

## OBITUARY

*Thomas T. Noguchi*<sup>1</sup>

### In Memoriam—Kazuo Suzuki, DDS, Ph.D.

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Kazuo Suzuki, Professor Emeritus of Forensic Odontology, Tokyo Dental College and President of the Japanese Society of Criminology, passed away after a prolonged illness at the Keio University Medical Center, Shinjuku, Tokyo on August 28, 2003 at age 76. He leaves his wife, Kazuko, four children and two granddaughters. He was a pioneer in the early development of Forensic Odontology in Japan and his influence extended to his colleagues in the rest of the World.

He was born on March 1st 1927 in Kou-no-su, Saitama-ken as the only son of Dr. Norimasa and Dr. Noriko Suzuki. His mother was a prominent practicing dentist in Kou-no-su City. He graduated from the Tokyo Dental College, Tokyo and earned the degree of DDS in 1951. Following graduate training in Oral Surgery, he further sought advanced training at the Department of Legal Medicine, Tokyo University School of Medicine and received a Ph.D. in 1958. The title of his doctoral thesis was "The study of the dental enamel for extracting substance for ABO blood typing." He was profoundly influenced by his mentor Prof. Shokichi Ueno, a forensic pathologist and desired to make his contribution in forensic odontology and allied sciences, aiding in criminal investigation through knowledge of dental science. The science of forensic odontology was unknown in those days, and he was largely involved in development of new techniques and procedures applicable to daily criminal investigation. In 1964, as an Associate Professor, he was selected as Chairman of the newly established Department of Forensic Odontology at his alma mater, Tokyo Dental College. This was the first such Department established in Japan. He became consultant to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and the National Police Agency. He lectured at many universities as well as at general public gatherings, promoting the importance of the contributions of forensic odontology. Over the many years, he trained countless number of forensic odontologists, who are now active participants in this field. Under his full time leadership as educator, researcher, and practitioner of forensic odontology, his Department participated in research projects and published numerous peer-reviewed publications. He emphasized the importance of forensic odontology in criminal investigations and his textbooks in Forensic Odontology are now the standard in dental and forensic education. He did not forget the need for public understanding of this unique science and spent much time participating in public education in the form of public lectures, radio and television appearances, and publishing popular books for the general public regarding the importance of forensic odontology.

I first met Professor Suzuki at the triennial meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences (IAFS) in Copenhagen



in 1966. We struck up a life-long friendship based on mutual respect and shared interest in the forensic medical field. We were also born in the same year. Every chance I had to go to Japan, I always worked through Prof. Suzuki. We exchange our ideas on advancement of forensic sciences and advancements in our careers. I became the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner, County of Los Angeles, in 1967, and in 1970 Professor Kazuo Suzuki became a full Professor of Forensic Odontology to add to his title of Chairman of the Department. In 1989 I was specifically invited to participate in the 25th Anniversary ceremony of the establishment of the Department of Forensic Odontology at Tokyo Dental College. Prince MIKASA, the uncle of the Current Emperor of Japan, presided at the ceremony.

Over 30 years ago, when I came under attack by local politicians in Los Angeles, Professor Suzuki was one of the first persons to express concern and he organized a fund raising effort in 1969 and sent a substantial sum to help cover the cost of fighting back to retain my position. Eventually, the County of Los Angeles, Civil Service Commission reinstated me as the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner.

Aside from his professional career, Prof. Suzuki had a unique ability to communicate to the public. He preached service to the community. One day, he explained to me his dual interpretation of the Japanese term for Forensic Odontology. Study of Forensic odontology in the Japanese language is "HOU-SHI-GAKU." Based on its phonetic reading, this could be understood to be "HOU-SHI," service to humanity and "GAKU," which means "study." This expressed his philosophy of life, service to humanity through his dedication to forensic odontology. He enchanted with his idea of dedication, friendship, respect to parents, and he

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practiced this tradition throughout his career. He dedicated his life to helping the people through his profession, through the application of a difficult science to practical solutions.

Among the many cases he had notably handled through dental identification, were the 1985 JAL airline accident involving over 200 victims, who were identified by a team led by Prof. Suzuki. He was appointed as consultant in aviation accident and to the individual ID team. He was given the highest rank held by medical and dental professional in the Japanese Department of Foreign Affairs, because of his extraordinary kindness in extending his support to international colleagues. I have referred to him many of my U.S. colleagues, who were seeking professional contacts in Japan, and among them are many AAFS members.

He lent his expertise on two Los Angeles County cases in which Japanese Nationals died as the results of gun shot wounds. In one case the victim, a Japanese woman, had remained unidentified for many years until Dr. Suzuki was requested by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department to review the dental records of the victim. He worked with the dental records prepared by Dr. Gerald Vale, Forensic Dentistry Division, County of Los Angeles, and was able to make positive identification.

After he reached his mandatory retirement age and became Professor Emeritus at the Tokyo Dental College, he still remained active and continued to work from a room, next to the President of

the College. As close friends we emulated each other and we both continued to work hard through our retirement years. For his many years of outstanding service to his country he was awarded The Imperial Medal of the Raising Sun by His Imperial Highness The Emperor of Japan.

He was also very generous in supporting and recognizing the efforts and contributions of his international colleagues. I was a recipient of this generosity. He spared no effort in publicizing my contributions to the forensic sciences in Japan and in 1999, in recognition of my contribution to the Japanese National Police Agency, I was awarded the highest National Police Medal granted to a civilian person. During the same year, along with other Japanese colleagues he recommended me for an Imperial Medal, and later that same year, I was awarded the Imperial Medal of the Sacred Treasure with neck ribbons.

In 2002 I saw him for the last time at the Keio University Hospital. It was a very painful "Goodbye" to a lifelong good friend and colleague. He now rests in peace after an exemplary life and a courageous struggle. We will remember his kindness and the help he gave to humanity.

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