



Yoshi's oldest sister, Misao, 80, and her husband, Toshio, 92, greeted us at the entryway to their Shibukawa home in November 2003. This will be my final photo of Toshio. In December he underwent an operation for gallbladder cancer and died in January 2004. Misao was a porcelain beauty when she was young. Yoshi, much younger, grew into a beauty, too. But there was a difference, and I have pondered it in my Japan journals. My conclusion: If they were placed side by side in their primes, Japanese would choose Misao and Westerners would choose Yoshi.

## Family: Another *Daijin* Dies

First it was my father-in-law, Shigenobu Iizuka, then my brother-in-law, Tsuneo Iizuka, and now another brother-in-law, Toshio Hatori. All died as *daijin*, important men in Gunma Prefecture, homeland for the Iizukas and Hatoris for centuries. Their funerals drew huge crowds in recognition of their civic contributions. Mr. Iizuka (I cannot bring myself to call him anything else) was the owner of mountains until Japan's last *Shogun*, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, cut him down to size. Tsuneo was CEO of the Bank of Gunma and thus the prefecture's premiere banker. Toshio was a great landowner just like Mr. Iizuka, but his lands lay mostly within urban areas, and they escaped the attention of MacArthur's zealous reformers. I admired Toshio, not because he was filthy rich, but because he was a gentleman, always impeccably dressed, with a wide range of interests, including music and botany. Several times over the decades I obtained rare Northwest American plants for him and mailed them to Shibukawa, labeling the boxes as "fruitcakes" to avoid trouble with customs officials. Once he discovered a wild orchid in Japan and was allowed to name it. When I returned to Japan in 1999 after an absence of 34 years, Toshio told Yoshi, "Never come back without Jack." He didn't always feel that way. As a father figure to young Yoshi in the early '60s, he opposed her involvement with a foreigner who possessed *uma no hone*, or "horse bones." I was a peasant, and a non-Japanese one to boot. When I became the father of a darling Iizuka niece, and it appeared the marriage would work out, in-law attitudes toward me began to change.



Yoshi enters the old Iizuka compound in the Komochi Mountains. Straight ahead is the gate house in which she was born. To her left is the big house, once the home of Iizuka *samurai*.



Yoshi hates to see photos of the run-down big house, but I sneak shots anyway. The 250-year-old place stands on the site of an earlier Iizuka house that probably looked much like this one. Unoccupied for more than 50 years, it is visited now only by students of Japanese architecture.





*Get in the picture, Jack*, my sisters-in-law Kazuko and Toshiko signaled as I snapped a shot of Dr. Hideyo Takai, 79, in his hospital bed. I did so, letting a nurse take a photo, but I prefer this one, without me in it. The doctor, Kazuko's husband, is a Shibukawa *daijin*, too. He owns the hospital in which he now finds himself confined as a stroke victim. He gets excellent treatment. Years ago he sent me a sharpening stone that was nothing short of amazing. I was already familiar with artificial Japanese water stones, but this one was natural, mined in Nara near Osaka, and it put a mirror bevel on my woodworking chisels like nothing else could. It fig-

ured, actually. The doctor had used the stone to sharpen his surgical instruments, which required a level of sharpness well above that of mere woodworking tools.



Dr. Takai's gift stone, mounted on a base that I crafted in my workshop. Water, not oil, serves as a lubricant.



I like this photograph. Even though it shows the back of Toshiko's head, it catches an animated Kazuko at her home next to the Takai hospital. If older Japanese even suspect you are taking their picture, they will strike non-smiling, stare-at-the-camera poses. To catch them unaware, you must catch them unaware. Notice the high-definition television. Everybody seems to have them. Which shouldn't be surprising. Japan developed HDTV.



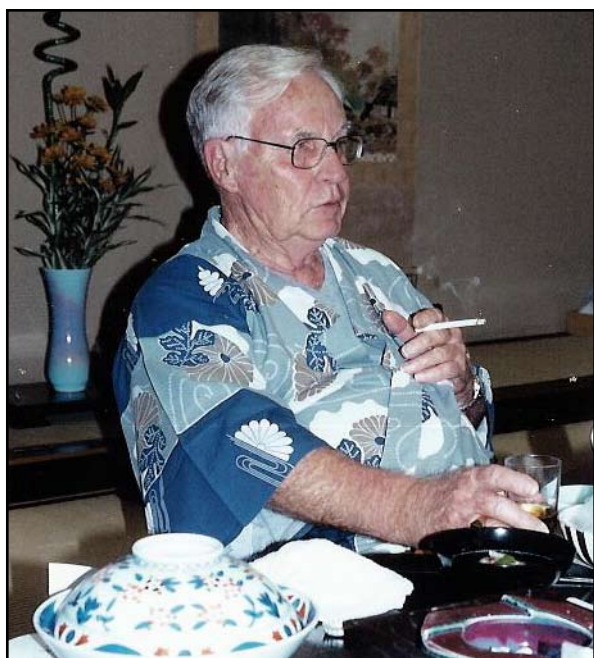
Yoshi and Toshiko are engrossed in something. I know not what.





It is customary for men to sit with their backs to the *tokonoma* alcove where hanging scrolls and *ikebana* are displayed. So brother-in-law Osamu Aikawa and I took our assigned places at our family dinner near the top of a mountain, while Kazuko, Toshiko and Yoshi sat opposite us. As usual, the dinner was held in the Kishigon suite where Yoshi and I always stay. That huge tray of *sashimi* doesn't know it, but I am waiting to pounce. I love raw fish.

Osamu Aikawa and I are oddballs among millionaires. Oh, we are comfortable enough, retired company men both, but the Iizukas, Hatoris and Takais are much richer. It has always amused me that the smartest of the Iizuka sisters, Osamu's Toshiko and my Yoshi, fell in love with handsome printing/publishing guys and wound up with the least money. Osamu is an enthusiastic amateur photographer, and his framed photos of Mt. Fuji grace our home. Here, near dinner's end, he pulled out his ancient 35-millimeter camera and shot the portraits below.



Jackson Sellers

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