

NOTABLE 2023 LOSSES

of Japanese Americans

Sam Araki

Born to Misano and Sakai Araki and incarcerated at the Poston WRA Center in Arizona during WWII, Araki would go on to become the executive vp of Lockheed Corp. Missiles & Space Systems Group and president of Lockheed-Martin Missiles and Space.

Minoru "Sam" Araki of Saratoga, Calif., died Aug. 22. He was 92.

Trained as a mechanical engineer at Stanford University, where he also earned a master's degree, Araki was responsible for the development of the Corona satellite system, which was used for surveillance and reconnaissance during the Cold War. Corona is considered "the single most important source of intelligence on Soviet strategic forces."

Araki received the Von Braun Award for Excellence in Space Program Management and was a National Academy of Engineering Draper Prize winner. He was an Asian American Engineer of the Year. The National Reconnaissance Office named him a Pioneer of National Reconnaissance. Post-Lockheed, Araki started ST-Infonox Inc. and helped found Ecopia Farms.



PHOTO: KEVIN DEREK

Fumio Demura

The Yokohama, Japan-born karateka helped spread the martial art of karate to the United States and the rest of the world. Fumio Demura's role as a karate ambassador began after he moved to the United States in 1965, when he established a karate dōjō in Southern California.

Fumio Demura died April 24. He was 82.

He gained recognition among karate students by appearing on the cover of more than 60 different martial arts magazines and as the author of several books on karate and *kobudō* or traditional martial arts weapons such as *sai*, *bō*, *tonfa* (aka *tuiifa*) and *nunchaku*, the last of which was popularized by cinematic martial arts superstar Bruce Lee. It was Demura who taught Lee how to use the weapon.

Demura had his own movie career, most significantly and mostly unbeknownst to the wider world, as Pat Morita's stunt double for the role of Mr. Miyagi in the original four "Karate Kid" movies. In February 2023, Black Belt magazine honored him for his 75 years of martial arts activity. (Demura began training in the martial arts at age 9.) The magazine

also named him its instructor of the year in 1969 and martial artist of the year in 1975. He was twice honored as a member of Black Belt's Hall of Fame.

Randy Hagihara

The journalist, who began his stint at the *Los Angeles Times* in 1990, would spend more than 20 years at the paper before retiring in 2011. During his time at there, he was the senior editor of recruitment and in charge of what was then known as Metpro, its minority-recruitment program.

Randy Hagihara died Jan. 7 in Huntington Beach, Calif. He was 72.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, his entrée into a career in journalism came by way of working with Sacramento, Calif.-based investigative journalist K. W. Lee in the late 1970s via his ahead-of-the-curve startup newspaper, *Koreatown Weekly*.

Randy Hagihara was predeceased by Janet, his wife of more than 40 years, and stepson Ian Kawata.

William Hirota

A journalist, William Hirota was born in Riverside, Calif., and 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.

William Hirota died June 23 in Los Angeles. He was 94.

Prior to serving in the Army, Hirota 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.

Hirota was predeceased by his wife, Margaret; and brother, Edwin Hirota. He is survived by his sons, Russell (Jill) Hirota and Jeffrey (Carol) Hirota.



Fujima Kansuma

Born Sumako Hamaguchi in San Francisco on May 9, 1918, Kansuma dedicated her life to teaching classical Japanese dance to several generations of students. Her decades of activity included serving in 2018 as the choreographer at age 100 for the Nisei Week Parade in Little Tokyo.

Fujima Kansuma died Feb. 22.

She was 104.

Hamaguchi's pursuit of learning classical Japanese dance continued when the family moved to Los Angeles and, after graduating from high school, Japan, where her kabuki dance teachers were Onoe Kikugoro VI and Fujima Kanjuro VI, who would later give Hamaguchi her *natori* or professional name, Kansuma.

After returning to the United States in 1940, Kansuma opened her first dance studio in Los Angeles and would later add more classes in other municipalities in L.A. County.

When the United States and Japan went to war, Kansuma's family and she would be held at the Rohwer WRA Center in Arkansas. She was nevertheless allowed to visit different camps to perform. Kansuma was recognized with the Order of the Precious Crown, Apricot, by the Japanese government in 1985 and the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1987.

She is survived by her daughter, Miyako Tachibana, son-in-law Noriyoshi Tachibana, and grandchildren Jonathan Tachibana, Taizo Tachibana and Miwa Tachibana.



