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5-23-2022

## Edmund T. Gilday

Edmund T. Gilday, 75, of Grinnell died on May 17, 2022, at his home of natural causes. A visitation is scheduled from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, May 24, at the Smith Funeral Home in Grinnell. A memorial gathering with words of closure by Susan Sanning will follow at 7:00 p.m.

Ed was born on January 15, 1947, in Racine, Wisconsin, the son of George Colbert and Elizabeth Anne Haight Gilday. He was a 1965 graduate of Holy Cross Seminary, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Upon graduation Ed joined a novitiate in Minnesota, where it took only six months for him to realize the priesthood

was not his calling. Then followed four years in the United States Air Force, during part of which time he was stationed in Okinawa, where he developed his love of the Japanese people, language, and culture. After his military service, he continued his education studying Japanese language and East Asian religions earning diplomas from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, culminating with a Ph.D. in the history of religions from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

From 1978 to 1982, Ed was in Japan teaching English. His first two years were in Tokyo at Sundai Academy, where he met Sheila, a fellow teacher, and the last two at Shinjo Gakuen, a private junior and senior high school in rural Hiroshima Prefecture. While at the latter institution, he also conducted many local personal interviews as independent research into religious practices in Buddhism and Shinto, leading to his being invited to dance in the local Kakura, a harvest festival, in which it was believed he was the first non-Japanese to ever participate. Adding to his earlier studies of French, German, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and Chinese, Ed perfected his Japanese language skills, especially in reading religious texts.

His first teaching position in the U.S. was from 1987 to 1992, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, followed by the University of Colorado, Boulder, from 1992 to 1995, and Grinnell College, from 1995 to 2015, where he was a professor in the Religious Studies Department.

Ed was an avid reader of the New York Review of Books. He loved cats, especially Thumper, Florence, and Lulu, and Sheila's horse, Belladonna. He enjoyed all ball sports on TV.

He was united in marriage to Sheila Faye Schmidt, December 7, 1980, in Shinjo, a tiny rice paddy village in Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan, in a traditional Shinto ceremony. On October 24, 1997, they were married in an American civil ceremony in Logansport, Indiana.

Ed is survived by his wife, Sheila Schmidt of Grinnell; a brother, James Timothy Gilday of Sacramento, California; a nephew, Bart Paul "Trey" Hartman, III of Katy, Texas; a niece, Kathryn Elizabeth "Kate" Gilday of Hobart, Tasmania, Australia; and an uncle, James T.

Haight of Pasadena, California. He was preceded in death by his parents; a sister, Elizabeth Anne "Betsy" Hartman; and a brother, George Colbert Gilday.

In his career, Ed was a teacher and mentor. In life, his most strongly held principle was fairness and justice.

