

## **JOHN M. YEE – Remembrance**

1927 to 2021



John M. Yee, beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather unexpectedly passed away at age 93 on January 18, 2021. John Yee had devoted much of his life as an active participant and leader in the Phoenix Chinese Community, and developed such a reputation and acclaim that he was later known as “Uncle John”. Uncle John was born in Toishan, Guangdong Province, China on February 4, 1927 and immigrated to the United States in his 20’s to join other relatives in the Phoenix area. His wife, Hong Yow Yee (who passed away in 2010) and their first son came to the Phoenix area in 1953 and together, they worked tirelessly at the corner grocery store to make the American dream a reality. Later on, two other sons were born. Like many of his peers and generation at that time, hard and unrelenting work was very common. That was the foundation upon which Uncle John and Hong provided the opportunities for their children and future generations to achieve successful careers in various professional fields. All of that was due to one common vision and aspiration.

There is an adage that reads: “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Uncle John unselfishly gave of himself. He never asked anyone to do what he would not do himself. He never asked for donations for different causes in which he himself did not contribute. Although his life was dominated by his passion and commitment to the betterment of his community in general, it was his help and assistance to individual people that brought out the most satisfaction. He was a willing participant and helper to people who needed to see a doctor; resolve a financial matter; help on an immigration issue; and even to buying a refrigerator. He had a booming voice and a great sense of humor and was sought by many to be Master of Ceremonies at weddings and other functions.

Uncle John’s Phoenix community efforts included, among others, the Chinese United Association, the Chinese Welfare Council, establishment of the Chinese Memorial Garden at Greenwood Memorial Lawn; and led the fundraising efforts for the Hong Lok House for low-income seniors. His other monetary donations went to local, national, and international programs and buildings.

Uncle John’s main energy and efforts were focused on the Yee Fung Toy Family Association at the local, national and international levels. (He was Western Grand President---USA Yee Fung Toy

Association) There was serious business conducted at the Yee Fung Toy ranging from offering scholarships to students, conducting charitable events such as water and food drives, improving the lives of senior citizens, and providing bonding opportunities for all Yees. Uncle John rose to leadership positions at all these levels. His involvement involved traveling to various parts of the country and world for the various conventions. It was at these venues that he and Hong met and made lifelong friendships with other 'cousins' of Yee heritage, which were invaluable memories.

There is another adage that reads: "No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burdens of another." Uncle John was a willing person who cared to soften the burdens of others. That is his main and lasting legacy.

As Uncle John approached the last two years of his life in his 90's, Father Time was unrelenting and unforgiving. Although his health declined, he still voraciously read all the Chinese newspapers and magazines that came to the house. He kept up with the news of the day both in the United States and abroad. He even tried to continue cooking which his sons discouraged for the sake of safety. In his younger days, he did like to cook certain dishes although he never reached the star status of his wife, Hong. Although he loved to cook, he didn't want to wash the dishes.

During this unprecedented pandemic of Covid-19, the family kept him sheltered-at-home to try to protect him from this unrelenting virus. And although he did not leave the house, he became one of the over 400,000 casualties of it in this country. He leaves behind three sons, grandchildren, great-grandchild, and numerous nieces and nephews:

- Dean (Carine) and grandchildren Julianne (Dr. Chris Chen & Grace Chen-great granddaughter) and Brandon
- Fred (Ellen) and grandchildren Nathan and Elizabeth
- Paul (Cindy) and grandchildren Aaron and Allison.

Uncle John had a very special nephew in James (Ruby) Kwan whose compassion and kindness were of such solace and help over the years.

Due to the concerns of this pandemic over the health and safety of all, the Family regrets that it cannot hold a traditional service and funeral that befits Uncle John. The Family understands the overwhelming number of family and friends who want to pay their respects to him, but Uncle John would insist on: Be Safe, Be Well, and Stay Healthy. Services will be private. The Family will consider a future Celebration of Life when it is safe for all.

A final adage is: "He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own". Uncle John is blessed to have so many family and friends and is secured in his own goodness. The Family requests no donations or flowers. For those who want to do so, the Family suggests donations to the Yee Fung Toy Family Associations at the various local/state, national, and international levels; to the local agencies fighting the pandemic; or to the organizations, churches or charities of their own choice. Even in the afterlife, Uncle John would rather you help others.