dr. Lieber's family; I am so sorry for your loss. I was a graduate student at the University of Arkansas from 1993-2000, and I was fortunate enough to have taken independent study courses in relativistic quantum mechanics and field theory with him. Further, he was a very valued member of my PhD thesis committee. Even more than that, he was a great guy and an extremely interesting person. During my time in Arkansas, I was lucky enough to have countless conversations with him on many topics, some technical, some not so much. After I graduated from Arkansas, I came back for a couple of years as a visiting faculty member. Dr. Lieber served as a valuable role model for me in that position (I'm pretty sure he didn't know he was doing that at the time). Though the news of his passing is very sad, I take solace in celebrating the inspired and positively impactful life he lived. We who live in Rochester and are physics alumni from U. Arkansas will indeed be raising a toast to Dr. Lieber's life and to our good fortune at having known him.

January 10 at 10:34 AM



**David Goorskey** posted:

So saddened by this news. I was a physics graduate student from 99-05. I never had Dr. Lieber in a class, but he was the first person I talked to on my path toward converting to Judaism. I walked into his office one day, navigated through the maze of books he had stacked floor-to-ceiling, and expressed my interest in Judaism. He invited me to an Erev Shabbat service at Temple Shalom, which was held in the Unitarian Fellowship building at that time. I believe his daughter, Rabbi Laura, was leading the service. I remember it was such a bright moment in my life and it all began with that simple conversation I had with Dr. Lieber. May his name be for a blessing.

January 7 at 8:13 AM



**Timothy Kral** posted:

Our deepest sympathy! Mike was one of the good ones! Tim Kral & Connie Hendrix-Kral

January 7 at 5:24 AM



**Anonymous** posted:

I was a grad student at UARK from 83-88. I did not have Dr. Lieber for a class, but he was a great resource for my questions on particle physics. I worked with folks at UARK after graduation, and on my visits there I had many nice visits with him. He will be missed.

January 3 at 2:11 PM



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**Jiali Li** shared 5 photos to the **Professor Lieber Teaching in Classroom** album.



January 1 at 11:59 AM



**Paul Edward Long** posted:

Eileen: Both Lina and I are saddened to hear of Mike's death. We knew him as an accomplished teacher in the world of physics. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family as you now move forward with your lives. Paul and Lina Long

January 2 at 10:02 AM



**Bob Ford** posted:

Oh, this news hits hard. Such a deeply feeling and intelligent and generous-hearted man whose presence will be sorely missed. We knew him well at TheatreSquared--both he and Eileen were the steadiest of patrons and friends. We send our love to Eileen and all the family. And yes, L'chayim, to a rich and wondrous life. Bravo, Michael. Yours always, Bob Ford and Amy Herzberg.

