

Elizabeth Ann Ishii
1955-2021



The HIDA 'ohana is mourning the loss of long-time HIDA leader Betty Ishii, who passed away on February 9, 2021. Betty's contributions to every aspect of HIDA's work played a significant role in HIDA evolving into the community leader, and award-winning IDA branch, that it is today.

Betty was born in September 1955 to Dr. Albert Ishii, an internist, and Faith Ishii, a bacteriologist, and was raised in Nu`uanu. After attending Roosevelt High School, she attended Stanford University and the prestigious Hasting College of Law in San Francisco. She returned to Hawai'i upon graduation and began her legal practice. Betty's practice areas at her firm of Char Sakamoto Ishii Lum & Ching included complex business and finance matters, with a specialization in international aircraft transactions. She was widely respected as an attorney and active in the American Bar Association on various subcommittees.

Betty was married to her high school sweetheart, Blane Fujiwara, and their beloved son Scott was born in 1995. As with many of HIDA's leaders and volunteers, Scott's schooling led Betty to HIDA: "When my son, Scott, was first diagnosed with dyslexia in fourth grade, I was terrified. I am a finance lawyer, not an educator--I knew nothing about struggling readers, or about children with learning differences or special gifts. Fortunately, a friend--long time Board member Simon Klevansky--gave me the best advice: He said 'Get involved with HIDA; then you'll have a lot of access to people in Hawaii who can help'. Simon was absolutely right." (Betty in her last message as HIDA President in late 2011.)

Betty joined the HIDA Board in 2006 and eventually served as president from 2009-2011. Betty was a positive force at IDA Branch Council and chaired and contributed to HIDA's critical Public Awareness Committee.

Those who worked with Betty on HIDA projects can say it best and, in each instance, Betty's professionalism, passion and dedication are evident:

Kathy Ferguson, Ph.D., a former HIDA Board Member and author of HIDA's acclaimed *A Resource Guide About Dyslexia for People in Hawai'i*, worked with Betty on a full range of HIDA Public Awareness projects. In Kathy's words: "Working with Betty at HIDA, as with most of the HIDA activists, has been an odd combination of distance and intimacy. We spent hours and hours together, over the years, planning events and finding resources to support dyslexic learners, their families and their teachers. We shared personal stories of our sons' struggles with dyslexia; we supported each other in our fears and frustrations. Yet we barely knew anything about each other's lives outside the intense world of dyslexia. I do not remember ever having a single conversation about our

professional lives, our political commitments, our spiritual beliefs, or other topics that would normally come up when you work closely with someone over two decades. Yet in the way that mattered most to us, as mothers of children who needed help to learn to read and write, we knew each other well."

Similarly, past HIDA president Sue Voit reflected on her work with Betty: "From 2010 to January 2013, a working group formed by the Hawai'i State Legislature met and developed the *Comprehensive Plan for Teaching Reading in Hawai'i Schools* ("Comprehensive Plan") and resulted in a Hawai'i Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR 120). This group, comprised of various stakeholders, convened monthly at Betty's law office to develop a comprehensive plan for reading instruction in Hawai'i's public schools. Betty's passion, merger, and negotiation skills facilitated the group's progress. Ultimately, she became the head writer for the Comprehensive Plan and was responsible for compiling countless redline edits from the entire group. I would frequently email her changes in the middle of the night and receive her response in minutes. Throughout our treasured friendship, I updated her when colleagues shared news regarding the use of the Comprehensive Plan. A few days before Betty's passing, I discovered and texted her that one school complex referenced the Comprehensive Plan and secured a multi-million-dollar literacy grant. The individual responsible for the administration of the grant has previous Structured Literacy training. I learned from her brother that when he read Betty my message, she teared up and said, "That's amazing."

The person who worked most consistently with Betty was HIDA's Executive Director, Margaret Higa, who has worked for HIDA since 1999. Margaret had an opportunity to help bring HIDA to the next level, by incorporating Betty's business and legal knowledge into HIDA's daily practices: "HIDA benefited considerably from Betty's visionary leadership, business acumen and exceptional writing skills. Betty was instrumental in streamlining HIDA's financial reporting and internal digital records' management system, both of which we continue to utilize. Moreover, I admired Betty's writing prowess in drafting multiple grant proposal templates and other HIDA documents. I shared a working relationship and friendship with Betty and I greatly value what I learned from her about being a stronger and more effective administrator and communicator."

As she exited the HIDA presidency in 2011, Betty remarked: "However, I won't disappear. Like my predecessors and many long time volunteers, I know 'retirement from HIDA' is not an option". Truer words were never spoken. Betty continued to be active with HIDA's Public Awareness Committee, serving as committee chair into early 2019.

HIDA's 35 years of accomplishments have been achieved largely by the hearts and minds of its leaders and volunteers -- many of whom are mothers and teachers -- who are fueled by a love of their children, students and by a passion for appropriate education for all. Elizabeth Ann Ishii gave relentlessly of herself and will be remembered always at HIDA with respect and gratitude. She is greatly missed.

Susan Walker Kowen
Past HIDA Co-President and IDA Board Member