

Frank F. Yanari **1913 – 2000**

Frank F. Yanari Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JACL

Frank was born on Feb. 3, 1913, in Ft. Lupton, CO and died on March 23, 2000, at age 87. His parents, Tokutaro and Setsu Yanari, emigrated from Fukuoka, Japan, to the United States in 1906 and eventually settled in Denver, CO. with 8 children. Frank married Kimi Yanari at Ft. Snelling in 1943 and had 3 daughters and 1 son.

As an athlete, Frank was a running back on the Englewood High School Varsity football team that played against former Supreme Court Justice “Whizzer” White’s team from Golden High School. Frank also practiced Kendo, a Japanese form of martial arts. His sensei said that Frank was one of the better swordsmen with a strong will and determination to improve. Frank had the positive “makenkiga tsuyoi” spirit which means “never give up attitude”. He was very strong, athletic, and a quick learner according to the sensei.

As a young politician, Frank was elected president of the student council at Englewood High School in Denver. He was the very first Asian American to be elected to the highest leadership position. He was a member of the Board of Governors of Stockton Buddhist Church and served as President of YBA.

Frank assumed responsibilities early in his life. When his father died, his mother returned to Japan with sister Sally for two years. At the age of 23, Frank was made the sole guardian of younger brother Sam who was enrolled in a junior high school. He also looked after younger brothers Harry and Jim when they moved to Stockton, Calif.

As a Military Intelligence Specialist in Japanese language, Frank served his country well from 1941 to 1945. He was drafted into the US Army at age of 28 and sent to Ford Ord, California, to work in the medical division. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Frank and many of his Nisei friends were sent inland to Fort Snelling. Frank was assigned to a hospital unit as a surgical technician.

When Frank was given a week furlough from Ft. Snelling, he went to Rowher Relocation Camp in Arkansas to visit his friends from Stockton who were incarcerated there. That is when Frank met his future wife Kimi. He helped to make it possible for her, her mother, and sister to leave the relocation camp and to find a place to live in St. Paul. Shortly after, in 1943, they were married at Ft. Snelling Chapel. The beautiful, happy marriage lasted for 57 years and will continue to be remembered forever.

Frank was rich in many ways. His eye/hand coordination was phenomenal. His skill allowed him to establish a successful career as a watchmaker. He was a CEO of his own jewelry and watch repair shop in Minneapolis. To expand his understanding of mechanical devices, Frank attended evening classes to learn electronics and was hired by Cedar Engineering and then later worked for Electrocraft as a project engineer, where he designed and developed high-speed motors.

He was involved in many different civic activities including the Twin Cities JACL and Unity Church-Unitarian.

Frank loved to sing. He enjoyed singing roles in Gilbert and Sullivan and even joined an operetta playing the role of an Arab in Desert Song. Frank also loved to tap dance and was very light on his feet. Even after retirement Frank danced at the Lenox Senior Center. As part of the dance group called Recycled Teenagers, Frank participated in over 500 performances.

The beautiful, authentic Japanese gardens in the Twin Cities are testament to Frank's political and leadership skills. As Chairman of the fund raising committee for the enormous projects, there were many hours of planning and meeting with city officials, Park Boards, and volunteers.

Frank, as a hero, quietly and without compensation donated many, many hours to the International Special Olympics, Minnihon Japanese Cultural Center, JACL, Japan American Society, Japanese American Veterans of Minnesota, Lenox Senior Center, Como Park Japanese Garden, Normandale Japanese Garden, St. Paul/Nagasaki Sister City Committee.

As a minister, Frank served the Buddhist Churches of America as a lay speaker. He conducted services, was a Sunday school teacher, carpenter, youth advisor, coach of girl's basketball teams, Boy Scout master, and many positions as officer of church organizations.