

Tribute

Remembering Dr. Yo Yuasa

1926 – 2016

– a man who dreamed of a world free from leprosy –

Dr. Yo Yuasa

On 7th September 2016, Dr. Yo Yuasa passed away peacefully at a hospital near his home in Kyoto, surrounded by family. He was 90 years old. Just before his passing, a person of high aspirations and enthusiasm had carefully completed his life story, a work that ranged from the history of his parents through childhood memories. At the same time, he also wrote a message to be delivered at the 2016 International Leprosy Congress (ILC), which would be held for the second time since 1998 in Beijing. He had chaired the first such congress there.

Dr. Yuasa became involved in leprosy work in his early years, after meeting a leprosy patient who dramatically changed his life. This lifetime friend asked him to teach English to the high-school students at a leprosarium on a remote island in west Japan. It was the only leprosarium that had an attached high school. Because ongoing health problems had at that point caused Yuasa to give up hope of becoming a doctor, he accepted this request. After teaching at the leprosarium for several months, however, he received an opportunity to work for the Japanese Leprosy Foundation. While working for the foundation, he regained hope and decided to go to the U.K. to study medicine. He was 34 years old when he eventually became a doctor, having completed his studies of medicine at the University of Edinburgh and of tropical medicine at Liverpool University. After graduation, as a leprosy doctor, he gained professional experience in the medical care of leprosy, through posts in Hong Kong and Nepal. Following those experiences, he put all of his effort into leprosy control, and visited leprosy-endemic countries

throughout the world for almost thirty years. In 1975, he joined Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF) as an executive and medical director, making the case that it was the moral responsibility of those responsible for public health to provide the cure to all who needed treatment. To quote Dr. Yuasa, "I could say that it was my lifework to propagate the implementation of Multidrug Therapy (MDT) throughout the world." He was one of the most radical proponents of MDT until the day he died. In 2002, he received the Damien-Dutton Award* for his remarkable achievements in the fight against leprosy. He was relentlessly active at the forefront of leprosy elimination work for his entire professional life.

"I want to be a doctor who doesn't lose his humility.... I want to be a doctor who is sensitive to his patients' feelings." Dr. Yuasa had suffered tuberculosis from early childhood through young adulthood and, after spending years at a tuberculosis sanatorium, he strongly wished to become a doctor who understood the feelings of patients. At the sanatorium, he had felt that he could never completely trust the doctors and nurses working there because they did not seem to understand how severe patients' agony was. People who knew the late Dr. Yuasa always comment on how he spoke to everyone in the same way and knew he was a warm and thoughtful person who treated people affected by leprosy in a very fair manner, never failing to lend a hand to those asking for help. It must also be remembered that he was the first man who urged the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Foundations (ILEP) member associations to give



Dr. Yuasa (left) and Prof. Ishidate, the funding chair of the foundation (right)

people affected by leprosy a chance to speak at international conferences. Although the history of the ILC started in 1897, only leprosy experts and social workers had not been given a chance of making a speech on their research progress and the results of their fieldworks before 1998. However, Dr. Yuasa had a long-time belief that leprosy issues were caused not only by medical but also social problems. The 1988 Congress held in Hague was the first Congress where such people participated, speaking on leprosy and about their lives.

Dr. Yuasa thought mycobacterium leprae could live in symbiosis with human beings. He said "I personally do not think that the leprosy bacteria should be wiped out. Every being on earth exists for a reason and its existence has meaning. The mere fact that mycobacterium leprae exists and that it has been with human beings for this long, I believe, should mean it has some reason to exist.

If we exterminate the virus, like we did with small pox, we will lose a chance to study possibilities to cure people, should a similar disease arise in the future.

Likewise, this virus, m.leprae, may turn into something that is precious to human beings, if used correctly.

We must not exterminate m.leprae just because our egos will not permit it to exist.

M. leprae may have been evolving throughout history. It is a gentle virus. It affects people very slowly. It does not hurt, it does not itch. And the majority of people do not even develop the disease. There is hardly any other disease like leprosy.

If we wait for another century, m.leprae may have evolved

in such a way that none will develop the disease. The ultimate mission of m.leprae has to be that it continues to exist. If it does much harm to human beings, this will increase its chances of eradication. But is it really such a fantasy to believe that m.leprae can develop gradually so that our two species can live together peacefully without harming each other in the future?"

Leprosy is a disease that has been feared and that has stigmatized people throughout the history of mankind. Controlling it has been many people's dream. With the dedication and passion of a great many, of which Dr Yuasa was one, this dream is becoming a reality.

We should pursue this dream further, perhaps not wiping out the virus completely, but finding a way that it can live without affecting human beings.

