

JEANNE WAKATSUKI HOUSTON DEAD AT 90

Her 'Farewell to Manzanar' shared story of Japanese American incarceration with generations of young people.

By George Toshio Johnston, Senior Editor

Author Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston died at her Santa Cruz, Calif. home, the *Pacific Citizen* has confirmed. She was 90.

According to next of kin, the co-author of the acclaimed book "Farewell to Manzanar" died of natural causes on Dec. 21.

The book, published in 1973 and co-written by her husband, Air Force veteran James D. Houston, was Inglewood, Calif.-born Houston's recollection from her childhood when, at age 7, her family and she were forced by the federal government to leave their Santa Monica, Calif., home, move to an assembly center and eventually become incarcerated at California's Manzanar War Relocation Authority Center, one of 10 such remotely located concentration camps that during World War II detained ethnic Japanese, the majority of whom were U.S. citizens.

Houston's experience that was chronicled in "Farewell to Manzanar" — later adapted into a 1976 telefilm of the same name — paralleled what had happened to more than 125,000 Japanese Americans residing along the U.S. West Coast following Japan's Dec. 7, 1941, attack on American naval facilities at Pearl Harbor in the then-territory of Hawaii — and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Feb. 19, 1942, issuance of Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Army to evacuate and relocate from the Western Exclusion

Zone persons of Japanese ancestry. "Farewell to Manzanar" was named by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as one of the 20th century's 100 most important works of Western literature. As assigned reading in schools, generations of young people became familiarized — as told through the eyes of a child — with the experience of Japanese Americans who were incarcerated by their government for, according to the conclusions of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, "racism, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

"Farewell to Manzanar" would lead to Houston receiving many accolades in her lifetime. The Japanese American Citizens League recognized her in 2004 with a Japanese American of the Biennium Award for achievement in Arts, Literature and Communication. In 2019, she became a California Hall of Fame inductee. Among the other recognitions she received were the Japanese American National Museum's Award of Excellence (2006); a Certificate of Commendation for Literature and History from the California Senate, Legislature and City of Los Angeles (2001); and the National Women's Political Caucus' Women of Achievement Award (1979).

The Houstons also co-wrote the screenplay for the book's telefilm adaptation with its director, Oscar and Emmy award winner John Korty (see *Pacific Citizen's* April 15, 2022, issue, tinyurl.com/3as4jd94). The telefilm aired on NBC on March 11, 1976, and would be nominated

for an Emmy Award. It won the 1977 Humanitas Prize in the 90-minute category.

In an email to *Pacific Citizen*, actor Clyde Kusatsu, who co-starred in the telefilm, wrote: "I was saddened to learn of Jeanne's passing last month. . . . It was my honor to have been part of the realization of her book 'Farewell to Manzanar' into a film for NBC. She and John Korty came to East West Players to view a few of us in a play we were doing at the time, and I was cast in the role of Teddy, her brother!"

"During the shoot, she came up to me to say how much I was able to capture her brother for the film. It was also an honor and privilege to contribute to the first film to tell the story of a Japanese American family and their part in the relocation experience, which was little known at the time we gathered to produce the film in 1975. It still stands as the only significant film on the subject. We were lucky to get it filmed."

In 2018, accompanied by her daughter, Corinne, Houston returned to Santa Monica and spoke about her book at the auditorium of the main Santa Monica Public Library as part of its "Santa Monica Reads" program on the 45th anniversary of "FTM's" publication, where she was presented with a proclamation by the city.

"I remember that trip to Santa Monica with my mom like it was yesterday," Cori Houston wrote to the *Pacific Citizen* via email. "It was extraordinary to see her welcomed back by the current mayor and given



Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, with daughter Corinne Houston, displays the proclamation presented to her on May 12, 2018, by the city of Santa Monica.

PHOTO: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

a city proclamation to the community that she and her family had been taken from so many years ago.

"To me, it was an example of what my mom always believed was truly the strength of this country. That we live in a society where dissent and disagreement are allowed and when a light is shined on an injustice, there can be resolution. I hope we don't lose that."

Jim Houston predeceased his wife and family on April 16, 2009, at 75. The couple is survived by their three adult offspring, Corinne, Joshua and Gabrielle.

A full version of this article can be viewed online at the *Pacific Citizen's* website at tinyurl.com/yck9yy9a.

"Farewell to Manzanar" the book and movie are available for purchase

from the Japanese American National Museum's gift shop. The paperback is available for \$10.99 at tinyurl.com/5n6jyw7m. The DVD, now with Japanese language subtitles, is available for \$24.95 at tinyurl.com/yx87v6sb.

Home movies of Manzanar from the family of Ralph Merritt that includes footage of Manzanar high school's 1945 graduating class and other Manzanar footage may be viewed at youtube.com/watch?v=vToNvZ6Vq2Y.

To listen to a 2020 interview with Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston conducted by Guy Kawasaki for his "Remarkable People" podcast, visit guykawasaki.com/jeanne-wakatsuki-houston/.

Keith Terasaki Dead at 68

By P.C. Staff

Dr. Keith Kenji Terasaki, chairman of the board of the nonprofit Terasaki Institute for Biomedical Innovation, died Dec. 22, 2024, in Houston. He was 68.

A son of the late philanthropists Hisako and Dr. Paul Terasaki — a pioneer in the field of organ transplant technology — Keith Terasaki had served as the chief of interventional radiologists for the Southern California Kaiser Permanente system.

In addition to serving as TIBI's board chair, Terasaki was a board member of Little Tokyo Service Center, Wesley Health Center, Metropolitan YMCA of Los Angeles, Vista Del Mar Children's Services, Colburn School of Music, TreePeople, Los



Angeles Philharmonic, Japanese Institute of Sawtelle and the UCLA Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies.

Terasaki also helped with the completion of Little Tokyo's Terasaki Budokan, thanks to a \$3.5 million donation from Terasaki Family Foun-

dation. For that, the LTSC, which operates the facility in partnership with the City of Los Angeles, named it to recognize Paul Terasaki, who died in 2016.

Keith Terasaki earned both his undergraduate and medical degrees from UCLA. He went on to train in general radiology at Los Angeles County-USC Hospital and interventional radiology at Stanford University. He was recognized early in his career with a Best Clinician Award, and toward the end of his medical career for his volunteer work on Skid Row, Kaiser awarded him its Top Physician Humanitarian Award.

Terasaki is survived by his wife, Cecilia Terasaki; his son, Paul Terasaki, and daughter, Susie Terasaki; siblings, Mark (Rindy) Terasaki, Taiji (Naoko) Terasaki and Emiko (Dan) Terasaki; and many nieces and nephews.

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Wish everybody the very best in 2025!

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