

Tatsuo Ryusei Inouye

October 31, 1910-September 19, 1999

Today we celebrate the life of Tatsuo Inouye who exemplified "Bushido". That means that he upheld the code of an ancient samurai of great courage, character, and heroic values. He was a leader who led by example.

His life's journey began when Tsuekichi and Taka Inouye came to America 104 years ago to farm. Their first son, Tadashi was born on October 11, 1906, and is now 92 years old and lives in Uto Shi, Kumamoto, Japan. Brother Tokio appropriately named "happy crossing" was born on September 22, 1907. Tatsuo which means "success" was born on October 31, 1910 in Montebello, California. He was always proud to be born during the reign of Emperor Meiji. Although he was born in America, he always loved Japan and things Japanese. The Inouye Family returned to Kumamoto, Japan, in 1912 in time for a special parade for children who were 3, 5, and 7 years old. To mark this occasion, there is a brief history of Uto donated by the Family at a local temple.

Eventually Tokio returned to the USA in 1926 paving the way for the younger Tatsuo who came in 1928. He attended Hollywood High School and worked as a schoolboy. Like many that pursue the American Dream, the two brothers worked hard and made a new life. He began teaching the Japanese Language in a one room schoolhouse in Lancaster. There he met his wife, Lili, a beautiful, spirited Americanized girl who was the love of his life. For their honeymoon, he took this young lady to meet his family in Japan and as far as the Great Wall of China. He worked as an Iceman and later they owned the Hilltop Market on Folsom Street before the War. They purchased the Family home in East Los Angeles where they raised three girls, Sayuri, Masako, and Kyoko. The Inouyes returned to Japan as an old couple in 1993 for the last time. Regardless of the fact that he was already 87 years old, he took care of her until her final day last year on November 10, 1998. During his final days, he said that the 65 years went quickly.

During the war, he wrote an extensive diary and made daily observations. He wrote about Lili's bravery in his absence while he was in the stockade. He protested being imprisoned by his own country. After many years, he visited Manzanar, Poston, and Tule Lake Camps. Japanese TV was interested so they interviewed him regarding his Tule Lake Story that aired in Japan. During the '70's, he was invited to lecture at UCLA's East Asian Studies Department. A few years ago, he participated in a group discussion at Tule Lake. He once said that the Japanese American National Museum is his life's story. Despite this chapter in his life, he felt that to be a good American is to be a good Japanese and voted in each election religiously.

After the war, he worked hard to rebuild his life by gardening for 28 years. His customers thought of him as a member of their family so it was difficult to fully retire from his favorites. So, he continued to work a few days a week.

Tatsuo Inouye was tall, handsome, athletic, and strong. Seventy years ago, he asked Toyama Sensei for advice when he named his dojo. Thus, Sen Shin Dojo which means

"Pure Heart" was founded in 1928. The dojo was small but survived for more than 60 years in various converted garages. He treasured his 1932 Olympic Games medal for his part in the Judo demonstration. It cost \$5 a month for lessons-but people learned more than how to throw a person. His Judo Family achieved National status at competitions. Sensei loved cooking udon after practice. Bobby Kubo said that the boys literally grew up at the dojo listening to his wisdom. He generously opened his house whenever anyone needed shelter. Sensei really enjoyed the Sen Shin Dojo reunions where he would meet grown men and women that he knew in their formative stages. After Lili's passing, his loneliness was forgotten when he reminisced with black belts like Mr. Kimura, Bobby, Cal, and Pete. He appreciated Alfred Tsuyuki's call.

In recognition of his dedication to judo, Sensei was honored as an eighth degree Kodokan, Black Belt from the Nanka Kodokan Yudanshakai. In 1995, he was recognized as a Nisei Week Pioneer.

During his many trips to Japan, he would return to his childhood home. His first stop was to the cemetery to remember his parents. He would venture via Japan Rail to various historical places he had read about as a youngster. He especially loved the light pink cherry blossoms near the dark, stone blocks of Kumamoto Castle. He sent gifts to the family in Japan and the local orphanage throughout the years. He enjoyed seeing old classmates and singing songs that only they might remember. Mr. Noguchi, a renowned poet, said that Sensei taught him how to write haiku. His old friends treated us like we were their children too and seemed to know a lot about each of us. More importantly, he made time for his sick friends. He taught us that friends are precious, keep them.

He had many pastimes that revealed his gentleness and vision. He taught us about the beauty of nature through our trips to Yosemite. He collected rocks and designed a beautiful barbeque and fish pond. He read the Japanese and English papers daily and thoughtfully made tapes to record current events and kept them in order. He had a photo essay of our life that he worked on continually as late as last month. He discussed Japanese history and attended the Kumamoto Picnics and later Keiro Parties where he was recently recognized for reaching 88 years of age. He taught us about integrity and discipline. His mother was a teacher. He was a teacher. We were the students.

At age 85, he grew a beard much like his sensei that he admired and walked with a black bamboo cane that he made.

Tatsuo Ryusei Inouye was proud of his legacy of eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren. He hoped that they would follow him. We are grateful to have a father who loved us so dearly and had high expectations. Every talk and action had a moral to it. Two year old Great Grandson, Tyler Tatsuo, said, "Grandpa's sleeping". Trent says that you are brightest star in the sky. There is an old Japanese saying, "Oya no hikari wa nana hikari". That means that the parents' influence is forever. Rest assured, Grandpa, that your influence will continue. We are happy that you and Grandma are reunited again. We will miss you, your ozoni, and your stories on New Year's Day.