Leprosy has been around in almost all cultures throughout history, often surrounded by terrifying stigma. Nevertheless, he had a lifetime dream for a world without leprosy-related medical and social problems. From his long years of fighting against leprosy, we need to learn what is important in the way we confront leprosy today and in the future, and pass the long history of its stigma and discrimination down to future generations.

* Damien-Dutton Award

"The Damien-Dutton Award" is an award presented by DAMIEN - DUTTON Society For Leprosy Aid, Inc. to an individual or a group of individuals who have made a significant contribution towards the conquest of leprosy yearly since 1953. The organization was founded in 1944 being named after Father Damien and Brother Dutton who devoted their lives selflessly to help the people affected by leprosy.

Profile **Yo Yuasa** (1926-2016)

- 1926 Born: Kyoto, Japan
 - Graduated from Amherst College, International Christian University (ICU)
 - 1958-1960 Japanese Leprosy Foundation (Tofu Kyokai), Administrative Secretary
 - 1966 University of Edinburgh, Faculty of Medicine (UK)
 - 1970 Liverpool University, School of Tropical Medicine (UK)
 - 1970-1975 The Leprosy Mission International (UK)
Hay Lyn Chau Leprosarium (Hong Kong), Medical Officer
Anandaban Leprosy Hospital (Nepal), Medical Superintendent
 - 1975-1980 Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Medical Director
 - 1980-2005 Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Executive and Medical Director
 - 1993-2002 International Leprosy Association, President
 - 2005-2012 Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, Advisor
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Clockwise from 2nd row far left: Dr. Yuasa, Ms. Yamaguchi, Prof. Kiikuni, Dr. Ohtani, Dr. Hinohara, and Mr. Sasakawa

Prof. Kenzo Kiikuni

President, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation

Remembering Dr. Yo Yuasa

Although Dr. Yuasa was 7 years older, he was my contemporary at college. To be more precise, he was a graduate of Amherst College (USA), and because his credits from ICU (International Christian University) were honored, ICU was also his alma mater. (His father was Dr. Hachiro Yuasa, the first president of ICU). We had virtually no point of contact while we were at ICU, and it remained so for until much later.

The first activity of Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF) after its establishment in 1974, was to host an international conference for leprosy control in South East Asia. One member of the board of trustees, Dr. Saikawa suggested inviting Dr. Yuasa who was, at that time, working at a leprosy hospital in Nepal. Dr. Yuasa attended the conference as a representative from Nepal, and it is a well-known story that people at the conference marveled: “Why does that Nepali man speak such good Japanese?”

SMHF was looking for a medical director at that time, and I asked him if he could assume such a responsibility. His mother was having medical issues, and he asked for advice from many, which luckily resulted in his assuming the post as the first medical director of SMHF in December 1975. He remained active at global scale both as the board member,

and the medical director for over 30 years until 2005.

Dr. Yuasa was the world leader in the fight against leprosy, having served as the president of International Leprosy Association among other things, so having him as our colleague proliferated our foundation’s name and activities to the world in a short period of time. Because of Dr. Yuasa, we were able to establish and enhance the fundamental policy of SMHF, “humane, yet scientific,” that was originally suggested by Dr. Morizo Ishidate, the first chair of SMHF.

Dr. Yuasa proposed to set a clear goal of leprosy control by defining the elimination of the disease as less than 1 patient per 10,000 population in collaboration with Dr. J. W. Lee, who later became the director general of WHO who then was the responsible medical doctor of the Western Pacific Regional Office of WHO. MDT (Multi Drug Therapy) enabled the elimination of leprosy achievable. The efforts Dr. Yuasa exerted for the realisation of “MDT for All” shall not be forgotten.

When I saw Dr. Yuasa at a hospital in Kyoto this August, we had a good conversation, and I was able to at least show some gratitude for all the years of Dr. Yuasa’s services. It had been told that his farewell was a calm one with his wife Yuko and daughter Yoko by his side. I admire his final chapter in life, and again pray: may he rest in peace.



With SMHF members

Mr. Yohei Sasakawa

Chairman, The Nippon Foundation, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Leprosy

Setting the Goal for Elimination of Leprosy was Dr. Yuasa's Idea

It would not be an overstatement to say that Dr. Yo Yuasa's entire life was dedicated to the fight against leprosy. Establishing a goal for the "Elimination of Leprosy" was Dr. Yuasa's idea, and because there was such a goal, nations around the world and parties concerned all united as one to eliminate the disease.

The idea was germinated when Dr. S. T. Han, then the Regional Director for Western Pacific Regional Office of WHO, consulted Dr. Yuasa on "ways in which to promote elimination of leprosy."

