

Amy Ada Haratani Obituary

1926-2024



Amy Ada Haratani (nee Ada Kiyeko Yamasaki) born May 27, 1926 - renowned artist, persistent educator, courageous activist, inquisitive befriender of new acquaintances, and situational socialite has journeyed onward on March 1, 2024. The last surviving Nisei of eight children born to Harumi and Shizuka Yamasaki, immigrants from Japan, she was so small her siblings carried her around their cooperative San Joaquin Valley farm in a bucket and compared her to a bird, especially after a spill broke her arm, prompting a wing- like splint.

As a teenager her entire family was incarcerated due to their ancestry without any legal trial or formal charges (despite the 14th Amendment guaranteeing her the full rights of American citizenship). Ada chose to focus on the positive aspects of imprisonment (behind barbed wire with armed guards facing inward) and, socializing with a larger peer group than farm life would allow, her new clique of 'sophisticated girls' called themselves "the Continentals." She recounted prewar, Depression era farm life sitting on the water tower cross-brace watching distant trains, dreaming of traveling far away from scrubbing carrots in freezing ditch water for market. Camp prisoners were allowed to leave confinement if they could secure a job on the East Coast and Ada traveled days alone by train having acquired a job in a frozen vegetable processing plant. Upon arrival she found the company had gotten "Yamasaki" typed as "Yamaski" - once seeing she didn't seem to be Polish, they told her the position wasn't available. Fortunately, her older sisters already back East were able to help her find another job as a domestic worker. (Learning later that the FBI mistakenly identified her as "Amy" in her war file, she adjoined that typo to her birth name, saying she tired of childhood teasing of being called "Aduh...").

The wartime experiences and lifelong prejudices she experienced scarred her deeply. but Amy Ada persevered and demonstrated grace and fortitude in maintaining a positive outlook on life. Postwar she returned home and attended Modesto Junior College where she met Joe Haratani, a gangly 442nd Regimental Combat Team mortar squad veteran, who had been incarcerated with his family in the same camp as the Yamasakis. Holding 8,000 displaced souls, they never met at 'Camp Amache', "Granada War Relocation Center", in the sand blown Colorado desert; but in Modesto they fell in love and



Joe gave her the world. His engineering career with the United States Agency for International Development enabled them to travel the globe while Amy Ada pursued her dreams of motherhood, teaching, painting, socializing, and enjoying life on a level of sophistication that the Continentals would swoon over.

Morphing into the first ever Peace Corps Volunteer family (3 dependents) she set up house in a wood & lava rock shack in the Galápagos Islands. Amy Ada demonstrated her own adaptability to living with

rudimentary water, power & resources. She befriended many from all walks and even spent weeks camping on remote Hood Island assisting two female researchers from the Charles Darwin Station. This rugged lifestyle enabled her to adjust to her third quarter of life when the Haratani family settled near the gold rush town of Columbia, California. Nixon scuttled their retirement plans, leaving them cash strapped while Joe sought a stopgap federal job (thank you USFS !). While dealing with harsh winters, power outages (no water) and woodstove heat, Amy Ada continued her work ethic with a variety of jobs ranging from roadside fruit selling, receptionist at the local junior college, to office work at the Employment Development Department (where she sadly encountered racism by an administrator which resulted in her leaving the job but eventually winning a protracted legal suit).

Weathering adversity, both parents rebounded over time to become a successful overseas consultant (Joe), and a beloved painter of landscapes and abstracts. Amy Ada also continued her education earning her Masters degree in education. Joe and Amy Ada consistently worked the long hours required of poll workers near their final Sonora home, not for the minimal pay, but because they knew the vital necessity of participating in a hard-won democracy. From each sons' birth, Amy Ada instilled a passion for reading, justice and knowledge...

Amy Ada is survived by sons Guy (Joyce), Richard (Kathleen), and Saji (Nicole) and their daughter Jazmine and son Jean-Patrik and myriad nieces and nephews and their families. She was preceded in death by her husband Joe. She was well cared for by her second husband Heinie. A Celebration of Life will be held March 23, 2024, in Tuolumne County in conjunction with a tribute to Joe whose memorial was postponed due to the pandemic. In lieu of flowers and gifts please vote to preserve equal rights and opportunity. (The dual Amy and Joe remembrance will immediately follow a "Pebbles in a Pond" presentation on community engagement, including a story from their life. Resilience Center 18241 Bay Avenue, Tuolumne, California. Full program begins at 2 p.m., Amy & Joe portion will start after 3:45 p.m.)

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