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News Release

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CAL POLY POMONA PAYS ITS RESPECT TO UNIVERSITY SUPPORTER

MICHI NISHIURA WEGLYN, PROMINENT JAPANESE AMERICAN

AUTHOR AND HUMANITARIAN

Cal Poly Pomona President Bob H. Suzuki announced today the death of Michi Nishiura Weglyn, a prominent Japanese American author, civil rights activist, artist and costume designer on Sunday, April 25, in New York City, following a yearlong illness. She was 72.

Best known for her critically acclaimed book, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps*, Weglyn was recognized as a supporter and advocate of numerous issues involving civil and human rights and the welfare of underprivileged groups. She was honored many times by a wide range of organizations and institutions.

“My wife, Agnes, and I are deeply saddened by the death of our dear friend, Michi Weglyn,” said Suzuki. “She and Walter were close, personal friends of ours and were among the most compassionate and humanitarian people we ever had the privilege of knowing. She will be sorely missed, but she and Walter leave a tremendous moral legacy for all of us.”

Born Michi Nishiura in 1926 in Stockton, California, she was the daughter of farming parents. As a teenager, following the outbreak of World War II she was placed in an internment camp, an experience

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THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico, Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton, Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Maritime Academy, Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

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which eventually led to her book as well as her continuing efforts to give redress to internees both in this country and South America.

After moving to New York City in the late 1940s, her early career was spent as a theatrical costume designer for Broadway, television and nightclubs. She later established her own manufacturing and design studio. For eight years, she served as the chief costume designer for “The Perry Como Show,” a very popular music and entertainment television program in the 1950s.

It was during this time that she met Walter Weglyn, a Jewish refugee from the Netherlands. The two were married in 1950. Walter Weglyn, who became a successful perfume chemist, died in 1995.

In the early 1970s, amidst the backdrop of the Vietnam War and Watergate, Michi Weglyn began questioning the decisions behind her internment some 25 years earlier. Her extensive research and the insistence of her husband led her to write *Years of Infamy*, first published in 1976. Walter Weglyn, who was one of the few Jewish children from his hometown to survive the Nazi holocaust, strongly empathized with and supported her efforts to document the history of her own internment. In the forward to her book, she explained how the highly charged atmosphere of that era ignited her interest in what became a strong, personal cause.

“At a time when angry charges of government duplicity and ‘credibility gaps’ were being hurled at heads of state, the gaps of the evacuation era appeared more like chasms,” wrote Weglyn. “Persuaded that the enormity of a bygone injustice has been only partially perceived, I have taken upon myself the task of piecing together what might have been called the ‘forgotten’ - or ignored- parts of the tapestry of those years.”

The book, originally published by William Morrow, was expanded and reissued in 1996 by the University of Washington Press. It has been lauded as one of the most thoroughly documented accounts of the World War II internment of Japanese Americans. In the introduction, celebrated author James A. Michener wrote that Weglyn, “who in this book codifies and substantiates this remarkable episode in our national history, has served the nation well, for this is a story that deserves telling.”

Weglyn received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from The California State University during commencement ceremonies at Cal Poly Pomona in June 1993. She was also awarded honorary doctorates from New York City’s Hunter College and Smith College in Northampton, Mass., in

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recognition for her many contributions to the betterment of society.

“The Weglyns contributed enormously to the civil and human rights movements in this country, especially to gain justice for different groups of Japanese Americans, such as the draft resisters and railroad workers, who suffered terrible hardships due to their incarceration by the U.S. government during World War II,” said Suzuki. “Almost to the day of her death, Michi continued to fight for the rights of these individuals and to be concerned for their wellbeing.”

In 1993, the Michi and Walter Weglyn Endowed Chair for Multicultural Studies was established at Cal Poly Pomona. In addition to a generous donation from the Weglyns to help fund the chair, Michi Weglyn dedicated all future royalties from her book for this purpose.

At Weglyn’s request, there will be no formal memorial service, but informal gatherings of friends will be held in many cities. Also at her request, contributions in memory of Weglyn should be directed to the Weglyn Chair at Cal Poly Pomona. More information on the endowed chair may be obtained by calling (909) 869-3415.

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Note: A scanned photo of Michi Weglyn is available on request.