A proposition from Dr. Yuasa was to set the numeric target at less than one patient per 10,000 persons in the population. It soon became the target of WHO.



Mr. Sasakawa and Dr. Yuasa on a field

To attain this goal in every country and in every region has been the cornerstone of my activities. It is, I believe, a way of expressing our gratitude to Dr. Yuasa for his contributions of so many years.

Dr. S. T. Han

Regional Director Emeritus, Western Pacific Region, World Health Organization

On the occasion of demise of Dr. Yuasa, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, I would like to send my profound condolences to the family of Dr Yuasa. During my working association with him, I was always so impressed with his dedication to the control of leprosy in the world.

I would like to cite only one and most important contribution he made not only in Western Pacific Region but also eventually in the world later. He was working with Dr. J. W. Lee, then medical officer in charge of chronic communicable diseases control in the Regional Office, later became WHO's Director-General. I proposed that we should come to certain conclusion in leprosy control sooner and requested them to come to define the attainable and acceptable level of infectious prevalence instead of dragging on and on with the control activities forever without early sight of elimination in the Western Pacific Region. He and



Serious discussion with Dr. Han (left)

Dr Lee then came up with a definition of "leprosy being no longer public health problem" to be "one patient in 10,000 population". We adopted and applied it in the Region as our norm for leprosy control. It eventually became the global elimination indicator for WHO and all Member States.

Dr. S. K. Noordeen

President, Leprosy Elimination Alliance, Former President, International Leprosy Association

I have known Dr. Yuasa for over 35 years. I met him for the first time in 1980 when he came to WHO HQ in Geneva. I had missed seeing him 3 years earlier when he had visited the Central Leprosy Teaching & Research Institute, Chenglepet (India) where I was working then.

Dr. Yuasa was a very amiable person always looking towards helping others. He closely worked with WHO at all levels, with members of other ILEP Organizations and with other NGO's. He was known by leprosy workers all over the world as the face of SMHF and ever ready to help. But for him the WHO recommended MDT at country level would not have succeeded so much, and so was his contribution to the WHO initiative on elimination of leprosy as public health problem. He was a pillar of strength to me during my tenure in WHO apart from being an invaluable friend.

Dr. Yuasa had very well balanced views on all technical aspects of leprosy and could identify key issues that need attention and also ever willing to learn. His direct involvement in leprosy control and leprosy chemotherapy research in his earlier years greatly contributed to his unique expertise on several aspects of leprosy.

Dr. Yuasa was behind me in every initiative WHO took in reducing the problem of leprosy everywhere and fully understood the public health importance of such initiatives when several others were taking a rather narrow outlook of medically caring for just a limited number of patients seeking help. He knew and explained to others the need for reaching out to all the patients in all situations and for providing essential support. This coincided very well with several WHO initiatives towards eliminating leprosy. I completely agreed with his prioritization of reaching out to the unreached which led to extraordinary collaboration between WHO and The Nippon foundation which was receiving advice from SMHF.

Dr. Yuasa was a very caring person and whenever needed he supported the idea of compassionate assistance to leprosy affected persons facing socio-economic problems. He also fully understood the problem of leprosy in the countries in the light of several public health problems they faced, and the need to do the maximum for leprosy in the shortest period of time as otherwise interest and priority for leprosy might wane.

In addition to all his qualities Dr. Yuasa was a leader among leprologists bringing them together at various fora. He thus served as President of International Leprosy Association for two terms which he led successfully and of which I had the privilege of succeeding. His contribution towards chronicling the history of leprosy over the past half a century has also been immense.

Dr. Yuasa will ever be remembered as a doyen among leprosy workers and as a contributor towards the drastic reduction of leprosy all over the world. I personally miss him and his friendship very much. All the same this is the time to celebrate the life of Dr. Yuasa and his years of great achievements.



Dr. Noordeen (center) and Dr Yuasa (left) in Myanmar

Dr. Wayne M. Meyers

Former President, International Leprosy Association, Former Chairman, Department of Microbiology, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology

A Treasured Friend

Within the “archives of my memory,” Dr. Yo Yuasa stands out for his contributions to the worldwide management of the problem of leprosy. I first met Yo in the mid-1970’s in Washington D.C. when a team from the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF) visited the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) in Washington. This team was developing a plan for the management of a program for the ultimate control of leprosy.

Eventually such a program for control of leprosy was developed through a collaborative effort with the World Health Organization (WHO) and SMHF. Yo struggled through many sessions at the WHO and around the world on the goals for this program. First, over the slogan for the program: would it be “A World Without Leprosy”, or “A World Without Leprosy--Related Problems”, etc. Eventually, after many mutations, it was decided to minimize all such slogans and simply work toward “Multi-drug Therapy for All Leprosy Patients.” During these years Yo and I had many happy and useful discussions in Geneva, USA, China,

Japan, and other venues.

