

MINEKO AVERY



On Thursday, February 1, 2024, Mineko (Minnie) Sasahara Avery passed away in Boston, Massachusetts, at age 97. She was born and raised in California and was interned with other Japanese Americans at the Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona, where, as a high school student, she helped to host Eleanor Roosevelt on an official visit. Minnie left Gila River early to study piano at the Oberlin Conservatory of

Music. After graduating from Oberlin in 1947, she taught music at Bradford College in Massachusetts and performed five times as a piano soloist with the Boston Pops. Minnie married fellow Oberlin graduate Robert W. Avery in 1954. In 1959, they moved to Pittsburgh, where her husband became a sociology professor at the University of Pittsburgh. She supported him in this role until his retirement from Pitt in 1992. Minnie completed a Master's degree in musicology and piano at Carnegie Mellon, and subsequently taught piano students in the college and preparatory programs until 2013. She made a mid-life career shift by attending law school at the University of Pittsburgh, graduating in 1977. She then worked as a public interest lawyer at Neighborhood Legal Services and Legal Aid for Children (now known as "Kidsvoice"). Minnie was featured by Pittsburgh Magazine as one of the "Pittsburghers of the Year" for her legal work in 1988. Minnie loved living in Pittsburgh, where she resided for more than 50 years, and particularly enjoyed attending concerts of the Pittsburgh Symphony, where she was a longtime subscriber. In addition to her parents, Harold Sasahara and Blanche Sasahara she was preceded in death by her husband Robert W. Avery; and brother Bryce Sutemi Sasahara. She is survived by her brother Arthur Sasahara; daughter, Robin; son, Christopher; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. There will be a memorial service at the Homewood Cemetery Chapel on Sunday, February 11 at 10:30 am. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Japanese American Historical Society.

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