January 1 at 11:59 AM



Keith Andrew shared 3 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

January 13 at 8:42 AM



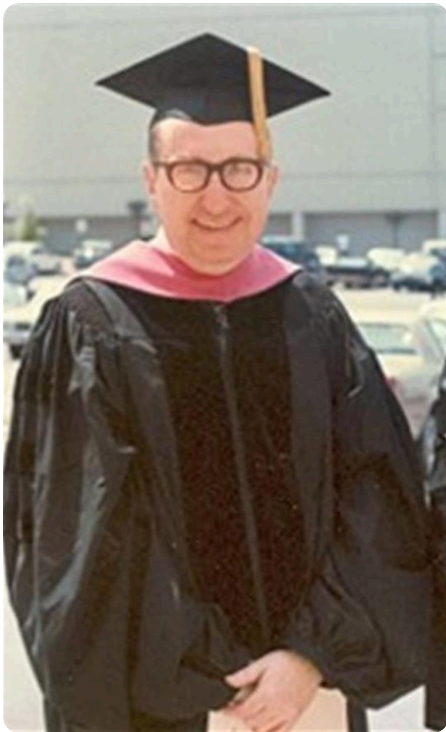
1984 with Dr. Julian Schwinger at OSU



# Media

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1986 Graduation

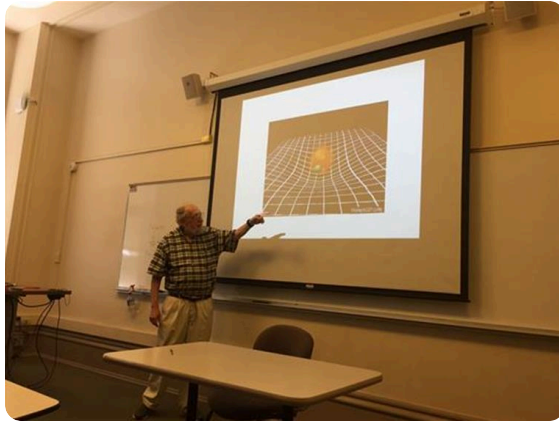


2007 Meeting

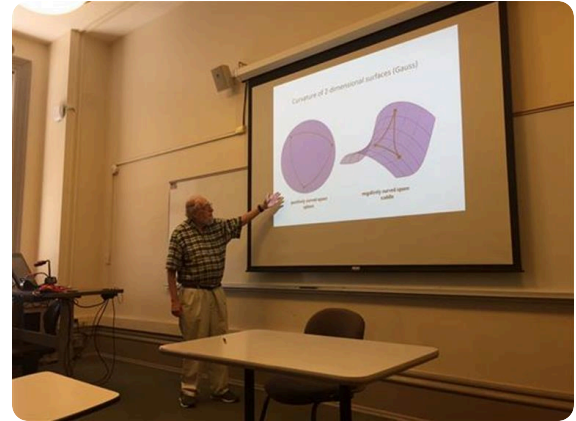


Jiali Li shared 5 photos to the Professor Lieber Teaching in Classroom album.

January 2 at 12:32 PM



Lecture on general Relativity in July 2017



Lecture on general Relativity in July 2017



### Principle of Equivalence

*A homogeneous gravitational field is completely equivalent to a uniformly accelerated reference frame*

Galileo: All bodies fall (in vacuum) with the same constant acceleration  $g = 9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$

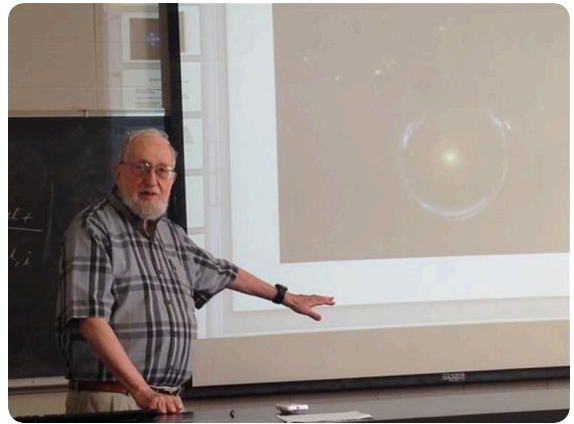
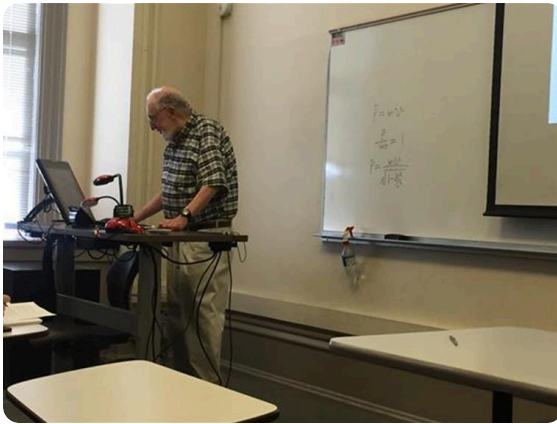
(1907): free-falling elevator - as if no gravity, "simplest thought."



## Media

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Lecture on general Relativity in July 2017



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Michael by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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