



## REMEMBERING Kai Yasué

September 25, 1944 - June 4, 2023



Kai Yasué was born in rural Japan (Nakatsugawa) Sept 25 1944 near the end of World War 2. He grew up in a time and place with incredible food scarcity as the youngest of five and learned creatively to come up with different ways to find food from catching crickets, bees, carps and song birds to hoarding and eating food before his siblings came home from school. His passion for resourcefulness with food continued throughout his life and eventually led him to move to Salt Spring but also led to his uncanny ability to accurately detect the presence of matsutake (pine mushrooms) in surprisingly large quantities from inside a moving vehicle on the highway.

His dad worked as a caretaker of one of the emperor's gardens and was later an innovative business-man in forestry and owned a bus company. His mom was a feisty and opinionated, tiny woman who would talk to anyone about her marital woes, including the unlucky (or maybe lucky) person who sat next to her in the plane.

According to his grade school report card, he was not a very good student in primary school (given his penchant for unprompted presentations). In the 1960s although very few Japanese people left Japan, as a young man he traveled the world from Madagascar to Latin America to Italy to Jordan. He also finished his university degree in French literature and later became a school teacher. Within a very traditional conformist school system, his inability to sit still during the many school formal ceremonies led him to be assigned as a parking attendant and uninvited to all such ceremonies. According to one story he "accidentally" ate one of his student's pet pigeons.

He followed the draft dodgers from the US to Canada and ended up co-owning a tourism company (Skyland Travels) with two of his friends. In Skyland's downtown

Vancouver office, he spent most of his time dragging staff away from their desks to play tennis or go fishing. He openly believed in challenging the neoliberal work ethic and the goal of making money - much to the bewilderment of his Japanese staff and co-owners. He brought frogs to the office and at one point, rescued baby songbirds that had been trapped during some building renovations and brought them home to care for and later release. Still, as a skilled and resourceful tour guide, he was an asset to the company. The work that brought him the most meaning was leading Canadian clients on back-road cycling tours in rural Japan. His volunteer bike tour for people with disabilities in Japan was highly publicized and led to a dinner invitation at the White House and an opportunity to run it with famous cyclist Greg LeMond. He also took Japanese clients on tours all around the world. He arrived only a few days prior to his clients to a new place and quickly became an expert in the random and beautiful parts of a town. He would make connections with the locals and through these, offered his clients an unstructured but unforgettable experience. He sold his business in the 90's and from that point on, called himself "self-unemployed".

He moved to Salt Spring Island in 2000 to look for a place with good water, clean air, a bit of sunlight and land. His dream was to become as self-sustainable as possible. Concerned about people's tendency to overwork, the resulting destruction of the environment and poor quality of life in urban areas, Kai was passionate about sharing the joys of living on a farm in the countryside with as many people as he could. He wanted people to know that anyone can do it, and this belief fell in line with his persistent passion to challenge conventions for a better quality of life. He had an uncanny ability to sense any Japanese person who stepped foot on the Island, locate them within hours, invite them to his home and quickly convince them to move to the country-side. He has helped numerous Japanese people learn to dream and later pursue their dream of immigrating to Canada so they could work a little less "hard" and be closer to nature.

Although we did occasionally question where we (as immediate family members) ranked in terms of his priorities and care, we also admired his unusual ability to try to care for everyone and other beings beyond our family. He invited and cared for troubled youth, people with disabilities and their families, as well as a sub-dominant male alpaca with no home. He even took Scotch Broom onto his property. All of this was grounded in the belief that each being could contribute to a community and that we should take the time to be open to the possibility that even beings that are not conventionally valued can have tremendous intrinsic value.

This philosophy, his interest and curiosity towards all other beings led him to be loved by an incredibly wide network of people. He was quick to make friends in any language and deeply held the belief that he could find some point of connection with just about anyone. He was truly a citizen of the world.

Even with his cancer, he continued to be creative, resourceful, growth-oriented and public. He created his own hearing aids out of paper-cups, developed all kinds of creative rope and ramp systems to support his mobility issues and worked to try to perfect his singing all the way until the end. As usual, he seemed curious and open even to learn about the new experience of dying and becoming ill. He tried to build community even with other patients and nurses at the hospital and strived to ask

busy doctors about their own lives in these appointments. There was a continual array of people who took him to doctor's appointments and as usual everything (even his final day) was a bit of a party. He was in pain often, but we also laughed a lot and towards the end, he was finally able to slow down a bit and give immediate family members time to actually talk about their emotions - he might have even listened a little more. Near the end, we saw him cry - which was new for us. He cried tasting something delicious, expressing gratitude to his community or listening to his granddaughter play violin. He was so grateful to be able to die in a community that embraced his eccentricities, fueled his eternal interest in learning all kinds of things including permaculture, hip hop, yoga - even golf. In the end, he lived in a place with ample protein-though he might still have occasionally eaten song-birds and rats- and lots of music.

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