

# NOTABLE 2025 LOSSES

## DWIGHT CHUMAN (77)

One of the six founding members of Asian American Journalists Assn. in 1981 when he was the editor-in-chief of the *Rafu Shimpo's* English section, Dwight Chuman died July 25 at his home in Los Angeles. The websites [gunviolencearchive.org](http://gunviolencearchive.org) and [crimesolvers-central.com](http://crimesolvers-central.com) indicate that the cause of death was a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His journalism career began at *Gidra*, the alt-Asian American newspaper, prior to being hired by *Rafu Shimpo* English-section Editor-in-Chief Ellen Endo.

"I felt he was a gifted writer," Endo told the *Pacific Citizen*. "He was kind of a free thinker and sometimes that was a good thing."

Following Endo's departure, Chuman became the paper's editor-in-chief. During his tenure, when the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians held regional hearings in Washington, D.C., Chuman traveled to the nation's capital to testify on July 16, 1981, and, according to a report in the July 31, 1981, edition of *Pacific Citizen*, asked the CWRIC to "investigate certain JACL leaders, such as Mike Masaoka, in regards to their role in the Evacuation" (see [tinyurl.com/mv9e-zuac](http://tinyurl.com/mv9e-zuac)). After 10 years at *Rafu Shimpo*, Chuman would abruptly leave in the early 1980s. According to AAJA, post-*Rafu Shimpo*, Chuman found employment at KCET, the Los Angeles PBS affiliate and later published a Las Vegas leisure magazine; in 2022 was inducted into AAJA's Hall of Fame.

## FRANK CHUMAN (105)

With having served as JACL national president from 1960-62 among his many accomplishments, attorney Frank Fumio Chuman was reported in the Nov. 14 *New York Times* as having died on May 23, 2022.

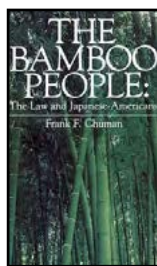
Chuman's death came a little more than seven weeks after he and some

35 other University of Southern California students who had been summarily expelled after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor solely because of their Japanese ancestry received honorary diplomas from the university in 2022. At 104 and residing in Bangkok, he was likely the only Trojan still alive during the April 1 ceremony. He turned 105 on April 29 (see April 15, 2022 *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/2s3mk23z](http://tinyurl.com/2s3mk23z)).

After graduating as valedictorian from Los Angeles High School in 1934, Chuman attended and graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1938 before enrolling in USC's law school in 1940. After the United States declared war on Japan, however, and everyone of Japanese ancestry living in Washington, Oregon and California would be forced into concentration camps, Chuman was sent to the Manzanar War Relocation Center and became its hospital's head administrator.

According to Densho, Chuman initially signed "no-no" to Questions 27 and 28 of the infamous loyalty questionnaire, an action that he was able to have withdrawn after much effort so that he could leave the camp in 1943 to resume his postgraduate endeavors. He completed his law degree at the University of Maryland.

Referring to two successful 1948 Supreme Court cases involving Japanese American litigants — *Oyama v. California* and *Takahashi v. Fish & Game Commission* — for which Chuman prepared the briefs, San Francisco-based attorney Dale Minami called him a "pioneer civil rights lawyer for Japanese Americans." He added that Chuman made "enormous contributions to Asian Americans and the law in terms of both his civil rights work in Los Angeles, and 'Bamboo People' and some of the other things he's written," a reference to Chuman's "The Bamboo People: The Law and Japanese-Americans" (1976) and "Man-



zanar and Beyond: Memoirs of Frank F. Chuman, Nisei Attorney" (2011).

Prior to being elected JACL national president, Chuman had served as the League's legal counsel from 1953-60. It was during his stint as JACL national president that he initiated the creation of the Japanese American Research Project, or JARP, at UCLA.

Many narratives, including his own, credit Chuman for having originated the idea of using the arcane legal procedure writ of error *coram nobis*, which he learned of as a student at University of Maryland, to revisit the three failed Supreme Court cases of Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu and Minoru Yasui challenging various aspects of the government's orders to remove and incarcerate U.S. citizens and legal aliens of Japanese ancestry who were then ineligible for naturalization.

