

The Late Mitsuo Aoki, Pioneer in Death & Dying Movement, Will Continue to Serve Through University of Hawaii Archives

Public Invited to Free Zoom Event "Revealing the Works of the Cosmic Dancer: Access to the Digitized Mitsuo Aoki Collections" on March 23, 2022.

HONOLULU, HI, USA, March 17, 2022

/EINPresswire.com/ -- On March 23, 2022, 12-1pm (HI Time), the public is invited to a special Zoom presentation entitled, "Revealing the Works of the Cosmic Dancer: Access to the Digitized Mitsuo Aoki Collections." During this program, participants will learn about the Collections archived at the University of Hawaii, and the work to preserve and make them accessible to the public. There will be demonstrations on how to access the digitized written papers of unpublished talks, sermons, articles, lectures and yet unseen videos of Dr. Mitsuo Aoki ("Dr. Aoki") through the online portals of the [University Archives](#) of University of Hawaii at Manoa ("UH Manoa") and [Uluulu](#): The Henry Kuualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawaii, University of Hawaii-West Oahu ("UH West Oahu"). This is being done with the support of grant funding from the Hawaii Council for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Humanities, University of Hawaii Foundation, and the Mits Aoki Legacy Foundation. Registration for the event can be found at www.mitsaokilegacyfoundation.org/activities.



Dr. Mitsuo "Mits" Aoki

As for the title of the program, "Cosmic Dancer" was a nickname given to Dr. Aoki by his students because of the sudden, unexpected dancing and tai chi movements he would do in class, often on top of a desk! Upon meeting the Dalai Lama, his Holiness invited Dr. Aoki to "Come, sit, you and I are the same." Many years later when visiting Hawaii, the Dalai Lama greeted Dr. Aoki with, "Good to see you, again, Cosmic Dancer."

Dr. Aoki was a highly respected leader in Hawaii from the 1950s until his death in 2010. He was

best known as a Professor of Religion at UH Manoa and for his pioneering work in the area of Death and Dying. He taught over 40,000 UH students in his religion classes which included a very popular Death and Dying class. Dr. Aoki also taught thousands of individuals through his community lectures and talks. His counseling of individuals with terminal illness and their families was well known throughout Hawaii and beyond. Dr. Aoki's work was also foundational to the creation of the hospice programs in Hawaii. Dr. Aoki brought spirituality and forgiveness into caregiving for those going through the transition of death. His approach was one of "conscious dying" which leads to fuller living.



Dr. Mits Aoki with the Dalai Lama at an event in Hawaii

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The fact that Dr. Aoki's legacy is properly digitized, archived and made accessible is a triumph for the field of end-of-life studies and a testament to the countless lives Mits has transformed.”

*Robert Pennybacker,
filmmaker, "Living Your Dying"*

["Living Your Dying,"](#) a documentary created by Lotus Films in conjunction with PBS Hawaii, focuses on Dr. Aoki's work and his belief that death is a vital and inseparable part of life. The film, which is currently being shown on PBS Hawaii, follows Dr. Aoki as he helps three patients find peace as they approach the final moments of their lives. In each case, Dr. Aoki helps these individuals - and their families - cope with the emotional aspects of their terminal illness and eventual death. He shows them ways to bring closure to their lives and die peacefully, knowing they are embraced in the power of love. Unseen footage from the filming of "Living Your Dying" is part of the University of Hawaii video archive.

Robert Pennybacker, finishing writer-producer of "Living Your Dying," said, "The value of the learning and healing found in these archives is inestimable. The fact that Dr. Aoki's audio/visual legacy is properly digitized, archived and made accessible to the world is a triumph for the field of end-of-life studies and a testament to the countless lives Mits has transformed."

Another former student from the 1970s, Alan Gamble, now president of the Mits Aoki Legacy Foundation, shares, "Dr. Aoki was an extraordinary, knowledgeable, wise, kind and compassionate human being who dedicated his life to teaching and assisting others on life's journey, including living their dying."

The digitization includes two distinct collections regarding Dr. Aoki: (1) His papers, held by the University Archives at UH Manoa; and (2) Production materials and raw footage related to the documentary film “Living Your Dying” held by Uluulu: The Henry Kuualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawaii at UH West Oahu (“Uluulu”).

Dr. Aoki’s family donated his numerous unpublished written works and personal videos to the Mits Aoki Legacy Foundation. PBS Hawaii donated the video footage taken to create “Living Your Dying” to the Foundation. Uluulu accepted the donation of over 250 videos and created the Mitsuo Aoki Collection in

order to preserve and protect this important historical work and eventually make it accessible to researchers, students and the general public.

About Dr. Mitsuo Aoki

Mitsuo Aoki (12/04/1914–8/19/2010) was born in Hawi on Hawaii Island, the son of Japanese immigrant plantation workers, and raised in the Japanese camp community as a Buddhist. He excelled in school and moved to Oahu where he attended the Honolulu Bible School and lived with Rev. Paul B. Waterhouse and his wife. He became a Christian and taught Sunday School at Kalihi United Church of Christ. The Waterhouses sponsored Aoki to attend UH Manoa and Drury College where he graduated with honors. He pursued his master’s degree at Chicago Theological Seminary and graduated in 1943 with honors, and was ordained as a United Church of Christ minister. Aoki returned to Hawaii in 1944 and worked as a minister on Maui and Kauai until returning to his Ph.D. studies with well-known Christian theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. It was there he wrote “The Meaning of Death,” under the mentorship of Tillich. He then taught for two years in New York before being asked to create the Department of Religion at UH Manoa in 1956.

For over four decades, Dr. Aoki showed others how to experience death, not merely as an end, but as a vital, inseparable part of life. Instrumental in establishing hospice programs in Hawaii, Dr. Aoki was named a “Living Treasure of Hawaii” in 2004 by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, and was also given a Lifetime Achievement Award from Hospice Hawaii in 2001. The Hawaii Forgiveness Project honored him as a “Forgiveness Hero” in 2009, and he was a national finalist for the prestigious Jefferson Award for his public volunteer service.



(Left to Right) Mits Aoki Legacy Foundation (MALF) Board Member Clarence Liu, Archivists Janel Quirante and Helen Wong Smith, and MALF Board Members Sophie Ann Aoki and Alan Gamble

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