In Memoriam: Kenneth Kazuo Tanaka

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IN MEMORIAM

Kenneth Kazuo Tanaka

Kenneth Kazuo Tanaka was born on February 10, 1935, in the small town of Kasumi on the northern coast of Hyogo Prefecture. He was the eldest son and was one of six children to Kyozen and Kinue Tanaka. His father was a Buddhist minister at the Gangyouji JodoShu Temple and although Kenneth was to be a successor there, his curiosity and desire to learn more, sent him abroad to America and to earn numerous degrees and accolades throughout the rest of his life. By 1963, Kenneth had received a B.A., M.A. and an AbD (All but Dissertation) from the Taisho University in Buddhist Studies and a minor in Social Studies, Japanese History, and Philosophy. He traveled to Hawaii by boat to continue his Buddhist training as a minister for several years. He then continued on to the University of Wisconsin, where he received a scholarship as an international student, which required him to maintain a 4.0 average.

While struggling to maintain his studies, supporting himself with several part-time jobs and to learn a new language, he managed to graduate with a Masters in Asian Studies. Upon his graduation in 1968, he took a position at the Library of Congress (LOC). While working as a Subject Cataloguer, he developed and implemented a Japanese Local History and Description Schedule which is still used today as part of cataloguing in libraries. In 1971, Kenneth took a leave of absence to earn a master’s degree in Library Science at the University of Michigan. This is also the year he met and married Reiko. Upon returning to work, using his own time and money, he researched and developed another cataloguing system for Buddhism which was published in 1973. For his scholarly work he received a Meritorious Award from the LOC and it has since been used in libraries all over the United States. In 1973, Kenneth was appointed as the Head of the Japanese Department at the University of Chicago Library. After 7 years, Kenneth elected to return to Hawaii as a Buddhist minister at Haleiwa Jodo Mission and Kapaa Jodo Mission. In 1986, Kenneth accepted a position at the University of Maryland Library where he remained an invaluable source in the East Asian Studies and Cataloguing Departments until his retirement in 2012. Immediately following his retirement, Kenneth and his wife, Reiko, moved to the West Coast to enjoy the remainder of his life with family and in the warmth of Southern California.

On February 8, 2021, 2 days before his 86th birthday, Kenneth passed peacefully in his sleep upon having a sudden cardiac pulmonary arrest. Kenneth is survived by his wife, Reiko (with whom he would have shared his “Golden” 50th Anniversary later this year), his daughters Karen and Janet, and Janet’s family, John (son-in-law), and grandchildren Calvin (10) and Alina (9).

Submitted by Frank Shulman