

Kiyoshi “Jim” Kusunoki

1927 - 2019

Kiyoshi “Jim” Kusunoki Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JAACL

A word to sum up Kiyoshi is “gallant”. Growing up in San Francisco, the son of Japanese immigrants, he was gallant in the face of racism and national hysteria following the attack on Pearl Harbor in late 1941. Despite being imprisoned in the Topaz “Relocation” camp when he was a just fifteen, he served in the Army with the occupation forces in Germany at the end of the War.

After the War, he settled in Chicago where, playing basketball at the Moody Bible Institute, he caught the attention of the two Fujimoto sisters (Pearl and Bessie) and their brother (Ralph). He returned the attention, and, with brother Ralph’s approval, the happy result was a double wedding — Kiyoshi to Pearl, and Shig Shiroma to Pearl’s sister, Bessie. Kiyoshi and Pearl raised two sons; Stanley and Brian.

Job opportunities brought the family to Minneapolis, where he his keen eye led to a position as color matcher in the color card department at Colwell Press. After layoffs at Colwell, he worked with good friend, Bill Hirabayashi, selling MGs and Jaguars at Twin City Auto. During this time, he also cared for his parents Morinobu and Ume, who lived with the family until they moved to a Japanese nursing home in Los Angeles.

Kiyoshi was committed to community service. He was a member Mayflower UCC in South Minneapolis where he deepened his commitment to social justice and mentoring young people, and through the Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL). For many years, he manned the Japanese booth at the Festival of Nations.

Kiyoshi died at age 92 in Roseville, from complications of a stroke, peacefully, early morning Wednesday, June 12, 2019.

Kiyoshi understood the power of education, and since he had only a high school degree, his wish is to “Pay it forward” to help others attend college.