Martha Nakagawa

Less than two weeks after visiting the hospital for what she thought was a lingering stomach flu, journalist Martha Nakagawa received a cancer diagnosis on July 16 — her birthday.

Martha Nakagawa died July 28 in Los Angeles. She was 56.

"She was in total shock," said her childhood friend, Marie Morohoshi, regarding Nakagawa's reaction to the medical results.

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*.

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.

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

To read a tribute to Martha Nakagawa written by Philip Tajitsu Nash, visit tinyurl.com/mwz5nb36.



Albert Okura

The founder of the Juan Pollo restaurant chain, Albert Ryo Okura in his book "Albert Okura The Chicken Man: With a 50 Year Plan" wrote: "My destiny in life is to sell more chicken than anyone in the world."

Albert Okura died Jan. 27, 2023, in Ontario, Calif. He was 71.

The Juan Pollo restaurant chain would expand to 25 restaurants, most located in Southern California's Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with a much smaller number in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

For Okura, it was all about the selling "the best tasting chicken," a phrase he trademarked — and selling rotisserie chicken would become his focus from age 32, when he founded his first Juan Pollo in Ontario, Calif.

Okura was predeceased by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Sella; sons, Kyle and Aaron, and daughter, Chloe; siblings, Robert Okura, Amy (Ray) Pong and Susan (Andy) Hoffman; and a niece and a nephew.



Fred Oyama

The California-born eldest son of the five offspring of Kohide and Kajiro Oyama, he had a 35-year career as a mathematics teacher at Los Angeles Unified School District schools, among them John Adams, Audubon, Stephen White and South Gate. With a parent, he took on the state's Alien Land Law that barred "persons ineligible to become citizens of the United States" from owning land in the 1948 Supreme Court case *Oyama v. California*.

Fred Oyama died Sept. 20 in Huntington Beach, Calif. He was 97.

In what was a common practice among Japanese Issei farmers — who were then precluded

from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens by the racially discriminatory laws of the time — Kajiro Oyama purchased farmland in Chula Vista, Calif., in the name of son Fred Oyama, who was a U.S. citizen by virtue of having been born in California.

In 1944, San Diego County, however, attempted to seize ownership of the Oyama land by escheat, claiming that Kohide and Kajiro Oyama had perpetrated "fraud upon the People of the State of California" by deeding the land to their son, thus "willfully, knowingly and with the intent to violate the Alien Land Law."

When JACL learned of legal action against the Oyamas, JACL President Saburo Kido, working from Salt Lake City, persuaded Kohide Oyama to sue California over the legality of Alien Land Law. In 1946, the California Supreme Court unanimously upheld a trial court's decision in favor of reverting ownership of the Oyama land to the state, essentially ruling that the land was never legally owned by the Oyamas.

In the writ of certiorari that requested the U.S. Supreme Court review the case, attorney Al Wirrin helped write the following: "The Alien Land Law ... deprives Fred Oyama, a citizen, of the equal protection of the laws and of the privileges and immunities of a citizen."

The high court rendered its decision on Jan. 19, 1948: Although the Alien Land Law was not invalidated, the majority found that Fred Oyama's rights had been violated. As for the state's Alien Land Law, even though it remained on the books until 1956, according to Mark Brilliant's 2010 book "The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978," the law's "enforceability had been dealt a crippling blow," thus bringing to a close most of the pending escheat cases that involved transfers of land from Issei parents to U.S. citizen offspring. This, thanks to the Oyama case, for which Fred Oyama took great pride.

He is survived by his second wife, Phyllis McGrath Oyama; his son, Pat Oyama; daughter-in-law Janice Oyama; daughters Jill Wong and Phyllis Oyama; sons-in-law Brian Wong and Lee Townsend; his stepdaughter, Lori Evans Matsumoto and her husband Stacy Matsumoto. He leaves behind his grandchildren Nathan Wong and his wife, Isabelle; Will Wong; Eva Townsend, Kyle Oyama and his wife, Rachelle; Eli Townsend; Kenny Oyama and Kalani Oyama. He had recently celebrated the arrival of his first great-granddaughter, Selah Oyama.



Minoru Tonai

A son of Issei immigrants Toyone and Gengoro Tonai, Tonai was born in San Pedro, Calif.,