



Daniel Kutsko

January 16, 1947 - October 31, 2025

In lieu of flowers the family is encouraging donations in Dan's name to the Panthera Foundation. Wild cats - especially tigers - were his favorite animals, and he would be honored to have contributions made for their conservation and care: <https://panthera.org/>

Memorial service to be held Sunday, December 14 at 1 PM in the Jersey Village High School Auditorium. 7600 Solomon St. Houston, TX 77040

Daniel Mark Kutsko, a lifelong learner, educator, and mentor, passed away unexpectedly on Halloween, October 31, 2025, which, honestly, fit him perfectly. Born January 16, 1947, in Youngstown, Ohio, to Joseph and Mary Vikartosky Kutsko, Dan showed early signs of possessing a naturally inquisitive mind. He loved building model airplanes and wanted to be a pilot until he had to wear glasses in the fourth grade. At age two he suffered an accident smashing the tip of his right index finger by falling over while standing on a rocking chair. Despite his injury he went on to deftly play the accordion, which he turned into a money making endeavor by charging his sister five cents for lessons. When he played baseball, his shorter finger gave him a unique grip on the ball, which his catchers put to good use, but Dan couldn't quite control the pitch enough to make his way into the big leagues.

During his years in Catholic School Dan questioned the nuns about everything which was not a thing you did to nuns in the 1950s. This did not deter him, however, and he took it upon himself to read books and search for answers on his own, a trait he carried with him his entire life. When not aggravating the nuns, Dan enjoyed learning about science, history, literature, and the arts. He dabbled in theater, and performed in plays in both high school and college. Growing up during the Space Race had a significant impact on his academic and personal interests. He went on to earn his B.S. in Biology from Youngstown State University in 1969, and his Masters of Liberal Arts from Houston Baptist University in 1989. Dan had opportunities to become a doctor, but ultimately chose to be an educator, a career where his big, bold personality could shine, and he could share with others his passion for science and learning.

Dan's career as an educator spanned over 40 years beginning in 1969 at South High School in Youngstown teaching Biology and Chemistry. He received the opportunity of a lifetime in 1974 to teach at the Warwick Academy in Bermuda, and to say he enjoyed his time there would be a massive understatement. Bermuda holds the honor of being Dan's favorite place in the entire world, and he fondly recalled his time there his entire life. He returned to South High School in 1975 until he made the journey to Houston, Texas in 1980 to teach at Jersey Village High School. There he taught Physics I and II/AP and Astronomy for over 30 years until his retirement in 2012. He chaired the Science Department for 25 years and was an avid mentor to and collaborator with students and colleagues alike.

Physics is a notoriously difficult subject, but Dan wanted his students to understand that physics was not as inaccessible as it seemed, and they could

learn it. He inspired independent thought and critical thinking, often using the history of science as a powerful teaching tool to show students that they, too, could think like a scientist, a skill that would help them outside of his classroom and on into the real world. Dan made his high school students feel seen as people – young adults, some for the first time in their lives, and celebrated their individual differences. He engaged in deep and engrossing conversations with students and colleagues, there hardly existing a topic he wasn't willing to broach. Dan cherished his continued correspondence with former students, some from decades after they had graduated, and often shared their many achievements with his family.

Odyssey of the Mind offered Dan an opportunity to coach students in creative problem solving and his teams enjoyed modest success during his years as advisor. He scratched his musical itch by playing the flute in the chamber music society and providing live music at dinner theater performances for the JV Players. Dan took any opportunity he could to improve his craft. He felt extremely lucky to have been able to attend, and often present at, many incredible science summits and conferences: an International Baccalaureate workshop at Montezuma, NM at the Armand Hammer International World College, NASA Toys in Space, Sally Ride Challenger launch, Lunar and Planetary Institute, Rice University, University of Houston, Houston Baptist University, University of Houston- Downtown, CalTech, MIT, Houston Museum of Natural Science, Oaxaca eclipse at Monte Albán, Edwards Air Force Base, UMinn, CAST, NSTA, several international conferences, including The International History & Philosophy of Science & Science Teaching Conferences in both Denver and Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and three weeks at FermiLab in Chicago.

Dan admired many scientists, artists, and composers like Einstein, Darwin, da Vinci, Kepler, Beethoven, Mozart, Van Gogh, and Vermeer, but probably his most loved and admired person of history was Galileo. Extremely interested and inspired by the works and life of Galileo, he even went so far as to become him in costume and teach classes and workshops as such. Dan and longtime colleague and friend, Robert Dennison, performed Galileo and Darwin together three times in a talk Dan cleverly named "Two Guys In Trouble With The Church" - once at the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT) conference, once at CAST (Conference for the Advancement of Science Teaching, which is the annual conference of the Science Teachers Association of Texas (STAT), and once at the NSTA annual conference (National Science Teachers Association).

Dan also portrayed Galileo in a one man show, directed by Elizabeth Crocker, his colleague, friend, and the theater teacher at Jersey Village. He always loved the creative outlet the theater offered and initially approached Crocker about needing help with costumes for the Galileo and Darwin characters. This eventually segued into him becoming a patron of the JV Players and, eventually, a director of his own shows. Dan relished flexing his creative muscles and spent his time choosing challenging, yet meaningful shows that he recalled fondly for years after they closed. He took great pride in connecting with and developing the actors and tech crews of his productions as he encouraged them to bring his vision to life. His debut as a director occurred in 2004 with *The Odyssey*. Some of his most memorable shows were *Camille*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *The Heiress*, *Amadeus*, *The Innocents*, *Death Takes a Holiday*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Gaslight*, *Akhmaton*, *The Uninvited*, *Anastasia*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Bad Seed*.

