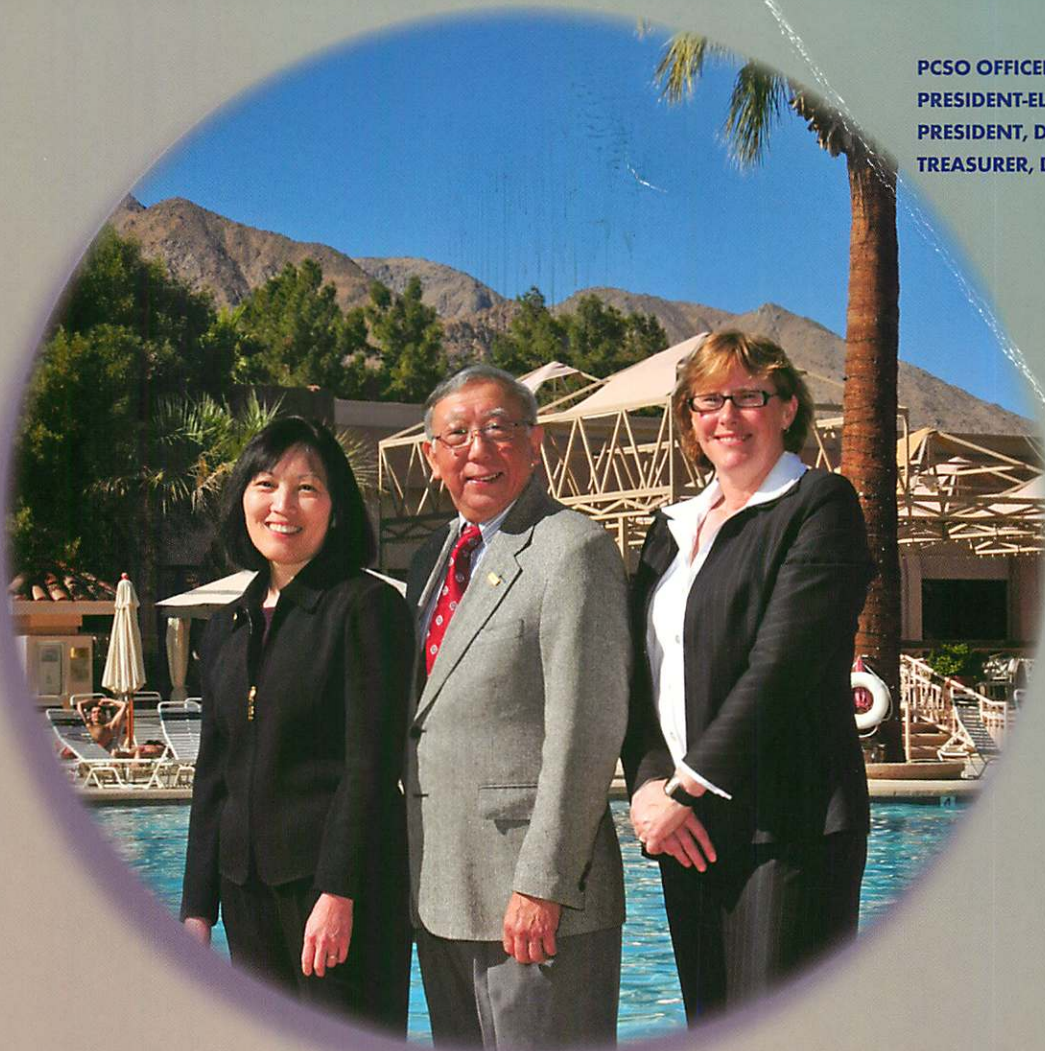


Bulletin



PCSO OFFICERS 2008-2009, L. TO R.:
PRESIDENT-ELECT, DR. LILI HORTON;
PRESIDENT, DR. KEN KAI; SECRETARY-
TREASURER, DR. LESLEY WILLIAMS