Minami, who was a member of one of the three *coram nobis* legal teams (for Korematsu), however, credits legal historian Peter Irons for the origination of the idea of utilizing the legal tactic for revisiting those cases because Irons, who was a conscientious objector, had already used *coram nobis* when had been convicted of selective service violation. Minami told the *Pacific Citizen*, "I don't want to diminish his [Chuman's] accomplishments, but I do have to intercede when he claims credit."

Chuman nevertheless did provide an invaluable service with regard to the revisitation of the SCOTUS cases: According to Minami, Chuman, as Yasui's attorney, "bulked up our credibility with Min Yasui," who was initially skeptical about the legal team that had been assembled to revisit his case. Getting all three men on board with regard to reviving the cases was critical, Minami said, in order to make the biggest impact. Chuman, after visiting with the teams, vouched for them with Yasui. "Frank apparently reported to Min that these folks are really good, so you shouldn't have any problem," Minami said.

Chuman is survived by his widow, Donna; their daughter, Diana Heyd; and sons from his first marriage, Daniel and Paul.

## NANCY MATSUI (73)

A Torrance, Calif.-born resident of La Palma, Calif., and a Sansei, Nancy Ellen Matsui, who had a 40-year-long career with American Airlines and was also very active in the Japanese American community, died Oct. 12.

The Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, the board on which she served for more than 29 years, issued the

following statement: "Nancy devoted much time and energy to ensure the success of many of the JACCC's fundraising events, reaching out and engaging others in the process. ... No one can forget her many kindnesses."

In addition to her decades of service with the JACCC, Matsui was also active with such organizations as Japanese American National Museum, U.S.-Japan Council, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Cypress College and Little Tokyo Service Center.

Matsui is survived by her husband, Glenn; their sons, Eric and Ryan; sisters, Karen (David) Thompson and Ginny Suruki; and many nieces, nephews and other relatives.

## YOSH NAKAMURA (100)

A civilian-turned-soldier who became an artist, educator and school administrator following his World War II service in M Co. of the valorous 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team, Yoshio "Yosh" Nakamura died Nov. 22.

Nakamura's death came just five months after his 100th birthday, which was celebrated at a standing-room-only party at the Liberty Community Plaza in his hometown of Whittier, Calif. (see Oct. 31, 2025, *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/fxrx254p](http://tinyurl.com/fxrx254p)).

Regarding his death, the Go for Broke National Education Center stated: "We extend our deepest gratitude to Yosh for everything he gave — during the war, after the war and in every moment he chose to stand up and speak out. He will be profoundly missed."

A lifelong San Gabriel Valley native — born in Rosemead, raised in El Monte and as an adult, a resident of Whittier — during WWII, Nakamura and his family were forcibly evacuated and incarcerated at Arizona's Gila River War Relocation Center, where he enlisted in the Army and was subsequently assigned to the segregated 442nd RCT. He was awarded a Bronze Star and in 2011, was among Nisei veterans who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

While serving in Italy, he was inspired by the historic works of art he was able to view, and postwar, Nakamura attended the University of Southern California, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in fine art.

Nakamura's teaching career began as a Whittier High School teacher, and in 1963, he was hired as Rio Hondo College's first professor and later, its first Fine Arts Department chair, spending nearly three decades there. Other roles he had included dean and vp of community services and institutional development. In 2024, Whittier High School's Fine Arts building was named in his honor.

Nakamura was predeceased in 2017 by his wife, Grace Shinoda Nakamura. He is survived by his children, Linda, Daniel and Joel, and grandchildren.

## GEORGE SUGIMOTO (99)

An entrepreneur-turned-philanthropist who founded a successful avionics company with facilities in the California cities of Arcadia and Upland, Kazuo George Sugimoto died Oct. 12 in Pasadena.

Decades before KGS Electronics became the successful avionics company that supplied equipment to the

likes of Cessna Aircraft and Boeing Aerospace, Sugimoto was born in Parlier, Calif., the youngest among eight other siblings. As a result of Executive Order 9066, his family and he were incarcerated at Arizona's Gila River WRA Center. He joined the Army in 1945, served in Korea and afterward attended Chicago's American Institute of Television Technology. After earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, he became an entrepreneur and later started what became KGS Electronics.

