



Hiroshi Kenji Watanabe

January 18, 1952 - August 27, 2026

Yakima, Washington

Hiroshi Kenji Watanabe died in Yakima on August 27, 2026. He was seventy-four. Born there on January 18, 1952, to parents who had come home from a wartime camp with a patience the valley did not always return, he grew up in a house that smelled of apples and coffee and treated both as ordinary. He learned English at school and a second set of manners at the table. He never treated either language as a costume.

He spent twenty-two years on a packing line that turned fruit into boxes the rest of the country ate without thinking. He was the adult who could sit on a stool without making a production of it. He kept extra socks in a locker for the woman whose morning had already been too long. When a buyer sent a new grade sheet, he translated it twice: once into English a tired crew could use, and once into the quiet that says you are not in trouble for needing help.

He married Naomi Watanabe in 1974. They bought a bungalow in a neighborhood that later became expensive around them. They stayed. A son and a daughter went through public schools he trusted more than he trusted real-estate talk. After Naomi died in 2018 he kept the garden of bitter melon and the habit of walking a neighbor's child to the bus when a shift ran late.

Neighbors remember a man who swept his sidewalk and yours if the wind had been unfair, who kept a coffee can of buttons labeled in two languages, and who could sit through a graduation without making it about himself. He liked the canal early, before the heat, when the trees still looked like a place a person could walk. He died in Yakima, the only city he had ever needed. The extra socks are still in the locker. That would have pleased him more than a eulogy.

Services

A memorial in Yakima with tea afterward. In lieu of flowers, a gift to a packing-house hardship fund or adult English class is welcome.

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