

MEMORIAM

Longtime P.C. Columnist Marsha Aizumi Dies

Author-advocate sought understanding, acceptance between communities.

Marsha Aizumi, whose life's mission became one of turning "shame, grief and fear" into understanding, acceptance and support of individuals dealing with sexual and gender identity issues, died Dec. 18, 2025, in Duarte, Calif., from an infection that followed stem cell treatment to counteract the rare form of leukemia she was diagnosed with last March. She was 78.

Aizumi penned the long-running *Pacific Citizen* column "A Mother's Take," in which she documented her journey as a speaker, organizer and leader of groups and events in support of those in the LGBTQIA+ and transgender com-

munities — especially within the Asian American and Asian community context — and their inter-familial relationships, and mused over interactions with people she encountered along that path. (To read the archive of her columns, visit tinyurl.com/3rr5ahp5.)

With her son, Aidan Aizumi, she also co-authored the memoir "Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son, and Their

Journey to Love and Acceptance."

Marsha Aizumi in 2014 founded Okaeri, a Nikkei LGBTQ+ community organization that



TRIBUTE

MARSHA AIZUMI



Marsha (Ogino) Aizumi was a beloved wife, mother, educator and activist, and a pillar of love, strength and acceptance. Born on May 28, 1947, in Cleveland, Ohio, Marsha was known for her courage, integrity and fierce love for her family, as well as the way she consistently showed up for others.

Marsha peacefully passed away on Dec. 18, 2025, in Duarte, Calif.

She shared 53 wonderful years of marriage with her husband, Robert (Tad) Aizumi. Their life together was built on commitment, mutual respect and standing side-by-side through change, challenge and joy. From everyday moments to shared adventures, like disco dancing, they created a home grounded in care, honesty and deep devotion to family.

Marsha was a devoted mother to her sons, Aidan and Stefen, a loving mother-in-law to Aidan's wife, Mary. She was a caring presence in the lives of those her children loved, including Stefen's girlfriend, Catherine. Being a mother was one of her greatest sources of pride and purpose. She believed deeply in listening, learning and loving fully, even when it required growth or courage.

Naturally funny and playful, Marsha brought warmth and light into the lives of those around her. She was always game for an adventure, loved to dance, especially disco, and never turned down a sweet treat. Her humor, curiosity and openness made people feel at ease and welcome.

Marsha's advocacy grew from love and lived experience. She became a respected leader within LGBTQIA+ and Asian Pacific Islander communities, offering education, support and hope to families navigating their own journeys. She was the founder of Okaeri and a co-founder of the PFLAG San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Islander Chapter, creating spaces rooted in compassion, understanding, and belonging.

She co-authored "Two Spirits, One Heart," a memoir that shared her family's journey navigating Aidan's transition with honesty and heart, and continues to support parents, families and allies learning how to accept and love more fully.

Marsha is survived by her husband, Robert Tadashi Aizumi; her son, Aidan, and his wife, Mary; and her son, Stefen, and his girlfriend, Catherine. She is also remembered by extended family, chosen family and a wide community of friends, colleagues and loved ones whose lives were shaped by her kindness, courage and care.

A public Celebration of Life will be held on Jan. 31, 2026, at Centenary United Methodist Church at 11 a.m. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in her memory to Okaeri (Little Tokyo Service Center) or PFLAG Pasadena, or PFLAG San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Islander.

in November 2025 became a program of the Little Tokyo Service Center. In a statement to the LTSC, Aidan Aizumi said, "My mom lived her life rooted in love, advocacy, and deep care for others. She touched countless lives through her kindness and courage, and her legacy will continue through the people she inspired. Thank you for the outpouring of love and support

during this time."

JANM President and CEO Ann Burroughs said, "JANM is deeply saddened by the loss of Marsha Aizumi. ... Her legacy of connection and inclusivity will continue to inspire future generations."

Aizumi was born in Cleveland, Ohio, after her parents were released from incarceration in an American concentration camp for Japanese Americans. The family returned to California when she was 5, settling in Temple City, Calif. Years later, after meeting and marrying her husband, Robert T. Aizumi, they decided to start a family. Due to difficulties with conception, they would adopt a daughter from Japan, and later, a son, Stefen.

