

# 'Silent teachers' get final farewell

*Following a service, UH medical students will scatter their cremains at sea*

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Mariko Miho remembers her aunt Fumiye Miho as being a larger-than-life force to be reckoned with — despite her dainty 5-foot-1-inch frame.

"Auntie was never idle," Mariko Miho said of the Wailuku, Maui, native who was studying at a Tokyo women's college during the onset of World War II. By chance, on Aug. 6, 1945, she missed a train that would have taken her to Hiroshima. From a distance that day, she witnessed the blinding flash of the atomic bomb and pastel-colored smoke rising from city.

"Why was I spared?" Fumiye Miho asked herself in the days that followed, as she helped carry people from the ruins and nurse injuries, her niece said.

The traumatic experience touched off her longtime efforts as a peace activist and humanitarian.

Consequently, Mariko Miho said, when her aunt made plans to one day do-

nate her body to the University of Hawaii's John A. Burns School of Medicine, the move did not surprise family members.

"I think that was very fitting for my aunt, sort of an extension of her life to continue to be a teacher," Miho said.

Fumiye Miho entered JABSOM's Willed Body Program in 2010, under the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, which allows medical schools and similar institutions to use donated bodies for education or research purposes.

Every year, "silent teachers" like her are honored in a memorial service planned by UH medical students for the friends and families of donors.

Leimomi Kanagusuku maintains that the lessons made possible through the program have been invaluable to her during her first year at JABSOM. "These donors have given us so much as far as offering themselves, literally," Kanagusuku said.

Since 2004, when a tribute saluted 34 donors, the list of donors has grown steadily, said the program's director, Steven Labrash. This year's memorial service, set for Saturday at UH-Manoa's Campus Center Ballroom, will be attended by family



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**JABSOM's Willed Body Program uses donated bodies for education or research purposes. Those who donate their bodies will be honored Saturday in a memorial service for the friends and families of donors. Program director Steven Labrash, second from left, said the memorial is the medical school's "feel-good" event of the year. With Labrash are Gabriel M. Lapid, left, Leimomi Kanagusuku and Kisami Oba. At right are photos of Fumiye Miho, a donor who will be remembered during the service.**

and friends of 145 donors.

The service will feature four medical student speakers, who will express gratitude for the donors, followed by a hula and string quartet performances. Afterward, guests will have a chance to talk story with the medical students.

"It's the feel-good (event) of the year for me, and that's kind of what carries me through to the next year," Labrash said.

During the afternoon, students will paddle offshore from Magic Island to spread the cremains of silent teachers and give the family mem-

bers a chance to say farewell (unless they request to keep the cremains).

Hisami Oba, who helped coordinate the event last year, said the service is a way for the families to complete the grieving process and helps them understand why their loved ones made the decision to become donors.

Recalling last year's service, the second-year medical student said, "You could sense so much love in the room. The families really appreciated it and felt the gratitude the students have toward them and the

donors."

While it is not uncommon for medical schools to hold a memorial service for such donors, Labrash said culturally relevant touches such as the hula and canoe scattering of the cremains are unique to the local program.

JABSOM's Willed Body Program is about 90 percent self-enrolled, meaning most people sign themselves up while they are alive. Statewide an estimated 1,800 people are enrolled to become donors.

During anatomy courses, the medical students spend hours in the lab with their



silent teachers and learn their first names as well as medical histories.

"We really want to foster the concept with our students that these donors are not anonymous — these donors are their first patients," Labrash said.

Mariko Miho attended the memorial service in 2012. In addition to helping her establish a sense of closure after her aunt died, it gave her a sense of hope for the future, knowing that local medical students are being trained to have a deep appreciation for humanity.

"They're not just bodies or cadavers," Miho said. "They're real people who had great lives and wished to donate so students could learn from them after their death. That's such a noble thing to do."