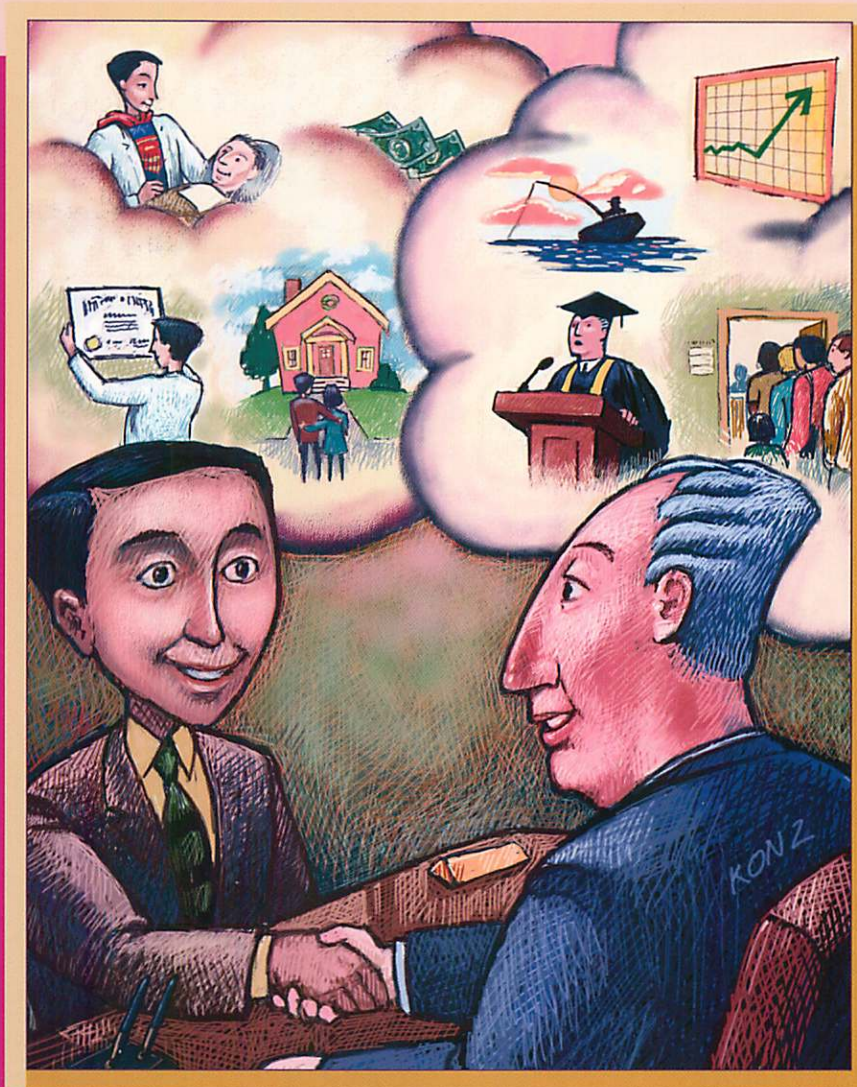


Bulletin



It's That Time of Year – Associateship Season (p. 13)

