

Kyoko Oda Dead at 80

Lifelong educator sought reconciliation, harmony.

By P.C. Staff

Some knew her as Mrs. Oda. To others, she was Principal Oda. To her friends, depending on where she was during her 80-plus years of life, she was Nancy; to others, Kyoko. It mattered not. As William Shakespeare wrote, “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

So it was for Kyoko Nancy Oda, who died May 15, just days short of her 81st birthday. By any name, she was formidable yet approachable, resolute yet understanding, a reflection of the meaning of her given name when she was born on May 20, 1945.

In a video played at the 2024 Day of Remembrance in Los Angeles, Oda said: “When I was born, my father wrote a poem that said: ‘At this moment, the world is in chaos and the future is unknown. It is critical for the world and the family to be united as one and cooperate in harmony. Therefore, I name this baby Kyoko.’ Kyoko means harmony. So that poem has given me purpose to bring people together in peace.”

As an educator whose 32-year-long career included teaching and serving as a school principal in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Oda also found purpose in uplifting others. One of her former students, Vivien Lou Chen, recalled in her LinkedIn account how, as a sixth-grader, she was bused to Riverside Drive Elementary School in Sherman Oaks, Calif. “Without Mrs. Oda, I would never have made it out

of the barrio in East Hollywood, gone to college or had a career in journalism. She served as my first bridge toward a better life.”

Born in the waning months of World War II to Yuriko and Tatsuo Inouye when they were incarcerated at an American concentration camp for ethnic Japanese that came to be known as the Tule Lake Segregation Center, Oda would dedicate a big portion of her life’s later years toward shining a light on lesser-known aspects of the Japanese American incarceration experience: as president of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition (the City of Los Angeles turned the site into a historic cultural monument), working on getting translated her father’s incarceration diary for subsequent publication as “Tule Lake Stockade Diary” in 2020 and organizing for the construction of a WWII Camp Wall in Torrance, Calif.

Oda also strove to live up to the spirit of her given name. She worked to reconcile not just the injustice visited upon her family and other ethnic Japanese by the federal government, but also any unfairness by elements within the Japanese American community, including some in JACL, against Tuleans, those from the camp that was for the so-called troublemakers.

As a member of the San Fernando Valley JACL chapter, she worked with others to have JACL apologize for its treatment of Tule Lake internees, not dissimilar to how JACL itself worked to have



Kyoko Nancy Oda (left) as she was in her younger years to her students and (right) more recently speaking in Little Tokyo on March 18, 2025, against misuse of the Alien Enemies Act.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ODA FAMILY AND GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

the federal government apologize for its treatment of mainland Japanese Americans in 1988 (see Aug. 16, 2019, *Pacific Citizen*, tinyurl.com/pubecaw9).

It was a contentious issue that prompted letters to the editor to *Pacific Citizen* from those opposed to an official apology from JACL (see Oct. 11, 2019, *Pacific Citizen*, tinyurl.com/mjfh47f9). Even after JACL made an official apology, Oda worked to hold JACL’s feet to the fire regarding 2019’s Resolution No. 3 (see April 21, 2023, *Pacific Citizen*, tinyurl.com/39te89fb).

After the 10 War Relocation Authority-operated camps closed with the end of WWII, Oda’s family returned to the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles. As a child, she attended Maryknoll School in Little Tokyo.

Among the many achievements and accolades Oda received in her life: earning the rank of *shodan* in judo, being awarded a Women of the Year award in 2010 from the Japanese Women’s Society of Southern California and the Downtown Los Angeles JACL

chapter; and, from the Japanese government, an Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays, for “enhancing the social welfare of Japanese American society and promoting the friendly relationship between Japan and the United States.”

Oda, who lived in Van Nuys, Calif., was a lifelong member of the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center, at which she had served as president of its board of directors.

Kyoko Nancy Oda was predeceased by her son, Daron Tatsuro Oda, and her sisters, Frances Takeda and Ernie Jane Masako Nishii. She is survived by her husband, Kay Oda, and their son, Jon (Monique), and daughter-in-law, Yvonne.