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PCSO President, 2008-2009

Ken Kai, DDS

San Jose, CA

By Dr. Gerald Nelson
PCSO Bulletin Editor

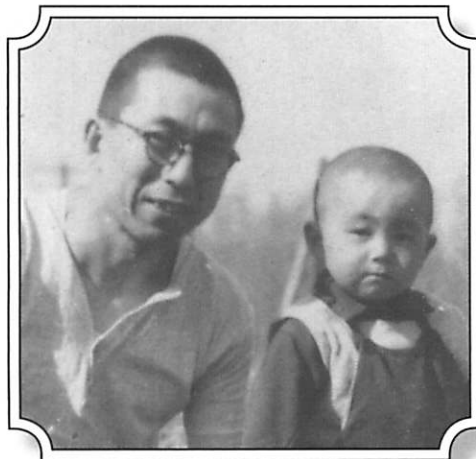
Each year I have the privilege of interviewing the current PCSO President for the PCSO Bulletin "Portrait." This year I spoke with Dr. Ken Kai, who lives near me in Northern California. Dr. Ken Kai's story was told once before in the PCSO Bulletin in the Spring 2004 issue. In today's Portrait, I will bring the reader some new adventures, and also urge you to go to www.pcsortho.org and click on 'Bulletin' in the left column to find the Spring 2004 article, written by Dr. Richard Savage (Anaheim Hills, CA).

Ken has had many global adventures, including his birth in Mukden, Manchuria (now Shenyang, China) in 1942. He was born to American citizens, thus gaining his own citizenship at birth although born out of the USA. Ken and I talked on a sunny Saturday in September 2008.

Gerald Nelson (GN): Ken, how did you happen to be born in Manchuria?

Ken Kai (KK): Well, it started with my grandfather and his newlywed wife when they moved to San Francisco from Japan in 1906 to establish an import-export business. My father, Yoshio, the eldest of five, was born and raised in San Francisco. When this family store burnt down, the whole family returned to Tokyo; Dad was 16 at the time and, as soon as he was able, he had to support the family. After some odd jobs such as food server for the Emperor, body-building instructor, pharmaceutical translator and transcriber, he moved to Manchuria, where he worked as a foreman in a machine milling company called MKK.

My mother, Hatsuko Kiri, from Honolulu, met Dad in Japan while she was studying Japanese culture. After Dad moved to Manchuria, they met up again and got married in Dylan, a seaport in China. I was born as the drama of World War II approached. When Japan surrendered, there was anarchy in Mukden, and the family began to face daily conditions that challenged the human spirit.



Ken (age 2) in Mukden, Manchuria (1944) with father, Yoshio. Planting vegetables behind their apartment for food supply for the coming winter.



Ken at age 3, with older sister Yoshiko, at age 5. She died during the following winter in Manchuria. (spring 1945, just after WW II)

Portrait of a Professional



Tae's first visit to Fresno to meet Ken's family. Ken dated Tae for one year before they were married. (1977)

With illness and starvation all around them, simply staying alive was a struggle. In Manchuria, the winters are so cold that even the peasants have fur coats, but wear fur on the inside for insulation. In America, people dress for style, with fur on the outside.

To make matters worse, the fathers of neighboring families, with the promise of work, were rounded up and left on trucks, and were never heard from again. My father didn't go with the others because of my asthma and the death of my two siblings, one at birth and my older sister at five years old. Besides doing menial jobs during the day, Dad entertained Russians soldiers by playing piano in bars. With the little tips he earned, he'd purchase rice by weight in a wine bottle from street vendors. Then at home, Mom and Dad, before cooking, would have to sort out the rice grains from the small pebbles that were mixed in. Often the content was moistened to weigh even more.

Mukden was the location of the only Japanese prisoners of war (POW) camp in China. During the first winter, at least 250 of 1,500 prisoners died because of the harsh cold. Soon after the end of the war, the first Americans, led by Hal Leith, parachuted in with six other soldiers to release the prisoners and

set up a small headquarters in the British American Tobacco Company compound. It was Hal who also took in our family for safe-keeping. Luckily my father could speak English and was an American, so he was taken on as a secretary working only for food and shelter. It wasn't until 1947 that the family was able to hitch rides on a military transport plane and then onto a cargo ship to Hawaii.