It was their first child's eventual challenges with sexual and

gender identity that would lead her to come out as a lesbian and then go on a journey to become a male named Aidan. This, in turn, reoriented Aizumi on a life- and priority-altering path of her own.

It would also affect Robert Aizumi. "It kind of blew my mind, and it took me time to understand what was happening," he told *Pacific Citizen*. He praised his late wife, saying, "Her heart was open to everybody. She goes around and creates new friends. It was amazing to me."

In addition to being survived by her husband, Robert, and Aidan and his wife, Mary, Marsha is also survived by son, Stefen, and his girlfriend, and her brother, Paul Ogino, and his wife, Arlene. She was predeceased by her brother, Martin Ogino. ■

News Briefs

S.F.: Manslaughter, Not Murder, for Attacker of 84-Year-Old Thai man

A jury has found Antoine Watson, who as a 19-year-old in 2021 attacked Vicha Ratanapakdee in the city's Anza Vista neighborhood and which subsequently resulted in the 84-year-old Thai immigrant's death, guilty of involuntary manslaughter and assault with force likely to produce great bodily harm. Many in the local community believe that the attack was racially motivated and that a first- or second-degree murder verdict was warranted.

City of Philadelphia Sues Over Park's Slave Memorial Removal

The lawsuit against Interior Secretary Doug Burum and acting National Park Service Director Jessica Bowron comes after the NPS removed exhibits in Independence National Historical Parks' President's Home site — where George Washington lived when the city was the nation's capital — commemorating nine slaves owned by the nation's first president. The suit seeks to halt the display's permanent removal.

JANM Taps New Board Members

The Japanese American National Museum has announced the addition of former IBM executive Ford Fujii to its board of trustees and artist Glenn Kaino, former Hawaii Gov. David Ige and former Nikken Global President and CEO Toshizo "Tom" Watanabe to its JANM board of governors. JANM Board of Trustees Chair Bill Fujioka said, "We look forward to working with them to tell the full story of the Japanese American community . . . and honor the legacy of generations who came before us."

— P.C. Staff

TRIBUTE

DOLLY OGATA



Dolly Ogata, age 103, of Riverside, Calif., passed away on Dec. 17, 2025, at Coastal Haven Living in Murrieta, Calif. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Dr. Gen Ogata.

Born on May 25, 1922, in Seattle, Wash. Her parents had emigrated from Japan in the early 1900s and started a farm outside of Seattle. Dolly attended high school and later a private business school. Early in her career, she worked as a legal secretary for a young Nisei attorney. When WWII began, she moved to Montana and then eventually to Minnesota, so she was able to avoid being placed in a Japanese relocation camp. In the summer of 1946, Dolly married Gen Ogata who had returned from the war as a member of the renowned 442. She and Gen stayed in Minnesota while Gen finished his Ph.D. They moved to Riverside in 1954 where Gen accepted a job with the U.S.D.A. Salinity Lab.

In 1967, she took a job with the YMCA where she worked for 20 years. Besides her job, Dolly was quite active with the school PTA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, First Congregational Church and Riverside JACL.

Dolly and Gen were proud charter members of Riverside JACL. The Ogata family shared many treasured memories through Sendai Festivals, community picnics and scholarship dinners. Dolly served for many years on the Riverside JACL board of directors and remained an active, dedicated and supportive member throughout her life.

Dolly found great joy in caring for her family and home. She loved baking fresh bread and was especially known for her generous Christmas cookie plates, filled with a wide assortment of homemade treats. She also cherished preparing and hosting her annual Japanese New Year's Day Open House and cooking traditional family holiday meals. A devoted pet owner, Dolly was famous for spoiling her miniature beagle, Dusty, with an ever-present buffet of dog treats and goodies.

A memorial service will be held on Jan. 31, 2026, at 11 a.m. at the First Congregational Church, located at 3504 Mission Inn Ave., Riverside, CA 92501.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation made to Riverside JACL for the Gen & Dolly Ogata Memorial Scholarship. For more information, please contact Riverside JACL President, Michiko Yoshimura at michyosh677@gmail.com.

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