A celebration of life is scheduled for June 7 at 3 p.m. at Nishi Hongwanji in Little Tokyo.

To view a video featuring Kyoko Oda on the book “Tule Lake Stockade Diary” that was presented by San Fernando Valley JACL chapter, visit tinyurl.com/ycyd3y5h.

News Briefs

A4 Taps 2 for Board of Directors

The Asian American Arts Alliance (A4) announced that Izumi Fukushima and Townshine Wu have joined its board of directors. ¶ The Television Academy Foundation announced Kevin Iwashina was among three members newly elected to join its board of directors.

Perry’s Personal Ass’t Iwamasa Will Serve 41-Months in Prison

The Department of Justice announced that Kenneth Iwamasa, the live-in personal assistant of “Friends” actor Matthew Perry, who died Oct. 28, 2023, of a ketamine overdose, was sentenced to 41 months in federal prison for “obtaining and repeatedly injecting” Perry with ketamine. The 61-year-old Toluca Lake, Calif., resident became Perry’s personal assistant in 2022. ¶ The Monterey County Sheriff’s Office announced the arrest of GuoGuo Lu, 36, of Mountain View, Calif., for allegedly setting fire to the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, the first Zen monastery to open outside Japan. Lu faces charges including arson, making criminal threats, committing a felony hate crime and terrorizing by destructive device, explosive. ¶ Texas authorities charged Ae Son Han, 67, with murder for allegedly helping her husband, Seung Ho Han, 69, carry out two fatal shootings during a May 5 business meeting. He was charged with two counts of capital murder and three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

— P.C. Staff

Rep. Barney Frank Dies at 86

Congressman was ’80s redress campaign leader.

By P.C. Staff

Barney Frank died May 19. The quick-witted Democrat who served for 32 years as a United States representative for suburban Boston and the state of Massachusetts was 86.

According to the *Associated*

Press, Frank — who after retiring had moved to Ogunquit, Maine, with husband Jim Ready — entered hospice care in April after a diagnosis of congestive heart failure.

Frank was best-known for his cutting humor; as the first member of Congress to voluntarily reveal he was gay (1987) and later marry

a person of the same gender (2012); and for financial reforms known as the Dodd-Frank Act, with Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Lesser-known now was his leadership role in Congress as an advocate for Japanese American redress that culminated with President Ronald Reagan signing the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

It called for an apology from the federal government for its World War II-era treatment of ethnic Japanese in America, for citizens and legal resident aliens then-prohibited from becoming naturalized, along with monetary compensation for still-living Japanese Americans who had experienced the abrogation of their constitutional rights.

In 1988, JACL led a group called Southern California Friends for Redress to honor Frank for his redress efforts and leadership (see Feb. 5, 1988, *Pacific Citizen*, tinyurl.com/3b87wftz). “Barney Frank was a leader of redress. He was one of the champions for that legislation,”



FROM 1988: Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) was saluted Jan. 30 for his efforts in the passage of H.R. 442 in the House. (From left) Rep. Norman Mineta, George Ogawa, JACL-LEC Executive Director Grayce Uyehara, JACL National President Harry Kajihara, Rep. Frank, Marleen Kawahara, Rep. Robert Matsui and George Takei.

PHOTO: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON/PACIFIC CITIZEN PHOTO ARCHIVE

said Trisha Murakawa, who is currently serving as El Camino Community College board of trustees president and was active in JACL at that time.

“He worked side-by-side with the Japanese American members of Congress. Not having a

Japanese American constituency of significance and not being Japanese American himself and not being personally affected by the incarceration, that showed great political courage and conviction of justice. And it showed the kind of person that he was.”

FD-929

KUBOTA

Sharing. Community. Legacy.

久保田葬儀社

T 213-749-1449
F 213-749-0265

911 Venice Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90015
www.kubotamortuary.com

福井 FUKUI MORTUARY

Five Generations of Experience
FD #808

707 East Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Ph. 213/626-0441
Fax 213/617-2781

Gerald Fukui
President