Yo had an ability to think of the individual leprosy patient and at the same time to consider the worldwide aspects of the problem. He

was a key leader in the dedicated efforts of SMHF and colleagues in making enormous improvements in the daily lives of people who suffered with leprosy, by bringing them both effective medical therapy and real hope.

Now, this effort continues. Dr. Yuasa’s quiet perseverance remains an example to follow. All the leprosy patients whose lives he touched, and the many dedicated care givers who knew him or knew of him, will miss him. My wife Esther and I miss him.



At the Damien-Dutton Award ceremony with Mrs. Yuasa

Dr. Marcos Virmond

President, International Leprosy Association

In my early days as a leprologist, I remember Dr. Yuasa chairing important WHO meetings in Geneva. A young specialist like me was seating in the last row of the room, listening with due attention to all those respectful names of the international leprology. However, what mostly called my attention was the presence of that thin and gentle man heading the meeting. In such an important position he had always a kind and humble behavior to all participants. Some years after that, in 1998, during the 15th International Leprosy Congress in China, I was both surprised and apprehensive when Dr. Yuasa called me to his room in the Convention Center. With his usual gentle and direct manner, to my delight, he not only invited me to be the next ILA’s vice-president for the Americas as well as invited me to organize the next International Leprosy Congress in Brazil, the 16th ILC. It was a double challenge that I could not decline, although I believed both tasks were below my aptness. However, I dare to accept and told him I would organize a congress in such a standard

that would reflect the respect and appreciation for him. I believed I could fulfil his expectations. Some time later, at a personal dinner in Paris he invited me, he gave me a small gift, a book on Kyoto, his birth place – looking at the beautiful photos of flowery gardens, calm brooks and peaceful

landscapes, I could finally understand the intimate soul of Dr. Yuasa: a deep respect for diseased people, an endless commitment to care and a notable ability to lead people with a secure and gentle manner. To me, these all reflect all those Kyoto peaceful images from the book he gave to me. We will miss too much persons like Dr. Yo Yuasa.



At the ILC 2002 in Brazil

Prof. David Heymann

Professor, Infectious Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Former assistant director-general for Health Security and Environment, representative of the director-general for polio eradication, World Health Organization

Dr Yo Yuasa – a voice for those who had none

I had often heard about leprosy, and studied it in school, but it was in the mid-1990s that the word leprosy took on its full meaning for me. And this was because of one devoted and unassuming medical doctor, Dr Yo Yuasa. Dr Yuasa had dedicated his life to the needs of others – to this neglected infectious disease called leprosy since Biblical and Koranic times.

Before I met Dr Yuasa, I had encountered leprosy in text books during my medical training in the US, and in the UK at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases linked to my studies at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. And I had seen the terrible disfigurement it could cause, if not diagnosed early and fully treated, when I worked in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1970s and 1980s for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But it was only from Dr Yuasa that I learned about the long lasting suffering and solitude caused by stigmatisation of those with leprosy, increased by isolating those with acute disease in dehumanising colonies, as well as those who had recovered but were disfigured. This was the learning that helped me understand the true meaning of leprosy. And this learning could only come from this passion of Dr Yuasa for those less fortunate. Dr Yuasa carried the burden of those with leprosy deep in his being, and spent his life to help better their situation. He was passionate about the need to

help those with leprosy and the disfigurement it had caused.

I worked with Dr Yuasa for many years from my position at the World Health Organization as he tirelessly strived to convince those working on leprosy elimination that not only was it important to rapidly diagnose and treat leprosy in those who were acutely ill, but also to ensure that once they were no longer infectious, that they were supported in reinserting themselves into the communities from which they came, to live with their families and friends. They were the same rights to a productive life in the community as for others who were more fortunate.

Dr Yuasa also helped me understand the importance of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of leprosy, and in particular of the International Leprosy Association of which he was a former president. He convinced me, and those around me, how important it was to continue to work with this association, and other NGOs involved in leprosy, as leprosy became more and more scarce through elimination efforts made by countries with the support of Sasakawa Health Foundation and others. The last mile to elimination was forever in front of Dr Yuasa as he dedicated his life to others.

Dr Yuasa was truly one who understood the need for equality in an unequal world, and he demonstrated this in his continued advocacy and support for those with leprosy. He will be greatly missed by those without a voice.



In Vietnam

Dr. Grace Warren

Former Leprosy Mission International Vice President, Former Leprosy Mission Medical Superintendent

It brought me many regrets to realise that Dr. Yo Yuasa had passed away, though I know he had not been well in his latter days.

