

Sumiko (Harada) Kosobayashi **1932 – 2025**

Sumiko Kosobayashi Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JAAC

Sumiko “Sumi” Kosobayashi (née Harada) believed deeply in the transformative power of education. Born in 1932 in Wapato, Washington, she grew up in a large Japanese American family whose life was upended during World War II, when they were incarcerated at the Heart Mountain concentration camp. That experience — witnessing injustice, resilience, and the quiet strength of her community — shaped her conviction that learning was not simply academic. To Sumi, education was a path toward understanding, empathy, and responsible citizenship.

After the war, her family resettled in Idaho, where Sumi graduated from Fruitland High School and later attended classes at the University of Idaho. These opportunities were meaningful to her not only for the knowledge they offered, but for the sense of possibility they represented after years of displacement.

Throughout her adult life, Sumi carried this belief forward. She worked as a secretary in the St. Louis Park Public Schools for two decades, supporting teachers, students, and families with warmth and steadiness. She understood that schools are communities — places where young people learn not just facts, but how to treat others, how to persevere, and how to imagine their futures. Her volunteer work as a room mom, Cub Scout den mother, and “Bucket Brigade” helper reflected the same commitment: she wanted children to feel supported, encouraged, and seen.

Sumi also remained active in the Twin Cities Buddhist Sangha and the Minnesota Nikkei Project, where she helped preserve and share Japanese American history. She believed that education included cultural understanding — learning where we come from, honoring the experiences of those who came before us, and using that knowledge to build a more compassionate society.

Her personal joys — gardening, cooking, and creating arts and crafts — were extensions of her belief that learning is lifelong and that creativity enriches everyday life.

Sumi passed away in 2025 at the age of 92, leaving behind her son Kevan, daughter-in-law Megumi, granddaughter Aino, and a wide circle of family who adored her. The scholarship established in her honor reflects the values she lived by; That education opens doors, strengthens character, and helps individuals contribute meaningfully to their communities. It stands as a tribute to her belief that knowledge, empathy, and cultural understanding are essential to a better world.