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ESTABLISHED 1903

OBITUARY

Famed Nisei Photographer
Vincent Tajiri Dies

The former photo editor of *Playboy* magazine passes away in Van Nuys. He was 73.

RAFU SHIMPO SPECIAL

VANNUYS.—Vincent Takashige Tajiri, a former photo editor of *Playboy* magazine, passed away on Sunday, Feb. 7 at Valley Presbyterian Hospital from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He was 73 years old.

Tajiri was best known for his work for *Playboy*, the Chicago-based men's magazine founded by Hugh Hefner, which made its debut in December of 1953. Tajiri joined the publication in 1956 and remained there until 1973.

"He fought racism wherever it reared its head," said Togo Tanaka, former editor of *The Rafu Shimpō* English Section. Tajiri had worked at the Japanese American vernacular as its sports editor in the late 1930s.

"He was concerned how cartoons, especially in the print media, stereotyped . . . the Japanese," Tanaka recollected.

Tajiri was born in Long Beach on May 15, 1918 to Japanese immigrants involved in the Nikkei farming association.

He was among six children, including Larry, who went on to become editor of the *Nichibei* in San Francisco and *Pacific Citizen*, JACL house organ.

According to his daughter, Rea, Tajiri got his start in photography when Larry bought him a camera during his teen years.

Tajiri was drafted before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and became a staff sergeant with the famed 442nd Infantry during World War II. He married his wife, Rose, in 1943.

After the war, the couple relocated to Chicago, where Tajiri pursued different photographic assignments, including weddings and jobs for small magazines and the Photographer Association of America.

In 1955, while working on a gun magazine at Publisher Development Corporation in Chicago, Tajiri had apparently befriended Hugh Hefner. The Japanese American photographer joined *Playboy* as its photo

editor the following year.

"He was a man understood photography very well and understood photographers' need for creative energy and space," said Jeff Cohen, the current managing editor of *Playboy*, who was hired by Tajiri in 1967 as a photo assistant.

"He was an advocate of the photographer to be adventuresome and take chances," continued Cohen in a telephone interview from Chicago.

"He was a great man. He left a mark on the magazine; he was an unsung hero."

Another *Playboy* photographer hired by Tajiri, Pompeo Polsar, recalled that the Japanese American had taken him to a pizzeria on his first day of work.

"I come from Italy, and I never eat pizza before," said Polsar in a telephone interview. "He took some Chianti wine and filled my glass with the wine. He said, 'I pour for you, you pour for me.' I always remember that. In the same way, I work for him, he did good for me. He was a pioneer in the way for the magazine."

After retiring in 1973, Tajiri moved back to his birthplace, Southern California, and participated in

various Japanese community groups such as Visual Communications.

He also pursued his writing skills, winning the James Clavell Short Story Contest in 1986 for his fiction piece, "Bird Pines," which captured a Nikkei teen-ager's struggle with racism. He also contributed a story to *Rafu's* Holiday Issue in 1987, "Snapshots," a recollection of some World War II comrades who were killed in action.

"Faces and memories preserved and recalled by photographic images. Time suspended in silver chloride. Fragments from an eventful life, which, like vintage wine, should have been sipped and savored and not so greedily gulped. The sediments that remain are regrets that all those good and mean times, none had not paused long enough to know the others a little better," he wrote.

A memorial service is being planned for the end of the month. Funeral services will be announced in the newspaper.



VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

Vince Tajiri

Tajiri is survived by his wife, Rose; two daughters, Karyn Schleitwiler, an accounting clerk, and Rea Tajiri, a film and video maker; and a son, Brion Tajiri, a jazz percussionist.

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