PORTRAIT OF A PROFESSIONAL: DR. KEN KAI

20

ANNUAL SESSION PRESENTATION SUMMARIES



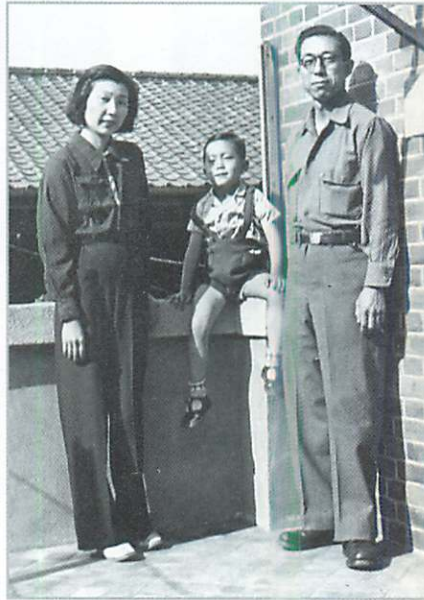
Ken Kai, DDS, MSD San Jose, CA

BY DR. RICHARD SAVAGE

I want to share with you an encounter I was truly fortunate to experience. It was in Vancouver at the PCSO annual meeting while I was attending a volunteer appreciation dinner. The night was cold and blustery, the rain had let up, and a bright moon reflected off of the still wet tropical foliage surrounding our restaurant. I looked around for a dinner seat, and I noticed Ken Kai sitting next to the window. I walked over and asked him if the seats next to him were occupied, and he stood up, smiled broadly and said, "Please sit next to us and enjoy the evening."

The next two hours treated me to a captivating story of Ken's life that began with his birth in China and continues today with his remarkable accomplishments and generosity. I had known Ken for many years, and I always thought of him as a dedicated, yet quiet man, but in all these years I never really knew the depth of his dedication and breadth of his accomplishments. That night listening to Ken tell me about his life inspired me to share a "Portrait of a Professional" article with our colleagues. Ken is one individual who continues to live life large, is an inspiration for us all, and really makes a difference in our blessed and chosen profession.

Top: Ken with his parents in Mukden, Manchuria, in a photo taken in 1947 for a passport back to America (Shortly after the war, women dressed like men to avoid rape or kidnap).



Bottom: Ken at UCSF in the spring of his sophomore year, 1966.

Ken introduced his wife, Tae, she smiled and we all began to chat. I asked Ken how he had decided to practice in the San Jose area, and was he from the Bay Area? No, he said, he was not even born in California; in fact, if it hadn't been for his great grandfather, Orie Kai, Ken would never have set foot in this country. It seems his great grandfather was one of the first seven graduate students of the famous Professor Fukuzawa, founder of the world-

famous Keio University in Tokyo. Professor Fukuzawa believed in "striving for progress and enlightenment, and providing the academic and moral education needed to create a generation of wise and capable leaders." The professor instructed his followers to go out into the world and get involved with international businesses, and great grandfather Orie Kai started an import/export business with curio shops in San Francisco, Chicago and New York. Orie assigned his son, Ken's grandfather, to manage the San Francisco shop in 1897.

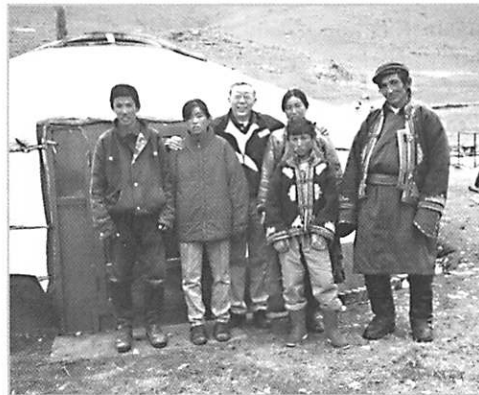
Not long after, in 1907, Ken's father, Yoshio, the eldest of five, was born in San Francisco at the Buena Vista Sanatorium. The family lived on Lyon street, next to the panhandle of San Francisco (now

Golden Gate) Park which was a vast expanse of sand dunes and not yet the park of today. The times were difficult for the family: they had to endure discrimination, adapt to the culture, learn and speak English, and avoid harassment and bullies.