As a supporter of the Japanese American community, Sugimoto was active with the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, Go for Broke National Education Center and Japanese American National Museum.

Sugimoto was predeceased by his wife, Ruri Hirano. He is survived by their children, Lisa (Donald) Nose and Nathan (Christine) Sugimoto; grandchildren, Lindsay, Alyssa (Jackson), Aaron and Garrett; and nieces, nephews and other relatives.

## CARY TAGAWA (75)

Boasting a nearly 40-yearlong career that encompassed big and small screens, as well as video game voiceover, actor and martial artist Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, who was often cast in roles calling for elegant malevolence or moral ambiguity, died Dec. 4 in Santa Barbara, Calif., from complications from a stroke.

The son of a Hawaii-born Japanese American stationed in postwar Japan and Japanese war bride, Tagawa had a peripatetic upbringing as a military dependent. After moving to California, he attended the University of Southern California but would become best-known for his role as Shang Tsung in 1995's "Mortal Kombat" and its offshoots.

Tagawa caught his big break in the 1987 epic movie "The Last Emperor," followed in 1989 with a role in the James Bond pic "Licence to Kill." Other movie appearances include "Rising Sun," "Picture Bride," "American Me," "Pearl Harbor" and "Memoirs of a Geisha." He also appeared in "The Slanted Screen: Asian Men in Film & Television," the 2006 documentary by Jeff Adachi.

On the small screen, Tagawa appeared in "Miami Vice" and reunited later with that show's star, Don Johnson, for a few seasons of "Nash Bridges." He also appeared on the Prime Video series "The Man in the High Castle." He showed a less-scowling side of his onscreen persona in the Disney TV movie "Johnny Tsunami."

Tagawa is survived by his ex-wife, Sally Phillips; and their children, Calen, Brynne and Cana; and two grandchildren.

## OTHER NOTABLES

*Note: Use the hyperlinks to view the entire news article.*

- Todd Endo ([tinyurl.com/mv862ce6](http://tinyurl.com/mv862ce6))
- Art Hansen ([tinyurl.com/4n9f77p7](http://tinyurl.com/4n9f77p7))
- Jeanne Houston ([tinyurl.com/2h85wv2k](http://tinyurl.com/2h85wv2k))
- K. W. Lee ([tinyurl.com/4y85wy9a](http://tinyurl.com/4y85wy9a))
- David Lin ([tinyurl.com/8r45zp6u](http://tinyurl.com/8r45zp6u))
- K. Mochizuki ([tinyurl.com/32uvf7vd](http://tinyurl.com/32uvf7vd))
- R. Nakamura ([tinyurl.com/4rty9ebs](http://tinyurl.com/4rty9ebs))
- Karl Nobuyuki ([tinyurl.com/ysr72czv](http://tinyurl.com/ysr72czv))
- Mario Reyes ([tinyurl.com/3yaphu7z](http://tinyurl.com/3yaphu7z))
- Kanji Sahara ([tinyurl.com/4648rh4r](http://tinyurl.com/4648rh4r))
- Keith Terasaki ([tinyurl.com/uvv3cvkj](http://tinyurl.com/uvv3cvkj))

## TRIBUTE

### AGNES M. UCHIDA

Agnes Mizuho Uchida died peacefully at her home in South Pasadena, Calif., on Nov. 2, 2025, at the age of 93.

Agnes was born on Oct. 23, 1932. In 1952, she married Joe Uchida. They went on to have three children. Over the course of her life, she was an artist and landscaper, a home gardener, an avid reader, a terrific cook and followed every Dodger and USC Trojans game. Agnes was a friend to many in the community of South Pasadena and beyond. She will be dearly missed.

She is survived by her three children — Alan, Craig and Naomi (John Foley); three grandchildren — Maria (Ted Pleiman), Jennifer (Jeff Franklin) and Melinda (Sergio Camarena); three great-grandchildren — Cora, Lucy and Nicole; and numerous nephews and nieces.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that you consider making a donation in her name to: Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute ([pjci.org/about/](http://pjci.org/about/)), 595 Lincoln Ave. #202, Pasadena, CA 91103; and the Japanese American National Museum ([janm.org/give/](http://janm.org/give/)), 100 N. Central Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

### PLACE A TRIBUTE

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