After two years in Oahu, living in the barracks of Hickum Field, we departed on a steamship to San Francisco, the birthplace of my father, who hadn't been back for 25 years. At first the surroundings were unfamiliar and strange to Dad until his eyes gazed upon the house on Lyon Street, and when he saw the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park, where he played so many carefree years ago. I was seven years old, and all I felt was the bitter cold of San Francisco compared to the balmy warmth of Hawaii. The first things we bought were warm coats. I was pleased that after two days, we were on the Pacific Union Railroad to hot Fresno, where we no longer needed the coats.

In 2003, because of my father's ill health, I had the privilege to take his place to accompany the first reunion of U.S. prisoners of war to revisit Mukden. My father died the following year at the age of 97.



With the orthodontic department chairman, Ken checks out a bilateral cleft baby in the Nanjing University orthodontic clinic (China, 2003)

There weren't too many POWs alive in 2003, which was 60 years since their captivity. On this trip, two POWs, Robert Rosendahl and Oliver Allen, and their rescuer, Hal Leith, made the trip to see their old POW camp. Hal remembers my father well and told my wife, Tae, and me the experiences they had together. On our trip, reporters and Chinese police escorts accompanied us. Since our trip, in 2007 the Chinese Government converted some of the prison barracks into a museum so the whole world can remember the tragedies of World War II.

GN: How was life in Fresno, California?

KK: We started out living behind a grocery store, then in a three-room duplex, and finally settled for a little while in a government housing project. When we arrived in California, my parents started to speak only English at home in order for me to adopt the language.

Both of my parents arrived without a formal education. Besides working as a clerk in the supermarket, Mom would take orders from ladies at church to make custom dresses. She also went to the local adult high school and earned her high school diploma in the same month that I graduated from Fresno State College with a bachelor of arts degree in zoology.

Meanwhile, my dad studied criminology on his own until he felt qualified to take the county and state law enforcement exams. He passed the qualifying exams and was hired by the Fresno Sheriff's office as Deputy, where he worked for 24 years until his retirement. He was first Asian in law enforcement in Fresno County, and was highly honored at a televised banquet for his retirement party.



Completing repair of a 5-week old infant's cleft with Larry Berkowitz (Plastics) at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Gatos, CA.

Like a nomad, every two years, I would change schools because of my father's job or because we would move into a better home. This made it very difficult for me to make long-term friends, so I felt a need to become more independent and self-reliant. I now realize that it was the environment that shaped my character and instilled the need to explore and try new things in life.

From the fifth grade on, I was cutting lawns, delivering newspapers, working in the fields of Fresno picking grapes, figs, and onions, cleaning apartment houses, as well as having my own gardening customers.

I would say that the most enjoyable aspect of high school was the result of taking flute lessons for three years starting in the fifth grade. Even though I was only a seventh grader, I was accepted as a member of the Fresno High School Marching Band. I was also active in the Fresno State College band, playing the piccolo when marching and the flute in concerts. It made my parents proud to see me in that spiffy uniform marching in the school parades, football halftimes and concerts.

As I reflect back upon those formative years of my youth, I fully realize how much I was influenced by the hard-working examples of my parents and their expectations of me. These experiences were the obstacles in life that had to be overcome, one-by-one, through diligence and determination by all of us. However, at the time, it was the way of life and we took it in stride.

GN: How did dentistry come into the picture?

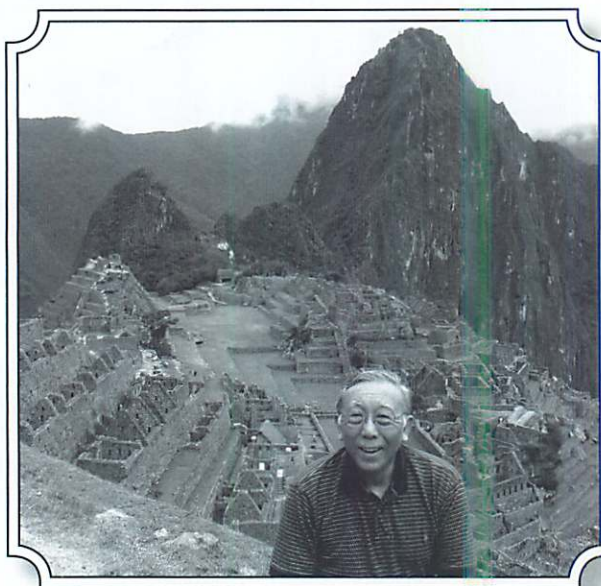
KK: One day after returning from my dental checkup appointment, my mom was sewing and she interrupted my flute practice to say, "Maybe you should become a dentist so we can all live a bit more comfortably." This seemingly casual comment, like so many things at that age, didn't register at the time, since I was a typical fifth grader, living from day-to-day, but it stuck with me and moved into my consciousness after my first year at Fresno State. The fact that I had remembered her suggestion after so many years has made me realize how much influence a parent, teacher, and an orthodontist can have on a young person. You just never know what impact your advice will mean to a young person in the course of his or her life.

