

In MEMORIAM

ANNA MAY SASAKI



Anna May Sasaki (née Louie), of Rochester, Mich., passed away on July 10, 2026, from a stroke at 92.

Ann was born in 1933 in Cleveland, Ohio, the third out of six children of Wah and Shee Huey Louie, who immigrated from Canton, China. The Louie family lived in Cleveland Chinatown on Rockwell Avenue between 21st and 24th. Her father operated the Sam Wah Yick Kee grocery store and led On Leong, the Chinese Merchants Assn.

Ann graduated from East High School in 1951 and applied to The Ohio State University. She was only one of two women and the sole Asian American in the math program.

During the summer after her freshman year at OSU, she met Saburo Sasaki. From then on, they were inseparable. Ann and Sab married in 1955 after her OSU graduation.

Ann took her first postcollege job at the NASA Glenn Research Center at Lewis Field in Cleveland. As a woman working in a technical role, she had unknowingly become one of the hidden figures in the space program.

In 1965, General Motors transferred Sab to Adrian, Mich. There, he and Ann built a house and happily raised their two children. With a small group of women, Ann helped start Adrian Community Nursery, which still operates. During summers, Ann and Sab took their family camping out west.

In 1980, now living in Rochester Hills, Mich., Ann returned to work as a reliability engineer for General Motors Truck & Bus. Standing tall at 4'9", she served as the truck design petite standard, vital for the minimum placement of seats and seat belts. In the fall, Ann and Sab loved hosting tailgates for their children, who were members of the University of Michigan Marching Band.

In retirement, Ann and Sab continued camping. For nearly 20 years, they drove over 5,000 miles annually to volunteer at the Manzanar National Historic Site in Independence, Calif., where Sab was incarcerated during World War II as one of the more than 125,000 Japanese Americans placed in government-operated detention camps during World War II. Ann assisted the Visitor Center and worked in Manzanar's archives. Sab served as a Manzanar living witness by talking to visitors and presenting educational programs.

In 2015, the National Park Service recognized Ann and Sab with the George and Helen Hartzog Award for Enduring Service (now Excellence in Volunteerism Award) due to their commitment.

Ann is survived by her beloved husband of nearly 71 years, Saburo; children, David (Viviana Quintero) and Julie Sasaki-Hom (Richard Hom); grandchildren, Isabella Hom and Alexander Hom; sister, Rose Hong (Andrew) of Cleveland Heights, Ohio; sister, Alice Chen (Michael) of Rochester, Minn.; sister, Wanda Au (the late George) of Sacramento, Calif.; sister-in-law, Emma Louie of Bakersfield, Calif.; and many relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister, Ruby Pong (William); and brother, James Louie.

Ann chose to participate in the Body Donation Program at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

Ann requested no memorial service. Contributions can be made to Adrian Community Preschool, 876 Addison St., Adrian, Mich., 49221.

(Note: Boldfaced names in the PDF version of this are active hyperlinks.)

Abe, Mildred M., 96, Honolulu, HI, March 11.

Grote-Shimizu, Dianna, 77, Deer Park, WA, March 13.

Higashi, Rose Y., 95, Batavia, IL, April 14.

Ikeda-Saito, Masao, 76, Willoughby, OH, March 28.

Izumo, Judy Suzanne, 74, Los Angeles, CA, May 31.

Kamibayashi, Noboru, 95, Santa Monica, CA, April 14.

Kawasaki, Julia Kikue, 100, Kona, HI, March 2.

Masuda, James, 83, San Jose, CA, Feb. 27.

Motomatsu, Nancy, 94, Olympia, WA, Feb. 23.

Nakatani, Katsuya, 97, Pico Rivera, CA, March 13.

Tanaka, Garry Shinichi, 82, Lomita, CA, May 15.

Yamashita, Diane Miyuki, 67, Burbank, CA, March 24.

Ikuko Kiriyaama Dead at 86

Educator led drive to save community newspaper.