Yo learnt about leprosy when he was working as interpreter at the International Leprosy Conference in Japan in 1958. There he would have met and worked with people from many countries of the world and belonging to the many groups concerned with trying to treat and eliminate Leprosy as a problem. He was so impressed with the possibilities of helping those in need that he went to UK to study Medicine and when suitably experienced he applied to the Leprosy Mission International, that has its Headquarters in London and works in many countries of the world.

Late in the 1960s he came to Hay Ling Chau Island in Hong Kong Harbour which was the Government Leprosy Hospital, run by the Leprosy Mission, and of which I was the medical Superintendent. Yo stayed with me for several months I think- I do not now have an accurate record of how long he stayed.

While with us he was able to see and examine the various forms of leprosy at the various stages of its development and healing. He also learnt the laboratory work so that he would be able to check laboratory diagnosis in which one looks for the bacilli that causes leprosy. We checked the healing by keeping record of the number of bacilli found in "slit skin smears". He would also have been involved in the rehabilitation, learning the basics of the physiotherapy essential to maintain hands and legs in good functional condition and then in occupational therapy, that is teaching patients crafts they could do in spite of their deformities to support themselves. Where practical, he also assisted with the surgical correction of their deformities to enable them to be socially acceptable and more capable of supporting themselves. We were one of the first centres outside of India that regularly did the rehabilitation surgery.

Dr. Erwin Cooreman

Team Leader, Global Leprosy Programme, Regional Office for South-East Asia, World Health Organization

The Global Leprosy Programme of the World Health Organization will remember Dr. Yo Yuasa as a longstanding friend and ally in the fight against leprosy. Dr. Yo Yuasa has been the prime example of a person who dedicated almost his entire life to address the challenges of one of the most cursed diseases. Some of us had the privilege of personally meeting Dr. Yo Yuasa and will remember him as a public health expert who was always close to the people in the frontline, be they grassroots level health workers, researchers, public health experts, activists or senior officials in ministries of health. He kept the needs of leprosy

We thoroughly enjoyed his time with us and I trust we gave him enough teaching to be of a real help in the many years ahead when he travelled to many countries helping in the Leprosy



On Hay Ling Chau Island in late 1960's with Administrative Superintendent of the Leprosy Hospital, Mr. Alan Waudby

Programs. Doubtless learning more as he travelled as so much research and teaching was going on in the 1970s and '80s, in many countries, and this was certainly assisted by the Sasakawa group.

I met him a few years later in Nepal where he was assisting and then, for a period, in charge of our Hospital at Anandaban near Kathmandu. I went there to assist with the rehabilitation surgery as I was travelling widely to teach the local staff how they could help patients in their areas by utilising materials locally available instead of having to send the patients for treatment, or the staff for training, to other countries.

Over the next twenty years or so I met him in numbers of places, at Leprosy Hospitals and at international conferences and of course had some contact through his work with Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation, and their generosity in assisting our programs.

I had not had much contact with him in his latter years as I was also officially retired and then he did but the news of his demise brought real grief as we had lost a real warrior who had spent his life helping those in need. Thank you Yo.

patients and their families always high on his agenda.

We are thankful for the rich legacy that he has left. The World Health Organization reflects with great satisfaction to the longlasting collaboration it enjoyed with Dr. Yo Yuasa. He has been instrumental in shaping global as well as local leprosy control over the years. The leprosy community will continue to benefit for many more years of the multiple initiatives he has undertaken.

At this very moment our prayers go to Yo Yuasa. We convey our most sincere condolences to his bereaved family, friends and colleagues.

Mr. Miyoji Morimoto

President IDEA Japan

In Memory of Dr. Yo Yuasa – The person who gave us our future

I first met Dr. Yuasa around May, 1957. That was 60 years ago, but the memories of the first encounter remain as fresh as if it were only yesterday. I was a 3rd year student at the newly established Niirada Class of Oku Senior High School, a part-time school for leprosy patients residing at Nagashima Aiseien Sanatorium. It was atypical 4-year system that lacked the appearance of a school; rooms were under construction and it had no assembly hall. Aiseien was isolated. Hence, there were no interactions with the main school or neighboring schools.

One day, the famous Mr. Shigeo Suzuki (pseudonym Fumio Tanaka), who presided over the residents' association of Aiseien, said that Mr. Yo Yuasa, a graduate of International Christian University (ICU), was giving English lessons to anyone interested. We had never met any high schooler or a collegian from Tokyo, so we were both curious and excited, and the opportunity was too good to pass. I joined with several classmates and some 1st and 2nd year students, so there were about 12 participants.

