

Our Dad's Eulogy Joanne Yokoyama Suzuki

Our beloved husband, father, and grandfather was born in Honolulu 81 years ago. He attended Waialae Elementary, McKinley High School and Hanganji Japanese School.

He came from humble beginnings. His father cooked and mother cleaned house for a family. Father Shigeichi later became a taxi driver but died of a bleeding ulcer as dad lay next to him, giving a direct blood transfusion. Dad was only 16 at the time. The family life savings were lost when our government confiscated money from Japanese banks following Pearl Harbor. Mother Ochiye became the breadwinner, raising chickens and pigs while working at Kaimuki Bakery as their best cake decorator. Dad would tell how he and younger brother Paul worked hard during those destitute years. He worked after school in a grocery store and since there was no electricity in the home, an added chore was to collect wood to fuel the stove.

At McKinley, he was editor of the Daily Pinion, the only daily high school publication of its kind. As a junior, he won top honors in the National Quill and Scroll contest that resulted in a journalism scholarship at Duke University. But on his deathbed, dad's father told him he should become a doctor, not a writer.

Dad was a freshman at the University of Hawaii when Pearl Harbor was attacked. On June 12, 1943, he joined the army and was recruited into the Military Intelligence Service after graduating from the M.I.S. Language School in Savage, Minnesota. He was assigned to the 5th Marine division during its invasion of Iwo Jima. His work in coaxing the Japanese out of their caves and locating a Japanese codebook earned him a Bronze Star. Six thousand marines and twenty thousand Japanese soldiers were killed in those 36 days of fighting. Looking back on the horrors of war, he was quoted as saying, "Life is very precious... So many people died. Seeing all of these people die made me go into medicine".

In 1946, dad returned to Japan on an army transport ship. Mom happened to be working on the dock that day, handing out files to departing civilian employees. From the ship railing above, dad began professing his love for her. Mom insisted to her co-workers that she did not know this man but to no avail. It was fate that three months later, mom and her sister Sue ran into dad at a bus stop while working in Tokyo. They married soon thereafter, a marriage spanning 59 years. During the occupation, dad was put in charge of translating "top secret" Japanese documents. He and mom thoroughly enjoyed 4 1/2 years in Japan during the Occupation, establishing friendships from around the globe.

Following the war, dad was accepted to the University of Michigan and with mom and me in tow, moved to Ann Arbor. Because dad had left UH during his sophomore year, he had to spend an additional year at Michigan to finish his Bachelor of Science degree before entering medical school. There is an anecdote to this: Towards

the end of the Iwo Jima campaign, dad and the marine officer he was assigned to, went swimming in the ocean. On their way back to shore, dad maneuvered the waves but his officer got caught in an undertow. Dad swam back to save him. They lost touch but years later, dad attended class and there was his officer, now an anthropology professor at Michigan. Needless to say, he got an "A" for the course!

Dad was then accepted to medical school at the University of Michigan. With their meager savings supplemented by the GI bill, they bought a small home that became the gathering place for all Hawaii students in Ann Arbor. It was quite a group of men and women. On their return, all found success in careers spanning medicine, law, research, and government.

After graduating from medical school in 1955, he interned and did one year of surgical residency at Queen's. In those days, interns made just \$50 a month. By then, the family had grown to 3 children with a fourth on the way. He left his surgical residency to establish a private practice. To make ends meet, he worked for the City and County Emergency Service, riding the ambulance 40 hours a week.

Let me interject here that when my 3 small children were at the house running around crazy, my dad complained, "You six were never like this!" And mom answered, "How do you know? You were never around." And that was the truth. When put in charge of intern training, he did hospital rounds with them from 7 to 10 a.m. He then went to his private practice until 3 or 4 in the afternoon, made hospital rounds on his own patients, and worked the midnight shift at the City and County. It's obvious that mom held the family together during these times. He maintained this rigorous schedule for four years to support a move from his termite-eaten office on Vineyard to the A.Y. Wong building on King St. It was a struggle, but as dad put it, "We might be broke, but we are rich with children."

Dad's passion for writing was fulfilled when he served 37 years as News Editor for the Hawaii Medical Journal. Year after year, his "News and Notes" series was voted most popular column according to readers polled. He was always in "crunch time" to meet the deadline. Even at my wedding reception, he snuck away and was found writing in his car w/ the overhead light on because of a next day deadline. He would often sit in his car at Magic Island, writing his column before snorkeling for ogo.