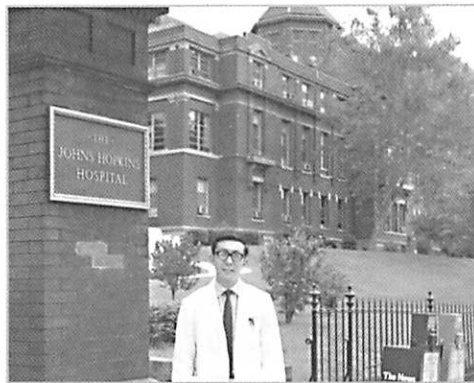
Back to Japan

In 1923, tragedy struck. The family shop burned down, and grandfather, whose first love was art, decided to move the family back to Japan and pursue a career in art. Ken's father and his siblings had to study Japanese to pass the school entrance exams in an effort to gain access to higher education in their new home in Japan. Ken's dad worked hard in his new country. He was the eldest, and it was his responsibility to care for the family, help his siblings attend school, and support his father as he painted. Yoshio worked long hours, studied in school at night, and expanded his skills in English. Ken's dad did many things to keep the family moving ahead and surviving in difficult times. He served food in the Imperial Household of Emperor Yoshihito (the father of Hirohito), translated chemist's papers into English and became an English language secretary for the Merck Pharmaceutical division in Japan.

Ken's dad found time to teach and train as a body builder, and was preparing for the 1940 Olympics when WWII intervened and caused the cancellation of the games. His father needed to find work, and war time was making work tough to find. Because Ken's dad was born in America and fluent in both Japanese and English, he was able to find work in Mukden, Manchuria as a translator for American engineers working with MKK, a milling and lath machine company. In 1938, as unrest and talk of war seemed closer, Yoshio married Hatsuko, who was from Hawaii and studying in Japan, in Dalian, China. Soon after, Europe was at war, and



While assistant leader of the U.S. Orthodontic Delegation to China, Ken visited nomads living in a ger in Mongolia (1988).



Ken had a rotating internship at The Johns Hopkins Hospital (1969).

the tide of war for Japan was rising. On December 7, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. Yoshio, an American citizen, did not want to return to Japan, and continued to work in Mukden. In June of 1942, with the help of a midwife, Ken Kai, the second of three children, was born in China.

A Country at War

The Japanese established a POW camp for about 15,000 American, British and Australian prisoners near the MKK factory, and because Ken's dad spoke English, he was put in charge of 200 prisoners who were being used as forced labor in the MKK factory. Yoshio was an American himself,

caught in the terrible plight of war, yet he did all he could to help the prisoners get food and clothing, and pleaded with the authorities to soften their harsh conditions and treatment.

In August, 1945, the Japanese surrendered, and the town of Mukden was thrown into anarchy and looting. The times were desperate; food was hard to find for Yoshio, and his family found themselves destitute and starving. Both of Ken's siblings died of malnutrition and cold, and Ken himself was lucky to survive this period of his young life.

Just in time, a small group of American officers arrived and established a local headquarters in a walled tobacco compound, giving Yoshio food and shelter for his family in return for his serving as a

volunteer secretary for the Americans. Finally, in 1947, Ken and his family began a journey aboard a U.S. transport plane to Shanghai, then onto Oahu, Hawaii, via steamship, landing at Hickum Field, where once again Yoshio used his linguistic skills to serve as secretary to the Provo Marshal.

On to a Drier Climate

Little Ken had a severe case of asthma, and breathing was not easy. He was just five years old, couldn't speak English, and the asthma kept him from sleeping at night so he was in a daze of sleep deprivation during the day and constantly missed school. Because of the severe asthma, the doctors suggested he needed to be in a drier climate — once again, the family was off. This time it was aboard a Matson Line transport ship on their way to Fresno, at the suggestion of a friend, who had a fiancé working as a gardener in Fresno who could help with the arrangements. Can you fathom how much was packed into Ken's young life and what his family had endured? Now a new adventure was about to start for this family of hardworking people as they made their way to Fresno to start a new life in 1949.

Growing up in Fresno

Ken relates this life that I never could have imagined, and then as we finish the dinner salad, he smiles a little and gazes off at the wind-blown plants outside our window. The wind howls and he looks back,

seeming to look into the past. His wife sits quietly by his side and smiles. She is a mystery. How did they meet, and what events brought this couple together? She leans forward and says, "Ken was very shy," and she didn't think he wanted to meet her because she came from Japan, and he thought

their cultural and language differences would make it difficult. So now the rest of us who are sitting around the dinner table waiting for the next course, ask Tae to tell us about their courtship. Shyly, she smiles at Ken and asks him to tell the story. Ken says it is a unique story, but he first wants to share what it was like for him growing up in Fresno and what kept him going through those early years before a social life, a wife, or a family could even be a part of his thoughts.

