

In MEMORIAM

Community Mourns Passing of 3 Wordsmiths

Poet Amy Uyematsu, journalists William Hiroto, Martha Nakagawa die.

By P.C. Staff

William T. Hiroto, Amy Uyematsu and Martha Miiko Nakagawa — three Japanese Americans known for their facility with different genres of the written word — have died recently.

A journalist, Hiroto — who was born in Riverside, Calif., and died in Los Angeles on June 23 at 94 — was known by his friends and readers by the nickname “Wimp” and “Wimpy.” During the latter years of his life, he contributed a column titled “Crossroads to Somewhere” to the *Rafu Shimpo*. His last column appeared in the paper’s June 16 issue.

Prior to serving in the Army, Hiroto was incarcerated at the Poston WRA Center in Arizona during World War II. He later graduated from the University of Southern California with a journalism degree. In 2023, he was among of group of Japanese American military veterans who were recognized by USC for their military service.

During his stint as a *Rafu Shimpo* columnist, among the topics Hiroto wrote about was his journey from living independently to becoming a resident of the Keiro Retirement Home, later named Sakura Gardens, part of the re-named former Keiro facilities after its sale to Pacifica Cos.

Hiroto was predeceased by his wife, Margaret; and brother, Edwin Hiroto. He is survived by his sons, Russell (Jill) Hiroto and Jeffrey (Carol) Hiroto; brother, Donald (Betty) Hiroto; five grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews.



An award-winning poet and Culver City, Calif., resident, Uyematsu died June 23 after battling cancer for two years. She was 75.

Uyematsu was born and raised in Southern California after her parents were released from incarceration at the Manzanar (California) and Gila River (Arizona) War Relocation Centers.

A Sansei, Uyematsu authored six poetry books: 1992’s “30 Miles from J-Town,” for which she won the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize; 1997’s “Nights of Fire, Nights of Rain”; 2005’s “Stone Bow Prayer”; 2015’s “The Yellow Door”; 2016’s “Basic Vocabulary”; and 2022’s “That Blue Trickster



Uyematsu

Time” (2022).

Prior to that, she authored a seminal essay titled “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America” that appeared in the newspaper *Gidra* in 1969 (see tinyurl.com/3ua38jxh). She also contributed to “Roots: An Asian American Reader,” a seminal textbook used in Asian American studies programs.

After graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, she taught that subject for more than three decades in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Mary Uyematsu Kao reflected on her sister’s “superachiever” life. In an email to the *Pacific Citizen*, Kao wrote: “As years went by, her movement activism found a loving home in the poetry community. Her voice was uplifted, and a symbiotic love created the legacy she has left us with today — her six poetry books and the historic front-runner of Asian American texts — ‘Roots: An Asian American Reader.’

“‘Roots’ was used by Asian American students all over the country as the basis for starting Asian American Studies at their college campuses,” Kao continued. “‘Roots’ went through 19 printings. While Amy (Tachiki) shared co-editor status with Eddie Wong, Franklin Odo and Buck Wong, Amy was the driving force to see the project to completion as the UCLA Asian American Studies Center’s first publications coordinator.”

In 2012, the Friends of the Little Tokyo Branch Library honored Uyematsu for her contributions to the Japanese American community as a writer.

Uyematsu’s survivors include her husband, Raul Contreras; son, Chris Tachiki; mother, Elsie Umatsu Osajima; and sister, Mary Uyematsu Kao.



Nakagawa, 56, died on July 28 in Los Angeles less than two weeks after visiting the hospital for what she thought was a lingering stomach flu. She received the

diagnosis of cancer on July 16 — her birthday.

“She was in total shock. She did not see that coming at all,” said her childhood friend, Marie Morohoshi, regarding Nakagawa’s reaction to the medical results. She added that Nakagawa had a recent mammogram and at that time there were no early indications of cancer.



Nakagawa

PHOTO: MARIO REYES

Nakagawa’s journalism career included a five-year stint at *Pacific Citizen* (October 1998-June 2003) as assistant editor, as well as working on staff at *Asian Week* and *Rafu Shimpo*. She also contributed to *Hawaii Herald*, *Nikkei West*, *Nichi Bei Times* and *Hokubei Mainichi*. According to *Pacific Citizen* Editorial Board Chair John Saito Jr., Nakagawa also worked in the *P.C.*’s circulation department circa 1989.

Describing Nakagawa as “a great reporter, hard-working and very productive,” Colorado-based Gil Asakawa, who served as the *Pacific Citizen* Editorial Board chair during a period that overlapped with her stint with the paper, he said, “My recollection is that she was a good, diligent journalist whose voice was important to the *P.C.*, and I enjoyed her stuff in all the other publications.”