His service to the medical community also included KOHO radio's "Call the Doctor" series, aimed at educating the first generation Japanese on medical subjects. He was coordinator for PBS television's medical panel and wrote articles for the Hawaii Hochi. He enjoyed writing for the radio program as it required research that maintained both his spoken and written Japanese language skills.

Dad was an avid athlete, playing tennis daily at Beretania courts except for Thursdays and Saturdays, his golf days at Mid-Pacific Country Club. Growing up, it was required that all six kids exercise regularly. Sunday was family day in the Yokoyama household and don't bother with an excuse because it was required that we all participated in the planned activity for that day. We had weekly family meetings to decide on the following week's outing. Dad announced it would be a democratic process and that each person had a vote. At one meeting, we six voted him down on where to go. He then announced that his vote as head of the household was worth 6 points and mom was the 7th. There was snorkeling at Hanauma Bay, swimming at Ala Moana Beach and the Waikiki YWCA, picking mountain apples at Sacred Falls, and fiercely competitive tennis matches at Beretania. Of course, mom would come prepared with the hibachi to barbecue teriyaki and serve her famous musubi and potato salad.

Dad strongly believed that physical and mental health is closely intertwined and that to maintain a healthy mind, one needed a healthy body. In 1999, following his heart attack, Suzanne returned to man his office for a week. Suzanne thought she was a "hot-shot" physician but was quickly humbled. Not only were all of his hypertensive and diabetic patients controlled perfectly, he had his 90+ year olds riding exercise bicycles daily. They told her of their fear of not complying with dad's strict orders.

Dad's greatest passion in life was practicing medicine. His love for patients was never so evident as when he had to retire following a devastating stroke in 2000. He never planned on retiring and probably fantasized that God would take him while working on patient charts in the office. It took the life out of him and he was never the same. He truly missed seeing his patients and friends and his busy work routine.

The other night, sitting around, I asked my brothers and sisters for a memory of dad. There are many but I chose the following:

Larry remembers going on house calls w/ dad at an early age; dad carrying his black medical bag, he remembers how thankful the patients were. He also remembers the trips to Kalaupapa when dad visited his patients the Ogawas, and along with Roger and Henry, would sit in front of a fire, watching the sunset and sea cliffs with dad, who was relaxed and not in his doctor mode.

When Diane had trouble with homework, dad put up blackboards in our dining room and taught us all how to outline and take notes. To this day, our dining room walls are still covered w/ those blackboards. When Diane had difficulty with memorizing, dad gave her confidence by telling her not to worry. He would say, "Intelligence is knowing where to find it". He also taught her to sketch, for

dad was also a good artist and you would always find his medical illustrations on the paper of the examining table as he explained things to patients.

Roger remembers putting up the Xmas tree every year, seeing who broke the most bulbs, and singing along with Mitch Miller. For dad loved to sing. He would have us singing Japanese folk songs on the way to school and would gather us in front of the TV for the weekly "Sing Along With Mitch". Roger also enjoyed watching him interact w/ his tennis buddies at the Beretania Courts and recalls fondly, dad's facial expression as he watched Roger's errant ball sail over 2 lines of houses near the golf course.

Suzanne shares dad's love for writing and is carrying on his legacy as chief editor of the quarterly Physician's Newsletter at Kaiser Hospital in San Jose. She even has her own physician profiling column called, "In Step with..."

Henry Dunn remembers growing up skin diving w/ dad off of Kahala Beach. After dad's stroke, Henry took him out into the ocean for the first time. Dad was nervous and tentative, but under Henry's gentle guidance, he thoroughly enjoyed himself.

For me, it was our long talks, especially after retirement. He was very proud of us and whom we were married to, and how we were raising our children. He was very proud of his grandchildren's accomplishments as well.

Dad's greatest gift to his six children was instilling the values of work ethic, passion and dedication to our clientele. All six of us share this in our respective fields.

The one thing that all six of us agree upon is that dad was blessed with the most loving and supportive wife. Through sickness and health, mom nursed dad over these past five years with an understanding no other could possess. Dad told the hospital social worker that he wanted to be placed in a nursing facility because he was burdening mom and he didn't want her to fall ill. Mom would not hear of it and was able to grant his wish of bringing him home to die.

We lost our greatest mentor, our foundation. But as a dear friend said, "It's sad when our heroes die." We want you to remember the brilliant and vibrant man he was, just as he would want to be remembered.

Editor's Note

Joanne Yokoyama Suzuki presented this eulogy representing her family at Henry's service. Joanne is Dean of Students at MidPacific Institute in Honolulu.