By P.C. Staff

Ikuko Kiriyaama, a lifelong educator and Japanese American community leader who co-founded the Japanese American Historical Society of Southern California and led the quixotic "Save the Rafu" campaign in the late 2010s to help keep extant a privately owned Los Angeles Japanese American community newspaper (see tinyurl.com/25r-4j5h8), died June 28. She was 86.

Kiriyaama had been homebound for the past few years as she dealt with aging-related health challenges.

"Mom was a teacher, a community leader and friend to many," shared her son, George Kiriyaama, via Facebook and who had helped with her caregiving during her final years. "She gave so much of herself to make a difference in people's lives."

Born Ikuko Kato to a Nisei mother and Issei father — Shizuko (née: Mori) and Takashi Kato — on Nov. 12, 1939, in Los Angeles, as a child she was incarcerated with her family at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California as a result Japan's Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. That lead to the U.S. declaration of war on Japan the next day and, by Feb. 19, 1942,

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's issuance of an executive order that led to the forced removal of all ethnic Japanese, regardless of U.S. citizenship, from the West Coast to several government-operated detention centers.

Postwar, the Kato family resettled in the South Bay area of Los Angeles County. Iku would be elected president of Torrance's North High School student body. She entered the University of Southern California in 1957, and after graduating and earning her teaching credential, subsequently began her career in education. She would marry fellow educator George Kiriyaama, and they would later co-found the JAHSSC.

Family friend Kiyo Fukumoto described Iku Kiriyaama as "a doer, somebody who did things," and said he "got to know her real well" because of his close friendship with her late husband, George Kiriyaama, who died in 2005 and co-founded the Japanese American Historical Society of Southern California with his wife.

Reminiscing on the Society meetings the Kiriyaamas would hold at their home, Fukumoto said, "We used to meet over there along with Sue Embrey and a lot of other people," Fukumoto said, "and



Ikuko Kiriyaama

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE KIRIYAMA FAMILY

a thing I remember, besides going to Japan with her family and the group, was she was a really good cook. So whenever we had meetings at their place, I knew we were in for a treat."

According to her daughter, Traci Kato-Kiriyaama (Joyce), in addition to herself and brother George, Iku Kiriyaama is also survived by her stepsons, William (Miho) and Bob (Judy); grandsons, Bryce (Kyra), Kyle and Cullen (Alyson); brother, Roy Kato (Christine); and an aunt, Marguerite Tanaka.

A service for Ikuko Kiriyaama will be held at noon on Aug. 16 at Senshin Buddhist Temple, 1311 W. 37th St., Los Angeles, CA 90007. She requested no flowers.

A link to Densho.org's interview with Kiriyaama may be viewed at tinyurl.com/4xczcyynr.

Sushi Entrepreneurs Uechi, Matsuda Die

A pair of Japan-born, Los Angeles-based sushi entrepreneurs have died.

Katsuya Uechi, whose Katsuya restaurant chain was founded on the success of his Studio City, Calif.-restaurant Sushi Katsu-ya, died June 26. The Okinawa Prefec-

ture-born restaurateur was 67.

Fumio Matsuda, the chief instructor and founder of the Sushi Chef Institute in Torrance, Calif., died June 17. He was 69. Born near Kobe, Japan, he was known to his American students and clientele as Chef Andy Matsuda. He founded

his sushi training school in 2002. He is survived by his wife, Setsu, and their daughter, Julie (Andy).

Uechi's American sushi journey began upon his arrival in the 1980s. He opened his restaurant in 1997, wowing customers with his innovative approach to sushi.

Coach Gene Nakamura, 81, Dies

Berkeley High School girls basketball coach Gene Nakamura, who coached the Yellowjackets to two CIF state championships, 15 North Coast Section titles and 563 wins during his 25-year coaching career, died July 4. "Coach Nak" was 81.

Nakamura was inducted into the California Coaches Assn. Hall of Fame in 2010.

Himself a 1962 graduate of

Berkeley High School, Nakamura's coaching career at his alma mater began in 1983 and ended in 2008. He spent 35 years in the Berkeley Unified School District as a teacher, mentor, coach and administrator.

The BUSD praised Nakamura for shaping "generations of students" and helping them "understand the value of preparation, teamwork, resilience, and trust."

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