I was accepted into both the College of Physicians and Surgeons (now UOP) and UCSF. P&S was a bit run down at the time—as it was well before Dr. Art Dugoni's tenure—so I selected UCSF. At that time when we were attending dental school, the curriculum did not give out Bachelor of Science degrees. To earn a B.S., a dental student had to take additional academic classes with medical and pharmacy

students and write a thesis. With the help of Dr. Russell Colman, our anatomy professor, I took the challenge and did a research paper on rheumatoid arthritis of the temporomandibular joint. At graduation, I was the only one in my 1968 dental school class with a B.S. and D.D.S. hoods to wear with my graduation gown.

GN: UCSF at that time offered a special program that provided orthodontic specialty training during dental school, reducing the crown and bridge, perio, and surgery requirements. Did you apply for that program?

KK: No. I wasn't sure which dental specialty I wanted to pursue, so I did not apply for the Ortho Curriculum II at UCSF. I wanted to experience all that was available before setting my course of life. After graduation, Dr. Bill Ware and Dr. Sol Silverman encouraged me to apply for the one-year Oral Cancer Fellowship at UCSF, which I did.



Ken relaxes on high in Machu Picchu, Peru, after lecturing at Cayetano University in Lima. (2007)

GN: Did you have outside jobs during dental school?

KK: I guess you could say I kept myself busy during my five years at UCSF (the fifth year being my Cancer Fellowship). I needed to bring in some income to reduce the financial burden on my parents who had my two younger siblings living with them. So, I worked throughout my dental school years. I drew blood from in-patients at the hospital before classes started in the morning and filed papers for a hematologist during lunch.

My first summer job was to close down the anatomy lab by disassembling and disposing of all the dissected cadavers to prepare the lab for the arrival of fresh

cadavers. I got very good at removing limbs quickly with a small scalpel. I worked the next summer at the information desk in the lobby of the Medical Sciences Building and did clerical work in the School of Medicine during working hours, while at the same time living and working in a halfway house for the mentally ill as a volunteer for the church. At the halfway house, I was to set an example of a “normal person” while trying to prepare the residents to return to the real world.

During my sophomore and junior years, I participated at the Mission District Clinic performing emergency dental care for transient and indigent people, working alongside UCSF medical students. During my sophomore Thanksgiving weekend, I went to the Havasupai Indian Reservation in Colorado with the Christian Medical Society to do emergency dental care with makeshift chairs and lights. The following summer, I helped at an orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico. I prepared electron microscope

tissues for dermatology research two evenings each week during my senior year. What was really a neat experience was to volunteer through our operative department to practice gold foil on the prisoners in San Quentin Federal Penitentiary. It was so exciting to go through thick electronically-controlled double security doors, pass armed guards and do dental work with guards standing on both sides of you.

During the whole time at UCSF, I belonged to and lived in the Psi Omega Fraternity House, which had a dental lab in the basement, allowing those late night sessions. I was able to secure an old dental chair that the dental school was throwing out and placed it in the fraternity lab to be used as a barber’s chair. Be-

tween wax-ups and crowns, I gave haircuts to some UCSF dental and pharmacy students, for seventy-five cents, when barbers were charging around \$1.25. At that time, of the four fraternities, the Psi O’s were considered the bookworms; however, we did have some great parties. Once, the dental school dean heard a rumor that we were having a stripper perform at our party and he ordered the function cancelled. Hmm... Now that I think about it, it probably wasn’t the dean, but another

fraternity that turned us in so they wouldn’t be outdone.

