

A Tribute To The Woman Who Sacrificed, Sparkled And Made Others The Best They Could Be

By Yu-long Ling

Fifty years ago, I found a treasure by waving to a friend. While at Indiana University, a beautiful Japanese woman thought I was waving to her instead of my friend standing behind her.

Through this chance encounter, I first met my future wife. Our second meeting came the next day when her bike and all the books she was carrying toppled over in front of me.

The Chinese believe that a third meeting means there is a reason. I took a shot and she said yes to the third meeting, a Christmas party I was hosting for Chinese students at IU. She surprised me by sneaking into my apartment and decorating my tree with lovely intricate origami ornaments and placed a note on the top.

I remember this like it was yesterday. In spite of historic animosity between our two different cultures, we ended up marrying and creating a beautiful life together. We moved to Franklin, and our marriage flourished as we determined to respect each other rather than always insisting on our own points of view. She was the foundation of our family.

We both treasure family life, and I have been amazed at how much she has sacrificed her life for our son. Although she had a high degree and other professional licenses, she chose to raise our son. She only started teaching again at Franklin College and IUPUI once Tony was grown. She did a terrific job raising our son and instilled in him the same values she espouses such as respect, hard work and high principles of right and wrong. We raised our son with one voice even though we disagreed from time to time.

Franklin became her home and this sense of family extended to the larger family of the entire community. She helped get the first Japanese company to come to Franklin. The Kuji exchange, which forged deeper bonds between Franklin and Japan, was also one of her projects. For these efforts, she was named “Woman of the Year” by the Franklin Chamber of Commerce, but she remained humble.

It seems that with each year that passes, I discover another beautiful aspect of this gem I call my wife. She was an only daughter in a traditional Japanese family, and was licensed in traditional flower arrangements, the highly symbolic Japanese tea ceremonies, and also plays piano. But she doesn't cook — that's my job. The beauty she brings to our home is astounding, and now this beauty is shared with our new passions, our three granddaughters, who sparkle as she loves them and shares her culture with them. She quietly passes on her legacy to a new generation.

She authored a book for children and also academic articles about the changing roles of Japanese women in modern society. As a professor, she was well-respected and loved by students and faculty alike. I look back and see that I truly married a better person than me.



Professor Yu-long Ling and his wife.

Yuriko gives me a reason for living and always encourages me. “Don't give up,” she says. “You can always get it.” Over the years, she has given me great confidence and support to fight and win. My mother gave birth to me, but my wife has made me into the man I am today. Each moment of time uncovers more of the treasure she is. Like two clouds that somehow happened to connect, our lives together grew. Our two clouds made something together, a beautiful rainbow of life.

These moments made life so good until an emergency trip to the hospital confirmed our worst fears. Yuriko was diagnosed with stage 4 bladder cancer. The doctors were not optimistic about a cure, but thought they could extend her life. For 12 months, she went through a rigorous treatment of chemo and radiation.

Much to everyone's surprise, she beat cancer and was cancer free. This was one of the happiest days of our lives. As she slowly recovered from treatment and easing into daily

life, another trip to the emergency resulted in bad news. Unfortunately, this news was much worse. In her few months of being cancer free, a new, much more aggressive cancer spread throughout her body. This time it was terminal.

After returning home from the hospital, we spent the last several weeks of her life at home. Tony, his wife, Anna and our three granddaughters, Hana, Mei and Kei, spent as much time with her as possible. Even though her time was limited, she stayed strong and positive. In the moments before her passing, Tony and I held her hands as he played videos of his daughters singing and talking, hoping that she could enjoy what she loved most up until the end.

Even though I was not able to save her physically, we were able to save each other spiritually. She gave me purpose and strength and I have her love and support. Even though she is gone, she will always be in my heart and soul. I now must find myself again and find a purpose to live on. She would want that.