

Tien Fan Tao

Obituary

September 1932 ~ January 2011



CARMEL - Tien Fan Tao, number three son of Mr. and Mrs. Pai Chuan Tao, exited this world to join his parents on January 23, 2011 at the age of 78. These are the stories he enjoyed sharing with his family and friends.

He was born in Shanghai, China, to parents who stressed the importance of education. Tien went to eight different elementary schools because of frequent evacuations during World War II. His mother promised him prizes if he would study harder to improve his grades from the bottom third to the top half of the class. Studying hard became his pattern of making steady progress in his schooling.

When China was taken over by the Communists, his family escaped to Hong Kong. There Tien spent his summer break swimming in the ocean three times a day until his mother limited his swimming to once a day. He began to spend more time studying at his high school, including weekends. The principal who lived on campus noticed and commended his study habits. The encouragement inspired his lifelong interest in academic study and research.

To go to college, he traveled to Taiwan by himself to take the entrance exam and was accepted into the Electrical Engineering Department at the National Taiwan University. Competition was fierce, only one applicant in ten was admitted. He ranked third to last in a class of 40. With a satisfied smile on his face, he said that by senior year, he was one of the top three students.

At that time, Tien also resumed swimming in the river with his buddies who shared the same enthusiasm. When his family moved to Taiwan to join him, they did not recognize him because he had grown 11 inches in one year. He believed it was because of the daily swimming.

A graduate school scholarship brought him to Moore School, University of Pennsylvania. While pursuing his Masters degree, he worked part-time at RCA, troubleshooting and providing support for customers using IBM's first mainframe computer. When he decided to go to Harvard for his Ph.D., RCA's Vice President of Research, Elmer Engstrom, offered him a scholarship to go to Princeton, which would enable him to continue part-time work at RCA. But he was determined to head for Cambridge because his father had studied law at Harvard, and his sister was going to medical school there for her doctorate. He often speculated how different his career path would have been, had he gone to Princeton, as the explosive growth of the computer industry was just beginning.

Tien's passion for teaching took him to [UCLA](#) and later to the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey. Then, after 23 years of academic life, he left the security of tenured professorship to co-found Gemini Computers, Incorporated, to develop a high-assurance secure computer system.

This system later achieved the National Security Agency's TCSEC Class A1 rating, the most rigorous standard for secure computer systems. Gemini systems were used in various government defense and intelligence agency applications. Retiring after 22 years at the helm, he gave himself a grade of A- as a professor, but D as an entrepreneur.

After the opening of the Monterey Sports Center, he became a regular at the pool. His daily swim was crucial in his health regimen after the diagnosis and subsequent treatment of his Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in August 2005. He said swimming was his therapy, a meditation in effortless motion. When he was in pain and had to use a walker to keep his balance, he felt renewed after swimming laps in the warm water.

Listening to music and surfing the Internet were also his favorite activities. He loved the Bach Festival and enjoyed working as a volunteer at Sunset Center. For the Cancer Wellness Support Group at the Community Hospital, he offered to be the email "servant," maintaining communications for more than 80 members. He spent hundreds of hours studying stock charts for "brain exercise" but never made a trade.

In the last month of his life when he could no longer swim, and when his computer sat idle due to his lengthening sleep, Tien's health took a tumble. Thirteen hours after he came to the Westland House, Tien drew his last breath in his sleep, at peace with this life and his transition to a new one.

He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Alice; sons, Albert (Thuy) and Alfred; daughter, Alicia (Donald); granddaughter, Lydia Tao; grandsons, Gabriel Tao, Gustav Landis, and Johannes Landis; older brothers, Tien Yi and Tien Yu; younger sister, Tien Wen; and younger brother, Tien Lin. He will be buried at the Monterey City Cemetery in a private family memorial service in accordance with his wishes.

We Will Be Together Again

A plum tree by our side,
a lake edged by the ocean,
we have our home, urn by urn.

Tien and his family are grateful to Dr. Roger Shiffman and his colleagues for their compassionate care; to Cancer Wellness, Cancer Journey, and Lymphoma support groups for anxiety relief; and to Hospice of the Central Coast for making his journey smooth and comforting. In lieu of flowers, please consider donations to the Carmel Foundation or Hospice of the Central Coast.

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