Mr. Yuasa exhibited the smartness of a city boy that suggested good upbringing; he was our idol. He enfolded us with genuine humanity and kindness, and his lessons were easy to follow. My classmate T. Y., who excelled in English, was studying diligently for the college entrance exam. I had not

decided whether or not I would go to college, and I was busy, playing tennis and ping-pong. 1958 was my final year at high school and my bacillus count had diminished to being almost zero. I dwelt upon going to college or getting a job for my reintegration into the society. As I was less capable of physical labor, I sought to become an office worker, and opted to go to college. After graduating from high school in 1959, I transferred to Zenshoen Sanatorium in Tokyo with my best friends T. Y. and O. H. and worked very hard for the entrance exam.

T. Y. was very good at English, but since his father was in a sanatorium, he had economic issues. He could not afford to go to a college except to the nationally funded schools. When Dr. Yuasa learned of this, he offered to pay the entrance exam fee of ICU. It had turned out, however, that even the math examinations at ICU were given in English and the replies must also be in English. Smart as he was, he could not pass. Eventually, a British missionary found him a job as the caretaker for a Christian church, and he made his comeback to the society.

In 1962, O. H. was accepted at Tokyo University of Science, Mathematics department, and I was able to pass for the Law department of Keio University. O. H. became a high school math teacher in his home prefecture of Saga, and I was employed by a local financial company. I had kept the issue of Hansen's disease a secret at the University and my new work place. Eventually, the stress and overwork caused the disease to recur and I had to return to Zenshoen.



At the grave of Mr. Suzuki



Meeting in 1996 for the first time in 40 years. Dr. Yuasa (right), Mr. and Mrs. Morimoto (center) and Ms. Yamaguchi (left)

Because of medication overdose, I had excruciating pain throughout my body, and slowly, I was losing my vision

While I was fighting against Hansen's disease, in 1972, Mr. Shigeo Suzuki ran for the office of town mayor in his hometown of Karakuwa, Kesenuma. Dr. Hachiro Yuasa, (father of Dr. Yo Yuasa and founder of ICU), came to give an endorsement speech for Mr. Suzuki, accompanied by Hamako Watanabe, a celebrity popular singer. You can imagine how astonished residents of sanatoriums were on learning of his candidacy, at time when so much as to mention the abolition of Leprosy Prevention Law was tabooed. In the long history of Hansen's disease, Mr. Suzuki may have been the first former patient to fully come out of secrecy. As for myself, from the time I re-entered Zenshoen until 26 years later when the Leprosy Prevention Law was finally abolished in 1996, I ceased all communications with the outside world, except with my parents and siblings, determined to quietly end my life inside the sanatorium and to enter the mausoleum at Zenshoen. In 1993, I became the head of residents' association, and became involved in the abolitions movement. As I got more involved, I began thinking that I should follow Mr. Suzuki's footsteps. It was at such time that I met Dr. Yuasa again after 40 years, thanks to the kind efforts of Ms. Kazuko Yamaguchi of Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation.

In 1997, a special exhibition for elimination of Hansen's disease and for the former patients, the "Quest for Dignity Exhibit" opened at the United Nations HQ in New York. I was invited with my wife to represent Japan, with the momentous role of giving a speech in English at the Opening Ceremony. From the podium, Dr. Yuasa introduced us in his beautifully fluent English. Previously, Ms. Yamaguchi had translated my speech into English and I had practiced reading it. However, due to my poor eyesight, it was very difficult to read the typed script. So, for most part of the 12-hour flight to New York I did not sleep. Instead, I rewrote the speech onto a lined notebook with a thick brush-pen, and practiced reading it... All the same, Ms.

Yamaguchi recited much of the speech on my behalf. Despite of it, after the speech, there was a standing ovation so warm that it left me drifting in a dream-like state. It was there at the Exhibition that I met members of IDEA from various countries for the first time, and it had taught me a great deal.

In the succeeding years I left Zenshoen, after a judgment was issued for the compensation suit against government of Japan, regarding the Leprosy Prevention Law (2002). We established an NPO called IDEA Japan in 2004, and with the support of Dr. Yuasa and Ms. Yamaguchi, we made it grow. As we participated in conferences of the International Leprosy Association in India, South Africa and Brazil, Dr. Yuasa, the world's top leprologist, always warmly greeted us and encouraged us. At the Beijing conference in 1998, his wife Yoko accompanied Dr. Yuasa. I have fond memories of us climbing the steep steps of the Great Wall together.

All former patients and parties concerned grieve the passing of Dr. Yuasa. He had exerted himself for many years to serve as the Chair of International Leprosy Association, and without him, the Hansen's disease survivors, such as I, would never have had the joy and hope for the future of our lives. I would hold meeting Dr. Yuasa at the highest post in my life, and keep it eternally as my bread of life. Let us show our heartfelt appreciation for the many years of services he had provided for Hansen's disease around the world. Let us pray; May he rest in peace.



