



## Yoji Kondo

May 26, 1933 - October 9, 2017

Dr. Yoji Kondo, Ph.D. took his last breath at 11 a.m. on Oct. 9, 2017. Born in Hitachi, Japan on May 26, 1933 to Tsuneo and Hama Kondo (née Yamada), he was the second of four brothers: Yasumasa, Yoji, Akira, and Hiroshi. After high school in Hitachi, he studied Portuguese Literature for his university degree, with the aim of seeing the world (Japan's major trading partners were the U.S. and Brazil, where Portuguese is the official language). His father passed on when he was 17, so he supported himself during school as a translator and interpreter. After graduation, he worked for the giant Japanese keiretsu (conglomerate) Sumitomo in São Paulo, Brazil for nine months. However, the excitement of travel lessened, and he decided he wanted to do something meaningful, to contribute to the store of human knowledge. He arranged a transfer to Sumitomo's New York office, studied physics at the City College of New York, and then applied for doctoral studies in astronomy. He applied to several schools where he thought he had a good chance of admission, and then found himself with one extra stamp, so on a whim, he applied to the University of Pennsylvania. Much to his surprise, he was accepted as a probationary student there, and matriculated in 1961, studying under Dr. Frank B. Wood. During one summer break, he was able to work at the Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C. Memorably, when he was translating at the World's Fair in New York another summer, he met the Emperor of Japan. Interestingly, the Emperor did not talk directly with people in those days, so Yoji spoke in Japanese, and then the Emperor's translator

would say the same thing to the Emperor, and so they spoke back and forth, in Japanese, through the “translator.” Dr. Kondo completed his doctoral studies in four years, and his mentor Dr. Wood -- himself a noted astronomer -- later stated that Dr. Kondo had been his brightest student, in a long career for mentoring. While doing all this, Dr. Kondo also met his future wife, Ursula Tütermann, and they married in September, 1965. He received a National Academy of Sciences post-doctoral fellowship and did post-doc research for three years at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. Toward the end of the post-doc, his friend and fellow astronomer, Karl Henize, met up with him at a conference in Prague, and recruited him to give a talk at NASA Johnson Space Center. Dr. Henize was an astronaut, and he wanted Dr. Kondo to design and manage a moon-based observatory. Yoji and Ursula, with their infant daughter Beatrice, moved to Nassau Bay, TX in 1968. There, Dr. Kondo was the head of the astrophysics lab at Johnson Space Center, although sadly, the use of Saturn V rockets was discontinued, and no lunar observatory was ever built. In Texas, he resumed his studies in judo, and later took up aikido as well. Through Dr. Henize, Dr. Kondo’s name came to the attention of noted science fiction author Robert Heinlein, who called him with some questions about astronomy, beginning a lifelong friendship. The Kondo family (now including daughters Cynthia, born in 1969, and Angela, born in 1974) returned to Maryland in 1978, where Dr. Kondo continued his career with NASA, becoming Project Scientist for the legendary International Ultraviolet Explorer (IUE) and later the Extreme Ultraviolet Explorer (EUVE). He also founded the Columbia Aikido & Judo Club, advancing to 6th degree black belt in judo, and 7th degree black belt in aikido. Through Robert Heinlein, he met author John Maddox Roberts, and they began collaborating on multiple novels (Dr. Kondo under the nom de plume Eric Kotani). Because of his scientific acumen, he was invited to speak to the Writers of the Future at the United Nations in New York, and later became a judge for Writers of the Future for many years. Throughout his career, Yoji Kondo published over 150 peer-reviewed publications, edited eleven scientific books, was President of two

International Astronomical Union (IAU) Commissions (“Astronomy from Space” and “Close Binary Stars”) and one IAU Division (“Variable Stars”), and served as a special advisor to Dan Goldin, the NASA Administrator. His professional honors include: the "NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement", the "Federal Design Achievement Award (concurrently issued with the U.S. Presidential Award for Design Excellence)", and the National Space Club "Science Award" -- in addition to seven other awards from NASA, Johnson Space Center, Goddard Space Flight Center, and the European Space Agency. He also received the Isaac Asimov Memorial Award for 2002 (announced in 2003 by the Lunarians, the New York Science Fiction Society), for science writing. [Previous recipients include, Arthur C. Clark, Stephen Hawking, Stephen J. Gould, and Charles Sheffield.] Dr. Kondo was also an educator, so while at NASA, he held concurrent professorships at the University of Oklahoma, the University of Houston, the University of Pennsylvania, the George Mason University, the Institute of Space & Astronautical Research in Japan, the University of La Plata in Argentina, and the Catholic University of America. He touched many people in many walks of life: science, martial arts, science fiction, and is remembered as friend, mentor, husband, father, and grandfather. Yoji Kondo is survived by his wife Ursula, daughters Beatrice, Cynthia (and husband, William Reynolds), and Angela (and husband, Chris Gavin), and grandchildren Sabrael, Constance, and Aloysius. He was predeceased by his brothers Yasumasa and Hiroshi, but survived by his brother Akira, and nephews Sumio, Hidehiro, and Yoshihiro. A celebration of his life is planned on Saturday, November 4 at noon. Please contact the family for information about attending and accommodations.

# Tribute Wall

TS

“ I first met Yoji when Dr. Blitzstein in Penn's Astronomy Department asked me to write computer code to process astronomical observation for his PhD dissertation. Our paths next crossed at a picnic on the Naval Observatory grounds given by another Penn alumnus, Dr. K.C. Chou. Yoji was working at NASA at Greenbelt, where I had worked summers while at Penn. My husband and I moved to Houston and I thought I'd never see him again, but one of my fellow science teachers at a Sacred Heart school told me about her University of Houston Astronomy teacher. We met Ursula and enjoyed their company. But, both of us were nomads and didn't meet again until my husband and I retired to Washington. I was delighted to renew our acquaintance. \r\n Yoji was a successful science-fiction writer. DC's Penn discussion group read one of his novels, which first suggested to me that the Internet might break through to isolated citizens in closed, autocratic societies. That idea has not been as successful as his many books, as well as scholarly publications. \r\n We will all miss our dear friend Yoji. \r\n Trish Brown Savage, tSavage2737@comcast.net

---

**Trish Savage** - October 14, 2017 at 10:14 AM