Nakagawa was a graduate of Gardena High School and Stanford University and was the only child of Shigako Nakagawa, a Shin Issei, and Akio “Lawrence” Nakagawa, a Kibei Nisei born in the Sacramento Delta region of California.

Author and novelist Naomi Hirahara, when she was editor of *Rafu Shimpo*, hired Nakagawa in the 1990s before her stint at the *Pacific Citizen*. “There was an opportunity to hire someone, and that’s when I hired Martha because

she was fully bilingual,” she said.

For Nakagawa, writing about and reporting on marginalized, overlooked, underserved, unpopular, unrecognized and disenfranchised individuals and communities within the larger Japanese American community was a constant theme for her interest in journalism.

There were times, however, when Nakagawa’s pursuit of those stories did not endear her to some within the JA community. In a 2021 video interview conducted by *Nichi Bei Weekly* Editor-in-Chief Kenji Taguma of another Nikkei community journalist, Takeshi Nakayama, and Nakagawa, she recalled the flak she encountered regarding some of the articles she wrote.

“When I started writing about the draft resisters at the *Pacific Citizen*, I started getting phone calls and office visits from JACL members who were staunchly against apologizing to the draft resisters,” Nakagawa recalled in the video.

Frank Abe, himself a journalist, documentarian, graphic novel writer and cultural critic, told the *Pacific Citizen*, “I still can’t believe she’s gone.” Though “devastated” by her death and the loss of her “encouragement, support and the loss of all the work that she still had ahead of her,” he took some solace that “her work will be long remembered.”

Writer Barbara Takei, an officer of the nonprofit Tule Lake Committee, described Nakagawa as “very gutsy” and “courageous” for “using her skills and her talent to tell the stories” of resisters and others.

Nakagawa was predeceased by her parents and is survived by her friends, life partners and many relatives in Japan.

At 11 a.m. on Aug. 27, a celebration of life service for Nakagawa is scheduled to take place at Fukui Mortuary, 707 E. Temple St., Los Angeles, with a reception to follow.

Portland, Ore.’s Homer Yasui Has Died

Hood River, Ore.-born Homer Yasui of Portland, Ore., died July 25. He was 98. A Nisei, Yasui was the eighth of nine children born to Issei immigrants Shidzuyo and Masuo Yasui. He was an active JACLer and a member of the Portland JACL Chapter.

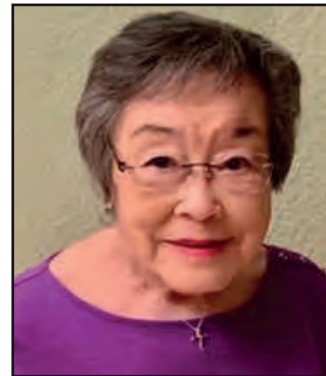
He was predeceased by his wife,

Miki; his son, Allen; and his siblings. He is survived by his daughters, Barbara and Meredith, and son, John, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.

(Editor’s Note: A longer story about Homer Yasui will appear in a future issue of the Pacific Citizen.)

TRIBUTE

ADA HONDA



Ada Honda, age 102, passed away peacefully surrounded by her three daughters on May 16, 2023, at Provident Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, Wash. She was born on Nov. 13, 1920, to Kimiji Ichikawa and Chika Mizuhara in Walla Walla, Wash.

Ada was the youngest of three; her siblings were Tom and Mary. She graduated from Walla Walla High School in 1938, wanting to go to nursing school but her application

was denied due to her race. Instead, she worked as an optical technician for Riggs Optical Co. in Walla Walla and later worked in the Yamauchi family restaurant in Pasco, Wash., during World War II.

On June 17, 1947, Ada married Harry Yoshiteru Honda from Yakima, Wash., and they moved to Spokane. Together they raised Marcia, Rhona, and Karla. After the girls grew older she worked for Spokane District 81 from 1964-1985. Her gift was working with young children with special needs. She worked at the Cerebral Palsy School, Garland Elementary School for the Neurological and Orthopedically Handicapped, and at Linwood Elementary School for the Hearing Impaired in the Oral Program.

In 1984-85 Ada was honored by educators and district personnel as the staffer of the year. In 1985, she retired so she could spend more time with her husband and grandchildren. After celebrating their 54th anniversary, Harry passed away in 2001. As a member of Highland Park United Methodist Church, Ada was the Community Care and Social chairman. She actively expressed her love and concern for others by visiting homes and hospitals, making phone calls, and later, texting her family and friends. She was also involved in the Volunteers of America Crosswalk program and the Spokane Chapter Japanese American Citizen League.

Ada’s bright beautiful smile, loving eyes and “unbelievable” memory will be forever missed, especially by her three daughters, seven grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, extended family and friends.

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