GN: That is an incredible list of extra-curricular activities. Incredible, but I certainly believe every word, because I have become to personally witness your energy and competence as a PCSO volunteer Board member and Delegate. OK, so you didn’t choose Curriculum II, and started the Cancer Fellowship.

KK: Yes, it was a truly fascinating exposure to dentistry that most don’t see. I made oral

and facial prostheses for patients who had undergone head and neck surgery. There were cases where we were replacing nose, ears, facial contours and lots of partial and full dentures with obturators of different designs. John Beumer preceded me in that program, and I believe is now Chair of Prosthetics at UCLA.

GN: Then, after this came orthodontics?

KK: Not yet. I was accepted to a one-year rotating dental internship at Johns Hopkins Hospital. I was introduced in depth to various specialties, especially surgery. I rotated through emergency room (E.R.), anesthesia, operating room (O.R.), as well as Walter Reed (the U.S. Military Hospital) to study pathology. I myself did full mouth restorative work on



Fishing for king salmon in Katmai, Alaska. Ken reports that this is the largest fish he has ever caught. (July, 2004)

Portrait of a Professional

The grand finale of "Flower Drum Song" 1981. (Ken plays the part of the drunk at the right table.)

NEXT PAGE: The many faces of Ken: characters he played in "Lovely Ladies and Kind Gentlemen" and "Flower Drum Song" (1976, 1977)

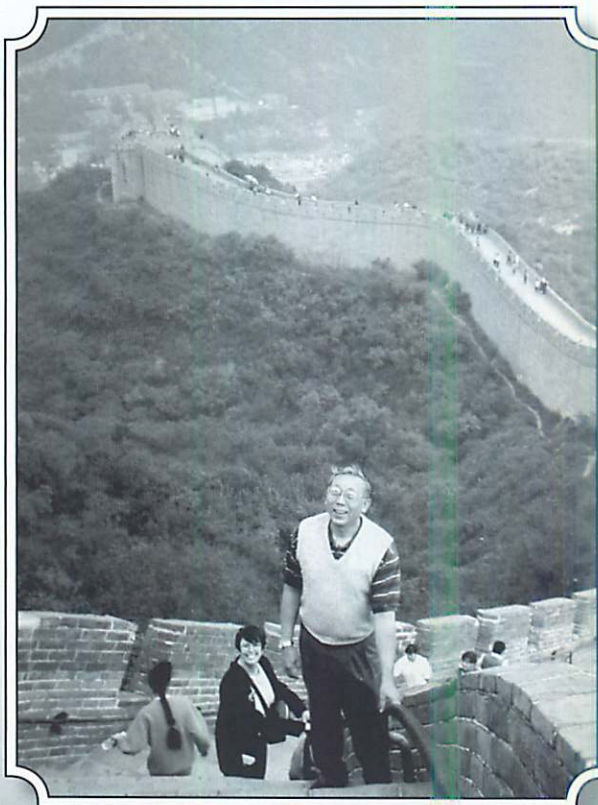


approximately 15 medically compromised or very apprehensive cases in the O.R. under general anesthesia. After that year came to an end, I decided I would not spend my life doing surgery or hospital dentistry. The orthodontists at Johns Hopkins piqued my interest, so I applied to orthodontic programs, gained some acceptances, and ultimately chose Fairleigh Dickenson University. Faculty there included Dr. Brainerd Swain and Dr. James Ackerman. We learned Begg, Bull Edgewise and lightwire Edgewise orthodontics. During my senior year at Fairleigh, I represented the University at the 1972 A.A.O. Annual Session by displaying my special project on headgears. I had about ten mannequin heads that demonstrated the vector effect on molars and the maxilla.

I got my New Jersey Dental License and moonlighted as a dentist in Union City, a Cuban town, on Fridays and Saturdays to help with my living expenses while in orthodontic school. Initially, I was four months in arrears with my tuition. Chairman Dr. Walter Mosmann was after me so I requested an advance from Dr. Robert

Parnes. When I had enough money, I went on a five-week tour of Western Europe, with the only unmarried classmate, Dr. Ralph Apuzzio, who now practices in Pennsylvania.

