

GH-R
4-13-2023

Carol (Kiao) Che Fong



Carol (Kiao) Che Fong, 95, of Grinnell, Iowa, passed away on Wednesday, April 5, 2023, at Montezuma Specialty Care in Montezuma, Iowa.

A traditional Buddhist ceremony will begin at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, April 18, 2023, at Smith Funeral Home in Grinnell. A visitation will be held prior to the memorial service beginning at 10:30 a.m. The memorial service will be held at 12:30 p.m. and will be followed by the second Buddhist ceremony at 1 p.m. Burial will be at Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell.

Carol was born on August 10, 1927, in Na Sâm, Vietnam, to Mu Chu Fong and Sai Ho. She

grew up in Na Sâm and went to school until she left to help with the family business.

She was united in marriage to Cheng A. Lai in 1950. Their marriage was blessed with six children: Francis, Robert, Jessica, Eric, David, and Paul.

Due to Cheng's work as a translator for the French military, the family moved around Vietnam before settling in Laos in 1956.

In July 1965, Carol began her job as a housekeeper for two USAID officers, Jack Huxtable and Jeff Amour. She continued working for Jack and his wife, Marge, for several years.

In May 1975, Carol and her family were forced to flee for their lives. They crossed the Mekong River and entered a Laotian refugee camp in Nong Khai, Thailand, where they lived for five months. On October 17, 1975, Carol and her family arrived at Camp Pendleton, Calif. They then 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 family met their sponsors, Jack and Gloria Mason, from Kellogg, Iowa. In March 1980, Carol and her family moved to Grinnell, Iowa.

Carol worked at DeLong Sportswear, where she was known as Mama Carol, from the time she arrived in Iowa until her retirement in August 2001.

Carol enjoyed spending time with her family, especially her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren. Being with her great-grandchildren and attending their activities was one of the highlights of her life. She loved knitting, playing card games with friends, and cheering loudly for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Carol is survived by her sons, Francis (Katherine/Bounsy), Robert (Jeannie/Sengchanh), and Paul (Tami) of Grinnell, Iowa, and Eric (Leo) Lai of Menifee, Calif.; son-in-law, Binh Nguyencong, of Brooklyn Park, Minn.; and daughter-in-law, Judy Lai, of San Francisco, Calif.; grandchildren, Rosemary (Aaron) Sheeler, Tony (Heather) Lai, Peter (Mary) Nguyencong, Jack Lai, Henry (Summer) Lai, Maria (Wade) Swenson, Tiffany (Logan) Johnston, John (Jaynessa) Nguyencong, Sandy, Brenden, Maylee, and Shaeanna Lai; great-grandchildren, Taylor, Mia, Sofia, Bria, and Livia Sheeler, Caden and Lily Lai, Charles and Claire Nguyencong, Ila and Vada Lai, Jonah and Micah Swenson, and Lincoln and Colson Johnston. She also leaves many other family members and friends who will sadly miss her, especially her laugh and spunk.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Cheng, her daughter, Jessica Nguyencong, and her son, David Lai.