Dan began dating his future bride and mother of his children in 1979. They left

the snow and cold behind in Ohio and moved to Texas where they were married on October 11, 1980. The judge wore cowboy boots and their neighbors served as witnesses.

Dan was preceded in death by his parents, Joseph and Mary. His spirit lives on in his beloved wife of 45 years, Rebecca; his treasured daughters, Diana Grawe and her husband, Anastacio Bustamantes, and Kathryn Kutsko and her husband, Chris Mays; his loving sisters, Virginia (John) Lynch and Paula (Robert) Cahalin; and his incredible grandson, Shane. Family was ultimately the most important thing to him, and his unwavering devotion to them was obvious to all who knew him. Dan showed his love in a variety of ways, every year bringing home flowers that the Student Council was selling for Valentine's Day, one for each of his girls, or by setting each one of his daughters up with their first tool kit with everything they might need as they set out on their own for the first time. He and his sisters spoke regularly on the phone, still playful and teasing as siblings often are. But, being there when someone needed him was probably his greatest superpower.

Dan's curiosity for the world had no bounds – his interests were varied and widespread. A true Renaissance man, Dan had much enthusiasm for, in no particular order: tigers, baseball (the Astros and the Guardians), airplanes—especially WWII era aircraft, classical music, jazz, history, WWII, the Twilight Zone, classic movies, art deco, ancient civilizations, trivia, reading (especially biographies), science, and space. He was an incredibly proud Opa as he watched his grandson pitch in the Little League World Series this past August.

In his twenties, Dan dressed like Carl Sagan, although he was adamant that he had dressed like that before Carl Sagan made it his signature look. As he

got older he had an affinity for Hawaiian shirts and comfortable button downs. He loved his hats, from baseball, to newsboys, to his snappy Panama hat. He was stubborn and set in his ways; he embraced technology, but really disliked when phones or iPads would update and he would have to relearn how to use them with their new features; he complained when the MLB made it harder to watch the Astros games, refusing to sign up for AppleTV just to watch the games. He never threw anything away, and always attempted to fix something before replacing it. He was proud of his Slovak heritage and was disgruntled by the Texas “kolache” which any good Slovak knows is not a real kolache. He had a sweet tooth, with anything chocolate being his favorite. And his laugh – what a joyous sound! Dan’s humor was second to none and his one-offs were as good as anything you could find on Saturday Night Live or The Simpsons. And yet, with all his knowledge and humor, he was the most kind, gentle, and empathetic person, often going out of his way to help someone, just because. He cared deeply about others, about animals, about the Earth. His was a shoulder to cry on and an ear for listening. He was always there to celebrate with you and to grieve with you as well.

He made the world a better place, and through his students, colleagues, and family, his legacy lives on.

In lieu of flowers the family is encouraging donations in Dan’s name to the Panthera Foundation. Wild cats - especially tigers - were his favorite animals, and he would be honored to have contributions made for their conservation and care: <https://panthera.org/>

Tribute Wall

VW

“ There are very few teachers who leave an impact the way Mr. Kutsko did. He made physics genuinely fun, and he was so much more than a teacher—he was a source of encouragement, mentorship, and countless laughs. I don’t have many papers saved from high school, but I still have the coloring sheet and ribbon from the coloring contest of The Bezel of Holland that I won in his class. Like so many former Jersey Village students have shared, one of the highlights each year was receiving his cheerful birthday message. He will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

Valerie Grizzaffi Wilson - November 21, 2025 at 12:55 PM

JM

“ Dan and I became friends at Ursuline HS in Youngstown and remained so through college at YSU and after. We had so many memorable experiences through those years. He was an usher in my wedding and we saw each other often until we both left Youngstown. Years later we reconnected and would text or call several times a year. I will cherish those memories and I will miss his funny, often quirky texts.
Jack Murphy

Jack Murphy - November 13, 2025 at 02:32 PM

UT

“ Mr. Kutsko was simply amazing. He encouraged me to build a 3 foot model of a blimp, a blimp! After so much glue and weeks of cutting and pasting, we hoisted it up in his classroom ceiling. That was a proud moment. Thank you Mr. Kutsko, for pushing me to dream about limitless skies. Peace be with you.

Uyen Tran - November 13, 2025 at 12:18 PM

M(

“ *Odyssey of the Mind with him was one of the best moments of my life. He was one of a kind and will be missed.*

Melinda (Hanson) - November 13, 2025 at 10:39 AM

SN

“ *Just the best. Shaped my life and a true mentor and wisdom that still carries with me. Truly miss....to my favorite Galileo.*

Summer Nijjer - November 12, 2025 at 08:30 PM



“ *One of only two teachers I remember from High School, until now he contacted me every year on my birthday and about special events on Facebook. Physics class and the overall HS experience was so much better because of him!!*

Lou Franklin - November 12, 2025 at 05:44 PM

AS

“ *Just the best. My favorite teacher from Jersey Village. Was so grateful to have known him and to reconnect with him over the last few months. What a shock this is. His light will be missed. XOXO*

Adam Scott - November 12, 2025 at 04:10 PM

EC

“ *When thoughts of Dan enter my mind, laughter, passion for projects, and dedication to friends and family come to mind. One specific memory? Naw... it's more like one life-long memory of a human being and soul inside him!*

Elizabeth Crocker - November 12, 2025 at 03:10 PM