With the Morimotos, at the Cape of Good Hope

Ms. Kay Yamaguchi

Former Trustee, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation

Remembering Dr. Yo Yuasa

As I recall the thirty years I had worked with Dr. Yo Yuasa, I must say that it was very fortunate for me to have had him as my immediate superior. I must say that I was introduced and exposed to 'leprosy' through the right person and at the right time, for which I am very grateful.

For Dr. Yuasa, his first encounter with leprosy was, according to his writings, in 1947 when, somewhat by chance, he visited one of the leprosaria in Inland Sea region of Japan. There, he met the then leader of its patients' association, Fumio Tanaka, an influential person with university education background. In 1956 Dr. Yuasa was asked by Tanaka to teach English to young patients who were enrolled in a high school located in Tanaka's sanatorium. Later in 1958 Dr. Yuasa was asked to help organize 7th ILA Congress held in Japan, and worked as a liaison between the Japan leprosy association and its International counterpart, ILA. This brought him to close contact with prominent leprologists and scientists of those days from around the globe, including Drs. Wade, Muir, Ross-Innes, Jagadisan, Follereau and many more. After the congress, he single-handedly edited its proceedings, which equipped him with full knowledge of leprosy with up-to-date topics of challenges. Thus it was natural for him to gear his intended medical career to leprosy.

After several years of work as a medical director of The Leprosy Mission hospital Nepal, he joined Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF) in 1975. It was

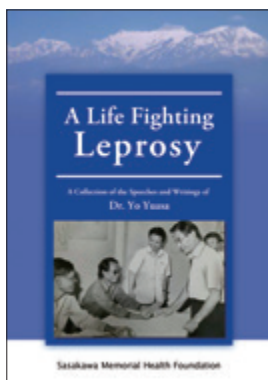
nearly three decades after the miracle cure of leprosy, sulfones, had offered a prospect of conquering leprosy. The resistance to sulfones had already emerged as a serious threat

for the world to conquer leprosy. He lost no time to face the challenge putting SMHF in alliance with all the key stakeholders in leprosy from the governments of endemic countries, international agencies and NGOs in order to create and strengthen 'A window of opportunity' to spotlight leprosy in the global public health agenda. He was also fully committed to strengthening the technical capacity of WHO and became a part of the technical body to develop a new regimen for leprosy, known as multidrug therapy or MDT, to overcome the drug resistance to sulfone monotherapy.

He was very firm in determining the priority in leprosy work of the time, e.i. prompt diagnosis followed by MDT through general health services, rather than leprosy specific, vertical services, in order to reach all the cases in the world as soon as possible. This required ensuring political commitment, building up capacity at all levels of health services, and even to designing patient-friendly drug packaging or blister packs of MDT. The blister packaging was first developed in the Philippines where he was involved in the pilot program of MDT implementation through the general health services. But he used to say that the idea of blister packed MDT was initially to protect the drugs from cockroaches. Blister packaging soon became the most appropriate format to be handled by the general health service and also was patient-friendly.

Dr. Yuasa was very much aware that 'a window of opportunity' spotlighting leprosy, could not be indefinite. Therefore he was eager and in haste to push the program further in order to avail the opportunity, but in sharing his enthusiasm he was always humble and calm with others. Thus, from the top government health authority, epidemiologists and leprologists to grass roots village health volunteers, people found it easy to work with him and were motivated to push leprosy agenda further.

He called himself as "one of the most radical protagonists of MDT implementation" and even stated that "care of insensitive hands and feet or treatment of eye



"A Life Fighting Leprosy", A Collection of the Speeches and Writings of Dr. Yo Yuasa

complications probably have to wait even longer”. This was Yo Yuasa pushing leprosy to be firmly positioned in public health agenda in order to achieve as much and as wide a coverage as possible while a window of opportunity for leprosy was open for this mission.

There was another Yo Yuasa who looked most at ease being with and among those affected by leprosy, especially those from the days long before when the effective cure had reached. People found him at east standing close by and holding their hands which very often showed the delay of treatment. He genuinely admired the resilience those survivors demonstrated in overcoming the disease physically, mentally and socially. He had a number of opportunities to interact with these survivors of leprosy, especially after SMHF started supporting people’s movement throughout the world in mid 1990s. Very naturally, he found a place among them as he was not rapped in doctor’s air nor a philanthropist’s posture. He was among them simply as an admirer of their strength sharing some common bond with them, although deep in his heart I am sure he was very much aware and was sharing the words of Prof. Michel Lechat, his esteemed friend, “Neglected patients of yesterday are the disabled today...”. I believe he could feel the pain of the people who had to miss the opportunity to prevent these physical damages. Perhaps this is due to his primal experience of been a TB patient in his young days, which equipped him with the dual postures of being a deliverer of cure and its recipients.

