

## Memories of Prof Sam Eilon

Professor Sam Eilon was an “economic migrant” who came to the UK to improve life for his family. This was not an easy decision for Sam since he was a second generation Jewish Palestinian born in Jaffa, as a result of his great great grandmother kidnapping her baby granddaughter (Sam’s future grandmother) in Odessa (beset with pogroms at the time) in the 1880s and taking her to Ottoman Palestine to force the rest of the family to follow. Sam was a lifelong committed Zionist who was born in Mandate Palestine in 1923, was brought up speaking Hebrew, was educated at the Reali School and the Technion in Haifa, was a member of the Haganah, and fought in the War of Independence (for which he received a medal, which is now knocking around modestly in one of his desk drawers alongside various biros that no longer work and some pencils sharpened to the last inch of their existence). Sam believed to his very core in the importance and rights of State of Israel. In 1948 (the year his eldest son Amir was born) Sam was in charge of IDF supplies and logistics in the Sfat area; this set of challenges started him on the road from mechanical engineering to the application of scientific method and mathematical tools to management, decision-making and the control of complex systems and procedures. He spent some 6 years in the IDF, achieving the rank of Major, among the earliest of a long string of titles and degrees which are listed in his **Who’s Who** entry.

When he came to the UK Sam had to leave behind his parents and his brother Itz who was always regarded in the family as the good-looking, charming one. By comparison the stick-thin, tongue-tied Shumulic was super-serious and geeky. But when still at the Technion he did a little bit of maths tutoring on the side, which stood him in good stead: one of his teenage students was Hannah who was doubtless charmed by his quick wit and good looks. (Frank Sinatra was considered to be Sam’s lookalike, at least by Hannah and her friends.) It was a love match that lasted his whole life. They were married for more than 73 years.

For a young Israeli couple with two children Amir and Ronit (the youngest two, Carmel and Daniel, were not yet born) immigrating to set up a new life in London in the 1950s was not easy. But Sam was a pioneer and a clear-sighted, innovative thinker who challenged assumptions and disrupted many accepted norms. Things were not always easy for him - he did not have any connections and in some circles he was not accepted as “one of us”. He contended with an environment that had no consciousness of institutional racism; he had to cope with the slights that were then commonplace when certain born-and-bred Englishmen found themselves having to deal with an ambitious and capable foreigner, and a Jew to boot.

In due course Sam created the new academic discipline of Management Science and became the head of his department at Imperial College, a post he held for some 30 years. He recruited an excellent team around him and created a family atmosphere among the staff. Over the course of his academic career he wrote 16 books including the famous ***Production, Planning & Control*** (which continues to be regularly reprinted in India) and ***Aspects of Management*** plus over 300 scientific papers. The department Sam founded became an internationally-respected in the field of management, and in due course became what is now the business school at Imperial College. In 2019 Imperial College awarded Sam a medal in recognition of his contribution to this success.

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When Sam set up the department he deliberately did not call it a Business School and insisted that the subject to be researched and taught was management science. Sam felt that the practice pursued in business schools often tended to be descriptive, examining the ways in which successful decision makers allocated resources and led teams; by contrast Sam wished to examine not just what managers do but (more importantly) what they can and should do. In particular he was critical of courses of study that did not require or train advanced mathematical skills to analyze complex datasets, or that failed to apply rigorous scientific method to the comparison of alternative strategies. Sam was a formidable mathematician; his published work and the courses taught generations of students and readers that many things in the management arena are not what they initially appear to be, and that by digging deep into the complex relationships between various causes and performance criteria it is possible to transform decision making from an art to a science, from luck to method. After he retired from academia he served for many years as a member of the Monopolies Commission where his mathematical acumen, his ability to absorb complex arguments and analyse supporting data and spot the inconsistency on page 286 of Appendix C, and his acute sensitivity to special pleading all stood him in very good stead.

Sam was highly appreciated in universities around the world, lecturing widely and acting as an external examiner. Long before it was common practice, he went on a tour of China where he lectured in huge amphitheatres to hundreds of students. He particularly enjoyed a moment when the translator apparently told the audience in Chinese, "Please laugh: the Professor has just made a joke". Alongside academic work Sam was a consultant to a wide range of industries; these included NatWest Bank and Westland Helicopters. He believed that industrial and commercial experience was an essential part of the toolkit of anyone teaching management.

As a product of secular, humanist Haifa, Sam was not at all religious, but he had a fierce belief in the importance of his Jewish identity and of belonging to one's community. In due course he became a keen supporter and a personal friend of Rabbi Louis Jacobs. For years he attended Louis Jacobs's Monday evening Talmud class at the New London Synagogue, sitting next to Hannah who sat in the front row and kibitzed the rabbi continually (in a constructive spirit, as she continues to do at age 96 every week in Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg's gemara shiur).

Sam came from a poor background; through hard work and many management consultancy appointments alongside his academic job he built a livelihood that ultimately sustained him and Hannah for over 30 years after his retirement. Having bought his wonderful house in Hampstead Garden Suburb he was determined that he would only leave it feet first, an ambition that he finally realised. The titles of Professor and Head of Department, and then subsequently as a member of the Monopolies Commission gave him the proud feeling that he had succeeded, arrived, and was accepted in English society. It gave him pleasure to have an entry in *Who's Who* – and it also gave members of his family *naches* that through his efforts they too appear in such a prestigious book. His son Daniel and his daughter Carmel are proud that they each add a figure 2 to the description of Sam's family "2s, 2d"; they also think it fitting that they each merit just one digit whereas Sam requires several columns of narrative to sum up his many achievements.

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For his family the most important attributes of Sam were that he was a wonderful supportive and loving father of four, father-in-law, grandfather of ten and great-grandfather of seven. He was always involved in his children's lives, and indeed in his grandchildren's lives. Sam never shared Hannah's interest in bible studies; Hannah never shared Sam's enjoyment of chess or tennis. But Sam and Hannah were a close and loving team who shared the same values. Sam adored Hannah and luckily the feeling was mutual. They were apart from one another for barely a handful of days over the course of eight decades. He was kindly, mischievous, teasing, benign, brilliantly analytical but also delightfully silly and playful; a sweet and lovely man who was an example to us all how to live a full and rich and productive life.

*Yehi Zichro Baruch* (may his memory be for a blessing).

*Written by Carmel and Daniel Eilon  
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