Ken recounts a difficult time growing up in Fresno. His family was financially poor, yet strong and full of love. He had to work hard to contribute to the family, and he moved around to several schools while growing up, not making many friends, and being a loner. The family eventually moved from a room behind a grocery store and into a government housing project. Ken drifted, and was without focus; because of the many jobs he pursued, his studies were not a top priority. He did not have a social life, he did not date, and it was not until his senior year that he finally got the courage to ask a girl to a dance.

Ken remembers the one date he had as a senior, with a girl from a wealthy family. It was a time when other seniors were making plans for college and seemed to

have goals. He was beginning to become aware of the pressure to go to college, but he had never even had a date, or given his future much thought. His immediate goal was to polish up his dad's ten-year-old used car for the dance, yet no matter how much he polished, the car still looked old. He said it was like being the Karate Kid, working endless hours



Ken's orthodontic class of 1972, where he was the only Asian, at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

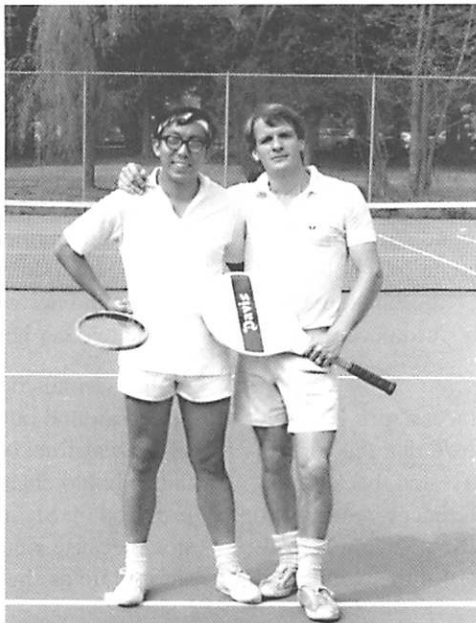
for seemingly little to show for the effort. Yet he persevered and learned his first social lessons about dancing, getting dressed up for the first time, renting a tux, and realizing for the first time how expensive it is to take a girl out. He had his first glimpse into a different world, and his lack of direction and goals slowly began to evolve into a new approach to his studies and his future.

In high school, although Ken was a loner, he loved to play the flute, and enjoyed the honor orchestra, the marching band and achieved a brown belt in judo. He was evolving — there was a sleeping giant about to awake. His family encouraged him, and Fresno College was now in his sights.

Ken is very proud of his father and mother. Both of them, he recalls, are very hardworking and always striving for the best for the family, and encouraging personal improvement through hard work, goals and education. Ken's dad came to Fresno, and worked in a produce section of a grocery store while studying criminology. He became the first Asian to work in the Fresno County Sheriff's office, and retired with honors and media coverage after a quarter century of service. His mom worked as a grocery clerk but kept up her studies, and graduated from adult night school the same year Ken graduated Fresno State College.

On to Orthodontics

For Ken, his turning point came the day he met Charles Griffin while attending Fresno State College. Chuck was the president of the Dental Club, and he invited Ken to attend a meeting. It was at this moment in time that Ken became consumed with excitement, and he realized that only his personal application to his studies would allow him to reach his goals. He applied himself with newly directed



Tennis in Hackensack, N.J., with Fairleigh Dickinson roommate/classmate, Fred Schwitz (1971).



Ken with Dr. Bill Bell, an oral surgeon who taught orthognathic surgery. Photo taken in Caracas, Venezuela, while Ken was studying distraction osteogenesis at Cesar Guerrero's clinic in 1997.

seriousness and quickly buckled down to hard study and raising his grades on his way to a future in dentistry. The fire in his belly was burning, and there was no obstacle that would keep him from living his dream. In 1968, Ken Kai graduated from UCSF. He was awarded the Oral Medicine Award and with extra work earned a B.S. degree in addition to his D.D.S. He was indeed living his dream.

