

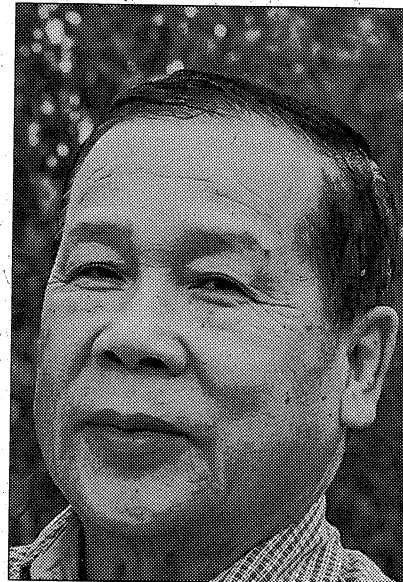
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9-21-2023

Robert (Phinh) Cam Lai

Robert (Phinh) Cam Lai, 69, of Grinnell, Iowa, died on Saturday, September 16, 2023, at UnityPoint - Iowa Methodist Medical Center in Des Moines, following a brief battle with cancer.

Visitation hours will be held on Saturday, September 23, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. at Smith Funeral Home - Grinnell. A funeral service will be held at 10:30 AM, Saturday, September 23 at Smith Funeral Home - Grinnell. A traditional Buddhist funeral ceremony will immediately follow the funeral service. Burial will be at Hazelwood Cemetery, Grinnell, Iowa.



Robert was born on May 18, 1954, in Hai Phong, Vietnam, to Cheng Lai and Carol Fong. He grew up in Seno, Laos, and attended a French lycee until he left to help with the family business after their move to Vientiane, Laos. In early 1974, Robert began his job as a driver for USAID's Motor Transport Branch in Vientiane.

In May 1975, Robert and his family were forced to flee for their lives. They arrived at Camp Dodge, Iowa, on October 27, 1975, where they and other Southeast Asian refugees were greeted by Governor Robert Ray. It was there that the Lai family met their sponsors, Jack and Gloria Mason, from Kellogg, Iowa, with whom they resided until March 1980, when the family moved to Grinnell, Iowa. Robert was so proud to become a U.S. citizen in 1980. It was then he changed his name to Robert in honor of Robert Ray.

He was united in marriage to Jeannie (Sengchanh) on July 8, 1980. Their marriage was blessed with three children: Rosemary, Jack, and Tiffany.

Upon arriving in Iowa, Robert began working at RobinTech, where he worked for a few years before starting his career at Lennox. He retired from Lennox in 2019.

Robert enjoyed spending time with his family, especially his grandchildren. He loved tending to his vegetable garden and fruit trees and meeting up with old friends at a buffet. He was always finding something to fix and watching YouTube videos to learn how to fix those things.

Robert is survived by his wife, Jeannie, of Grinnell, Iowa; children, Rosemary (Aaron) Sheeler of Waukee, Iowa; Jack Lai of Grinnell, Iowa, and Tiffany (Logan) Johnston of Williamsburg, Iowa; grandchildren, Taylor, Mia, Sofia, Bria, Lincoln, Livia and Colson; and brothers, Francis (Bounsy), Eric (Leo) and Paul (Tami) Lai. He also leaves many other family members and friends who will sadly miss him.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Cheng A. Lai and Carol Fong; his sister, Jessica Nguyencong; and his brother, David Lai.