GN: You were still single. You did have a California dental license. What was the next step?



Ken at the Great Wall of China, with Rebecca Poling in the background, during the AAO People to People Delegation goodwill tour to China in 1998.

KK: I received my California Dental License right after graduating UCSF in 1968. Starting in 1972, I became associated with Dr. Jerry Tappe in Marysville, CA for three years. Marysville is near Beale Air Force base and much of the practice was under the CHAMPUS program that provided orthodontic benefits for dependents of military personnel. When this program was discontinued in 1974, Jerry let me know he could not afford to continue my employment. Looking over my possible options, I saw one in San Jose, in an under-served part of town.



I leased a three-room medical office, and outfitted two rooms on a shoestring budget to do orthodontics, and was prepared to sleep in the third room should my fortunes become financially comprised. The practice grew quickly, and I never did have to sleep there. Three years later, I married Tae, and a year later (1979), I moved into my present office, in the same area, composed predominantly of minorities. As a newlywed, besides running the practice, I was busy planning for this new office space. Without an architect, I designed the whole building, working with the general contractor who in turn worked with engineers.

GN: Does your practice have an emphasis?

KK: I always felt compelled to give back to the community to help the underprivileged, and in that regard, I accept DentiCal cases and have a strong interest in the care of cranio-facial patients. Working with plastic surgeons such as Dr. Larry Berkowitz at Good Samaritan Hospital and Dr. Stephen Schindel at Stanford, we have seen many such patients, some as young as three weeks old. Because of this, I am on staff at two hospitals. My real passion, however, is to treat orthognathic surgical cases with facial deformities.

I have developed reliable protocols with the surgeons at Kaiser and Stanford. It is gratifying to transform these patients and to observe their self-esteem improve, as they often have reclusive, introverted personalities. I am involved in many multi-disciplinary cases, but am placing my own TADs, allowing for more satisfying treatment results.

Another emphasis I have in my professional career is continuing education. I have taken three courses

with Dr. Robert Ricketts in Pasadena, one of these a week-long course on TMD. In 1982, I flew to the University of Vienna for a week to take a TMJ course with Dr. Rudolf Slavicek. These classes led me to accept TMD patients in my practice, which I continue to this day. I then took a series of classes with Dr. Ron Roth's FACE organization. I continue to be active with the South Bay Orthodontic Study Group, whose membership includes Drs. Bob Asatani, Dennis and Jerry Kinoshita, Earl Steinhoff, Dave Tillmanns, and Dennis Widman of San Jose, along with Drs. Larry Morrill and Lesley Samuels of Palo Alto. We each have diverse backgrounds, training and techniques, which make our meetings lively. Another group that I enjoy is the Edward H. Angle Society; I was the Society's secretary for some years and have learned so much more of what orthodontics is all about.

GN: You have six children. Tell me the story of your love life.

KK: A medical surgeon, Dr. Al Ribisi, and his wife Anne, decided that they wanted to sponsor a young Japanese person to go to school in the U.S.A. Through connections with their Japanese gardener, in 1968 they were given the name of an 18-year-old girl, Tae Kodama. Tae lived with the Ribisi family and attended the local Presentation High School to learn English, San Jose Beauty College, San Jose City College for her AA Degree and then San Jose State University for her BA Degree in Computer Mathematics.

At this time, as I was slowly building my first practice from scratch, a UCSF classmate, Gene Kinoshita, told me he knew a young woman from Japan whom I should meet. I had to be talked into this blind date—I pictured Tae as an unsophisticated Japanese country girl who would never be able to accept this Americanized orthodontist. Boy, was I wrong. That first date was followed by flowers and a request to see her again and again. While we were dating, Tae was in the MBA program at San Jose State. After a year of dating, we tied the knot. It was August 26, 1978. Because of what the Ribisis had done for her, for the past 15 years Tae and I have had a foreign student reside with us, to be educated in the

United States. The first was a boy who stayed for seven years and now teaches English at a private school in Japan. Our present student, a girl, Ayumi, is studying pre-nursing at DeAnza College.

