



Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama

October 9, 1939 - September 2, 2024

Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama, 84, of Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood, passed away on September 2, 2024 at Northwestern Memorial Hospital surrounded by the love of family after suffering a massive stroke.

Born in Los Angeles, California on October 9, 1939, Elizabeth and her family survived the incarceration of Japanese Americans from 1942 to 1945 at Heart Mountain in Wyoming, one of ten internment camps established by the U.S. government during World War II. Her family moved to Chicago, where her parents established restaurants on the city's north side. Elizabeth graduated from Wells High School and earned a teaching degree from Chicago Teacher's College. She began her teaching career in Champaign, IL and taught at Stockton Elementary School in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood.

Family was the joy of Elizabeth's life. The eldest of six, Elizabeth was sister (lovingly called "Neichan" by her younger siblings, which translates to "older sister" in Japanese) – and aunt to many, and a loving mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She loved being a mom, choosing to stay home to rear her three children. She adored caring for her grandchildren and celebrating life's milestones with family members throughout the decades.

Ms. Okayama was an active member of several United Methodist congregations in the Chicagoland area, most recently at Ravenswood

Fellowship. Her call to lay ministry was strong, and she served selflessly as a lay leader in various congregations for many years, including Mayfair UMC and New Hope UMC. In addition to serving as an administrative leader, she also directed and sang in choirs, volunteered at the food pantry, organized peace vigils during times of war, and championed LGBTQ+ equality in the church locally and nationally. Her advocacy for racial, gender, and economic justice was woven throughout everything she did.

In the 1980's, Ms. Okayama served as coordinator of the Ecumenical Women's Center (EWC), where she supported the faith-based women's movement for equality. She later joined the staff of the General Council on Finance and Administration of the United Methodist Church. While at GCFA, she earned a master's degree in human resources from National Lewis University and served as Director of Human Resources, as well as Director of Episcopal Services. She was a respected executive in the United Methodist Church with friends and colleagues throughout the world. She retired in 2005. In retirement, Elizabeth enjoyed an active lifestyle with family and friends new and old, continuing her leadership in the church and giving generously of her time and resources in countless ways.

Elizabeth is preceded in death by parents Noboru Okayama and Aiko Marion Okayama (nee Yamano), her sister Margaret Kazumi Saida, and former spouse Anthony William "Bill" Dopke.

Survived by former spouse Carlos Higashide (Chiye) and siblings Robert Katsuto Okayama (Yasuko), Jean Johnsen (Robert), Edward Okayama (Elaine) and Dennis Okayama (Sandra); her children Scott Higashide (Ruth Zayas) and Martin Dopke (Meleia Kasai) and Cynthia Okayama Dopke (Ken Butigan); her grandchildren Steven Higashide (Hayley Richardson), Brian Higashide (Angelle Albinto), Troy Dopke (partner Caitlin Schuster), Lindsey Dopke (partner Timothe Lefevre), and Leah Butigan; and her great-

grandchildren, Akira Higashide, Siddharth Higashide, and Rye Higashide.

In the summer of 2022, Elizabeth returned to Heart Mountain for the first time during an official annual pilgrimage event with her son Martin's family. She was committed to sharing her personal experience in the hopes of creating a more just society free of prejudice and racism.

Memorial visitation 9:30am (service begins 10:30am) on Saturday, October 5, at First United Methodist Church of Arlington Heights, 1903 E Euclid Ave. Arlington Heights, IL 60004. The building is accessible and parking is available.

The memorial service will be livestreamed at <https://www.youtube.com/@FUMCAH>

For questions, please contact Cynthia Okayama Dopke at cynthiatod@mac.com.

Memorial donations may be made in her name to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation: <https://www.heartmountain.org/>, the Japanese American Services Committee <https://jasc-chicago.org/>, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) <https://umcmmission.org/umcor/>, or a cause of your choosing that strives to bring peace, justice and compassion to the broken places of our world.

Arrangements by Inclusive Funeral Care, 773-370-2959 or www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com.

Previous Events

Memorial Celebration

OCT 5. 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Church of Arlington Heights

1903 East Euclid Rd.

Arlington Heights, IL 60004

<https://www.fumcah.com/>

9:30 visitation 10:30 service

Tribute Wall



“ *Inclusive Funeral Care created a Webcast in memory of Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama*



Team Inclusive Funeral Care - September 29, 2024 at 12:40 PM

JB

“ *I'm so sorry that I just found out about Liz passing. We were at Wells High School together. She always called me Evie, not Evelyn. I remember her Mom attending PTA meetings with her little brother Joe seated next to her. Liz lived on Elizabeth Street and my husband Joe knew Liz from Motley Elementary. She was a part of our life for a very long time...she came with us to Mr. Kellys and Villa Venice for prom. We went to all the reunions and loved every moment. We met in Florida with Liz and Marge and had a very nice time together. We kept up with texts and Christmas cards. We will miss our dear friend. Peace to you dear Liz....Evie and Joe Blazen*

Joe Blazen - November 01, 2024 at 05:40 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama.*



October 02, 2024 at 01:32 PM

DD

“ *Dorlimar, Michelle, Rachel, Ross, Dale purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama.*



Dorlimar, Michelle, Rachel, Ross, Dale - October 01, 2024 at 10:53 PM

YW

“ *Your friends and colleagues at Wespeth. purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Elizabeth Toyomi Okayama.*



Your friends and colleagues at Wespeth. - September 30, 2024 at 04:10 PM

SM

“ *Our deepest condolences to all of Liz's family - we have wonderful memories of Liz as she taught our kids in the choir at New Hope UMC. She worked tirelessly at New Hope for all of us and we treasured the community that helped our family in our faith journey. We hope that fond memories will bring you all peace at this difficult time.*
Sheila, Dale, Madison and Nathan Moyer

Sheila Moyer - September 30, 2024 at 12:38 PM

MD

“ *My deepest sympathy and prayers for Cynthia, Leah and Ken and to all of your family. With love, Marie Dennis*

Marie Dennis - September 25, 2024 at 10:55 PM

DH

“ I send my deepest Aloha to you and your families on the passing of your mom, Liz. I have fond memories of Liz even though I was just a kid, about 11 at Stockton and Liz (and your Dad), were teachers of mine. She was always kind to me and I loved her piano playing. I know...she will rest in peace.
Deanna Higashide Aspengren

Deanna Higashide-Aspengren - September 12, 2024 at 09:52 PM

GC

“ Our deepest condolences to the family and prayers for comfort during this time. From the staff of GCFA.

GCFA - September 12, 2024 at 11:35 AM

ME

“ Liz was an example of elegance, grace, and understated sophistication. Even more importantly she was kind and thoughtful.

I knew her through church and it was always such a joy to see her. Our thoughts and prayers are with her friends and family during this difficult time.

Megan - September 12, 2024 at 09:19 AM

RO

“ Liz was a breath of fresh air. I don't have a particular memory to share. She was a pleasure to be around and often had some practical wisdom. I'm a better person for knowing her. My deepest condolences to her beloved family. RIP ~Rowena~

Rowena - September 08, 2024 at 08:43 AM