Well now, dinner was finally being served. Ken had kept us all glued to our chairs listening to this remarkable saga. Tae sat quietly, still smiling, and we all insisted now we must know how this lucky man — a loner, without a social life and fortunate to have raised himself to his dream — managed to meet and marry this lovely woman?

Between sips of wine and bites of dinner, Ken began to tell us of a romance that began slowly, and almost

Portrait of a Professional

not at all. He still had much to do in his profession, working many jobs to support himself through school, wanting to achieve a fellowship, complete an internship and orthodontic residency, and establish a practice. Ken had come up the hard way, and he wanted to share his experiences and compassion with others with the unfortunate plight and struggling he had experienced. Ken had much to do in life. In 1976, because of his friend Dr. Eugene Kinoshita, another turning point in Ken's life was about to occur that would bring two people together.

Gene asked Ken if he wanted to meet a girl. Ken said, "Of course, I do," but when he heard that this girl was from Japan, he said he wasn't interested, because he felt the cultural and language differences would be too much to deal with. Gene pressed Ken, saying he had promised this girl's sponsor a date for this young girl

studying in San Jose. Ken said he reluctantly agreed, but he is pretty sure he was a little rude to Tae on their first meeting. Yet she was gracious and friendly the whole evening. Ken said he teased her when he picked her up and asked her if she liked hamburgers, even though the plan was for a nice Polynesian restaurant. On the way back from their dinner, Tae invited him to her San Jose State graduation party, but Ken did not want to get involved in a relationship, and he told her he had other plans.

As the second course of our dinner began to be placed around our table, Tae smiled and giggled and said it was true, but she said she told him if something should change his plans, he was welcome to just drop in. She must have made quite an impression, because Ken sent her a dozen rose buds and showed up as she had suggested. That began a year of dating, and on a trip to a conference in Palm Springs, our loner, in the Jacuzzi with only his lady Tae, spontaneously proposed without a ring — and as they say, the rest is history.

Tae and Ken have six children: three girls and three boys ranging in age from 10 to 24, with three in college, two in high school and the youngest in the fifth grade. The eldest is in dental school, and another was just accepted into dental school. Tae and Ken continue to work together raising the

family, sponsoring foreign students, caring for Ken's elderly parents (96 and 91 years old), enjoying the practice of orthodontics, and looking forward to seeing the world together.

As we finish dinner, I ask Ken, "How did you get into orthodontics?" Now, that opened up another adventure, as by now I had learned Ken does not seem to take the easy road, but travels and makes his own paths.



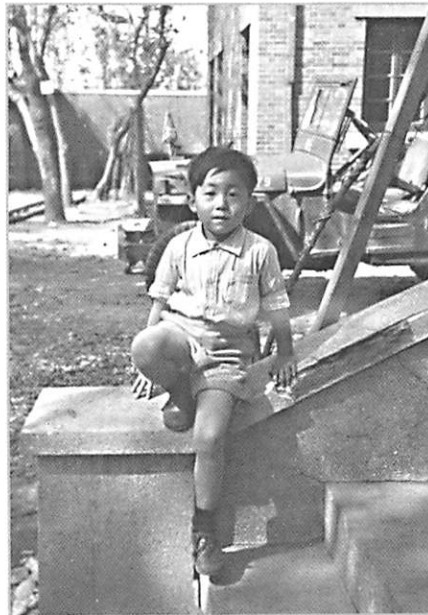
Kai family portrait, New Year's, 2004. Front row, left to right: Kevin, Kenneth, Ken's mother Hatsuko, father Yoshio, Tae. Back row, left to right: Alan, Marcus, Lisa, Cheri and Gina.