We now have six grown children, three boys and three girls. Although I ran the 1977 Bay to Breakers marathon in San Francisco, because I had asthma in my growing years, I was more into music; however, all of our children have been involved with sports. Marcus, the eldest (29), who just got married this past March to lovely Diane Marr from Hawaii, was in varsity wrestling

in high school and is now a second-year orthodontic resident at UOP. Lisa (27) played lacrosse in college and is also a second-year orthodontic resident but at USC. Cheri (24) was in varsity tennis and cross-country, graduated from UC Berkeley and taught English in Japan through the JET program.

Gina (21) was also in varsity tennis and is a fourth year college student, doubling in psychology and Japanese at UC Davis. Alan (18) was in varsity football and varsity tennis and is now second year college student at UC Davis, possibly pre-med. Kevin (15), a sophomore in high school, is on the debate team and doing cross-country. Tae is very busy tending to the needs of the children who are always coming and going from the house. Tae also does the office bookkeeping from home. About three times a year she visits her aging mother in Japan. Despite our busy schedules, we enjoy taking ballroom dancing lessons once a week and traveling at every opportunity. As a family, we are our own tour group. At home, we enjoy challenging each other to a competitive match of tennis.

GN: Have you done any teaching?

KK: Quite a bit, but not in the normal sense at orthodontic university programs. With my best friend, Dr. Raymond Sugiyama, who teaches at Loma Linda



Ken enjoys sharing knowledge with others around the world. Here he is with orthodontic residents at Khon Kaen University, Thailand. (June, 2008)

University, is the past president of CDABO and the most giving man I know, we have traveled to many countries to teach and give seminars. In these countries the students and young orthodontists do not have the opportunity to hear and ask questions about current orthodontic practice and techniques. We started with Japan back in 1979 when they were just getting into orthodontics; now Japan is on par with the U.S. I gave lectures on treatment protocols for orthognathic surgery patients and for cranio-facial patients. Most of the university dental schools where Dr. Sugiyama and I visited and gave lectures were located in Taiwan, Thailand, China, Mongolia, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, Philippines and Mexico. Most of our seminars are given pro bono as a goodwill gesture. These young and eager orthodontic students are so grateful to have someone come from the United States to teach them the current concepts in the world of orthodontics.

A wonderful feeling fills your heart to know that you are contributing to the knowledge of mankind. Through my travels I have learned how lucky I am to be living in the United States where one can succeed in any direction that he or she desires. Also, I notice that the poorest American lives more luxuriously than the average citizens of some countries. We are so fortunate; only in America can these things happen.

GN: You started out your association volunteer work with the California Association of Orthodontists.

KK: Yes, I was a Board member with CAO and then was asked to join the PCSO Board. While on the PCSO Board I acted as a liaison member to the CAO, so I attended Board meetings for both groups. Now I have moved through the PCSO officer positions, and it has been a wonderful ride. I am so impressed with the knowledge and dedication of all our great

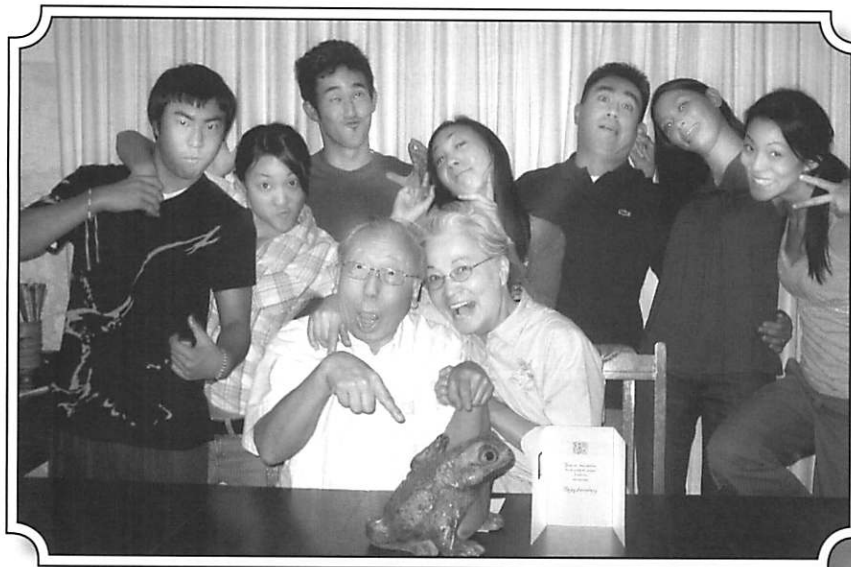
but as a tortoise amongst the hares, I try my best. Though we are a close family working together, the children are taught to appreciate the value of effort and to be self-sufficient. As an example, we all pitch in to prepare for big festivities, but when alone each can survive, even Kevin, the youngest one. They have been taught to be Jack-of-all-trades and in whatever they do, give it their best effort as that opportunity may never come again. Sharing

