

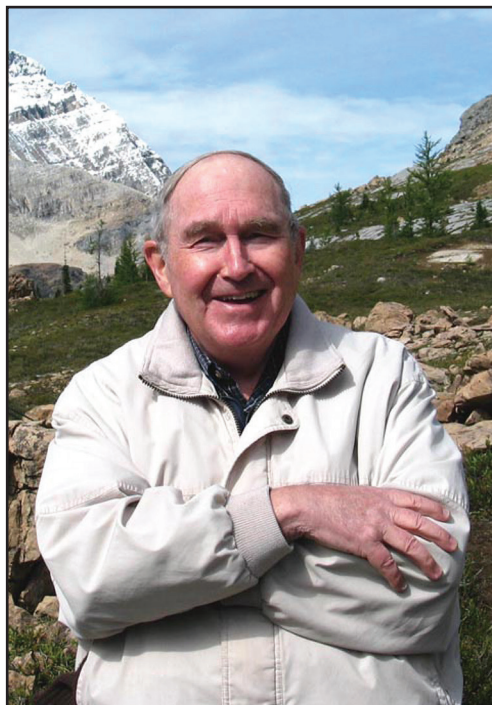
# FRED G. NOTEHELPER

## IUC '65

“My earliest childhood memory is seeing the Doolittle Raiders flying overhead,” recalls Fred G. Notehelfer. “That was April 18, 1942.” The son of German missionary parents living in Tokyo, Notehelfer was a three-year-old eyewitness to the first air raid by the United States to strike the Japan Islands, a historic event credited with boosting American morale and casting doubt upon Japan’s wartime claim of invulnerability. “I’ve forgotten a lot of things in my life,” he continues, “but I remember everything about that time.”

It was a childhood spent listening to sirens sounding nightly and watching B-29 bombers make their way to their intended target, a nearby railway facility. Food was scarce, and bartering became a survival skill at which Notehelfer’s father proved expert, using the family’s ration of cigarettes to obtain oil-rich walnuts and cabbage, which would later be transformed into a food product with a long shelf life -- sauerkraut.

When he arrived with his family in the United States after the war’s end, Notehelfer hardly spoke any English, but by the summer of 1948 when the family settled in Turlock, California, the young immigrant had become fluent. Eventually, in 1953, he returned to Japan, joining his father, whose Japanese language skills had been sorely needed in post-war Japan. After graduating from the American School in Tokyo, Notehelfer found his way to Harvard, arriving with designs on learning to fly and becoming a painter. However, it was his personal relationship to the family of Edwin O. Reischauer -- noted scholar of Japanese history and culture and later U.S. ambassador to Japan -- that inspired a serendipitous course correction. “How come with your background you’re not working on anything Japanese?” Reischauer had asked the undergraduate.



Following Reischauer’s encouragement and advice, Notehelfer eventually earned a B.A. in history at Harvard, and then a Ph.D. from Princeton University in Japanese history, becoming a specialist in the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods. After teaching briefly at Princeton, he joined the UCLA History Department in 1969 to develop the Japanese studies program at that institution. From 1975 to 1995, he served as the UCLA director of the USC-UCLA Joint Center in East Asian Studies, and from 1992 to 2007 as director of the Terasaki Center for Japanese Studies. For his major contribution to Japan-U.S. relations and his role in pioneering the establishment of Japanese studies in Southern California, Professor Notehelfer was awarded the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun medal from the Japanese government in 2009.

Throughout his distinguished career, Notehelfer has remained a champion of the IUC program, even serving for a time as its board chair. “Few programs in the world are like it,” he explains, “and few have lasted as long as it has.” Describing the curriculum as “miles ahead” of what was available at the time, he remembers his own training at IUC in 1964-65 as revolutionary for teaching familiar Japanese -- unheard of in an era when it was considered too crude a form to study. The idea that “language has to be used for something” has been a key to IUC’s success, he believes, spawning the highly specialized yet fundamentally practical training its students receive today. In addition, he credits IUC with an ability to attract and retain dedicated staff, scholars, and teachers. “That’s why I’m such a strong supporter,” he concludes. “The program has been developed over some time with good linguists working out how best to approach language so that people can later perform at the their jobs really well.”