When Ken graduated from UCSF, he was given the Oral Medicine Award and with encouragement from Drs. Sol Silverman and Bill Ware, Ken did a cancer fellowship for a year, but he found it too morbid, and therefore took a one-year rotating internship at John Hopkins Hospital. Ken said this was a good experience, but "surgery was too stressful for me." So he applied for and went on to attend the orthodontic program at Fairleigh Dickinson. Ken said money was still an issue, so he found a part-time associateship, and he was able to pay his tuition and save some money for a five-week trip to Europe with the only other bachelor in his class, Ralph Apuzzio, who now practices in Pennsylvania. No doubt this adventure in Europe would be the seed for Ken's desire to travel the world, see new sights and meet people wherever his wanderlust takes him.

As the dinner plates are cleared and we wait for dessert, I ask Ken about some of his current activities. He tells me he has just returned from Mukden with a group of POWs, representing his father and revisiting their old MKK factory and prison camp, and he also just completed some recent lectures in China and the Philippines. I asked Ken how he got started going to China to do lectures. He told me his good friend Dr. Raymond Sugiyama and he had decided long ago to share their professional wealth by teaching in other countries not as developed as ours, at their personal expense and asking nothing in return. He told me they started in Japan when Japanese orthodontic programs were in their infancy, and they have expanded their efforts into Mexico, Mongolia, China and Thailand. There are 19 orthodontic programs in China, and so far Ray and Ken have visited 15. They want to meet a goal of teaching at each of the 19 schools. Ken gives lectures and presentations on cleft palate care, esthetics, orthognathic surgery and difficult and challenging orthodontic cases, plus hands-

on wire-bending sessions. Ken says he loves to meet new people, see new places, and is continually impressed with the kindness, warmth and appetite for information he sees no matter where he goes. Ken finds time to learn the history of each area he visits, and he is constantly amazed how people in ancient times were able to use primitive tools yet still build truly amazing structures like the Great Wall.

Ken was an associate for three years before starting his private practice in 1975 in San Jose. In 1977 he designed and built his current practice facility where he is serving the diverse needs of the San Jose community. During the first three years, while his practice was growing, he was the orthodontic director for the Center for Correction of Dentofacial Deformities at St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco. He continues to volunteer his time in many professional organizations, including serving on the board of the Pacific Coast and California Associations of Orthodontists, on the board of the Edward H. Angle Society, on committees of the California Association of Orthodontists, along with several clinical study clubs. Ken is a Diplomate of the American Board of Orthodontists, is on staff at two local hospitals, and is on the California Children's Service screening panel.



Truly Blessed

Ken loves our profession and he truly believes he is blessed to have the opportunities he has experienced in his life. He and

Ken in 1946 in Mukden, Manchuria. Shortly after WW II, when the POWs were released, Americans set up headquarters in the British American Tobacco Company Compound, where Ken's dad worked as a volunteer secretary for safekeeping. Note the U.S. Jeep in the background.

Portrait of a Professional

Tae continue to encourage their children to study for what they want to do in their lives, and as parents they are supportive and want them to experience life to its fullest and make the time to volunteer in the service of others. Ken and his family enjoy life, and because of his humble financial beginnings he has not concerned himself with accumulating vast wealth. Instead, he spends money on the needs of the family, the care of his parents, and funds his goals to travel and teach those appreciative and in need.

Ken views orthodontics with great pleasure. He sees orthodontics not as work, but as an opportunity help people and develop their self-esteem, as he helps his patients achieve beauty using all of his resources, including orthognathic surgery and the full range of multi-disciplinary treatment approaches. He says that we are like artists, using our hands, eyes and skills to create a meaningful result that is esthetic, with the additional challenge to include functional health.

Ken's current passions are his continuing love of his family and practice, and also the desire to see and do as much in life as he can do, yet he fully realizes there is not enough time to experience everything. He encourages all orthodontists, younger and older, to "follow your passions and make a difference in the world." Ken says he is so elated to be in orthodontics, keeping busy and helping others, especially the young and unfortunate, such as those with birth deformities like cleft lips and palates, "who will have a better future with my assistance."

I wanted to share this remarkable man's story. He is a role model in a world that needs more people like him. He has fought real life battles for survival, and he has risen to each challenge with dedication, hard work and generosity. I thank Ken and Tae for sharing their life with me that blustery night in Vancouver.



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