and doing things for others will never hurt and what better way to do this than to teach like so many of my respectable friends are doing at the university, relating their knowledge and experiences with the residents. By learning and sharing you will have it all.

More important is to know that good health and education leads to satisfaction and a comfortable and happy life, but you must challenge yourself and not be complacent. I was very asthmatic until high school, so to keep up with the other kids, I

took up judo to build my stamina. Through competitions, I advanced to a brown belt and became more self-confident. I enjoy trying new and challenging things, not necessarily limited to dentistry. I do not want to be on my deathbed and say "I wish I did ..." I want to live life to the fullest.

When my practice in San Jose was new, and I was single, I took character parts in local theatre groups. I was given parts in a few plays, for example, "Lovely Ladies, Kind Gentlemen," "Flower Drum Song," and "Uncle Vanya." Also, I was an extra in "Farewell to Manzanar" (a Monday Nights at the Movies production). When not on stage, I helped make the



Ken's family presents him and Tae with a lucky frog at their 30th wedding anniversary.

volunteers. I am also a PCSO Delegate in the AAO House of Delegates, which gives me the opportunity to weigh in on the policy decisions made each year at the AAO Annual Session.

GN: I know all PCSO Board members are quite proud of the leadership you have shown in your years on the Board and in the PCSO Officer positions. I certainly feel lucky to have known you over these years. What advice could you give the young PCSO member?

KK: Because of my upbringing, I found that working independently and putting in your effort will have many unexpected rewards. I am not really smart,

Portrait of a Professional

stage scenes and worked the lights and sound for a few productions. Nowadays, most of my extra-curricular activities are given to PCSO, and I truly enjoy it. Happiness is the name of the game of living and I found out long ago that money is not happiness nor will it bring happiness. I know so many people who are truly happy living a very simple life and I am sure all of us know very wealthy individuals who are still searching for the meaning of life.

There is a Japanese term, “*kaizen*,” which means continuous improvements in small increments over time. Even now, I am still following this philosophy; however, from time to time I do have to kick in “*kaikaku*,” which is a single radical or major change and improvement, and at the end of each, I feel a sense of accomplishment.

Kaikaku is necessary to make adjustments along my path of life (personal and professional) to keep in progress with the rapidly changing world. An example of *kaizen* in orthodontics would be to move up to nickel titanium wires, start self-ligation, take

advantage of TAD and incorporate multidisciplinary communications with other specialties for cranio-facial, perio, trauma, and implants. *Kaikaku* would be starting a private practice, jumping into marriage, computerizing your office and teaching in other countries.

I feel very honored to be involved in PCSO. PCSO has been a *kaizen* for me in my life, but also, now, as PCSO president, it has become a *kaikaku* for me, and I will do my very best to serve this profession that I am so privileged to be a part of.

It behooves each one of you to incorporate *kaizen* in your lives to be in the forefront and maintain a competitive edge in our fast-moving times. Also you are in a respected position to make a profound change in the lives of others by your deeds and words. By practicing *kaizen* together with an occasional *kaikaku*, you can do it!

Thank you, Jerry, for allowing me to share my stories with PCSO members.



The entire Kai family gathered at the wedding of Marcus and Diane. (White Chapel, Hawaiian Hilton Village (March, 2008)



Ken with son Marcus (of UOP) and daughter Lisa (of USC). Both are second-year orthodontic residents.