I was very fortunate to have closely observed the evolution of leprosy and its related challenges through following Dr. Yuasa’s work. Last year I was finally able to answer him by editing *A Life Fighting Leprosy*, a collection of his speeches and writings published by SMHF. This book tells us that he was very adamant to prioritize the ownership of leprosy work by the government general health service. This is because he was very much aware that leprosy was a deformity-producing



Hongwei Village, Guangdong, China, 1996

disease and therefore the soonest possible and widest possible delivery of leprosy service, of prompt diagnosis followed by proper treatment, was essential. And he had done what he could while ‘a window of opportunity’ for leprosy was wide open.

*

One sunny afternoon in August, 2016, I visited Dr. Yuasa at his bedside in a hospital in Kyoto. On his right, through a large window of a room on 8th floor, one could see the gentle slopes of the Eastern Hills of the city of Kyoto, his hometown. We talked about International Leprosy Congress, Beijing, scheduled less than a month away and he was willing to send a message to the Congress. He seemed to be recalling 15th ILA Congress also held in Beijing in 1988 which he presided as the then president of International Leprosy Association. We also talked a little about possible future paths of leprosy. He did not talk much but it was clear he understood all. Then after a few fax exchanges the text of his message to ILC, Beijing was finalized. On September 6th I emailed the text to ILA president, Dr. Marcos Virmond, and the chair of the Chinese organizing committee, Prof. Zhang Guocheng. The next day, 7th September, he left us forever at the age of 90. He was survived by his wife and a daughter living in Kyoto.

He lived and served the cause of leprosy “Quietly, firmly, faithfully, brilliantly” as described in the certificate of appreciation given to him by American Leprosy Missions. His memory will remain in the heart of everyone who has come to know him personally or through his works and papers.

Prof. Teera Ramasoota

Chairman, the Raj Pracha Samasai Foundation, Under the Royal Patronage of HM the King, Thailand

Remembering Dr. Yo Yuasa from friends in Thailand

Upon hearing the news of the passing of our dear Dr. Yo Yuasa, I and other colleagues in the leprosy control circle in Thailand are deeply saddened. We join the Yuasa family and the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation in their grief and fond remembrance of Dr. Yuasa and his lasting contribution to the world of leprosy.

I have known Dr. Yuasa for more than half of my lifetime which is approaching 85 this year. Throughout our friendship and collaboration, Dr. Yuasa has selflessly dedicated himself to leprosy control work at the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and the World Health Organization (WHO) which has produced tangible and sustainable results throughout the world. On the part of Thailand, Dr. Yuasa was one of the pioneers who has laid the firm foundation for leprosy control which has been a project under the royal initiative of HM the King of Thailand since the early 1970s.



With Dr. Teera (2nd from left), Thailand

In all, it would be fair to say that the successful elimination in Thailand of leprosy as a public health problem in 1994 and the sustainable elimination in 2011 which was announced by the WHO were owing significantly to the contribution of Dr. Yo Yuasa. This lifetime achievement of his will be fondly and eternally remembered by all his Thai colleagues.

We wish our dear Dr. Yuasa a serene and peaceful rest in the hereafter.

Prof. Tran Hau Khang

President of Vietnamese Society of Dermatology, Former Director of National Institute of Dermatology, Former Director of National Program for Leprosy Control

Remembering the Great Friend – Dr. Yo Yuasa

Dr. Yo Yuasa, Former Executive and Medical Director of Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF) involved in the National Program for Leprosy Control of Vietnam from 1980 to 2001. During more than twenty years, he visited several provinces/cities of our country for assistance of all activities of the program including the treatment, prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation... His initiatives contributed to the success of the battle against leprosy. Everywhere he visited, he left very nice impression on everyone, especially on PAL and their relatives. Besides, his lectures focused on human rights raised the kindness of the community to all patients. He was a very good-hearted for everyone.

We highly appreciated the SMHF's support and Dr. Yo Yuasa's dedication to our program of leprosy elimination.

I had several occasions to work with him and discussed various subjects which were very interesting. His lessons and his kindness helped me so much in my life.

I am always proud to say that it was my honor and privilege learning from him and working with him.

The eminence of Dr. Yo Yuasa's work was duly recognized by all dermatologists and leprologists in Vietnam.

We and everyone who knew him will treasure our memories of the excellent physician, outstanding man and great friend.



With Dr. Le Kinh Due, an eminent leprologist and the former director of the National Institute of Dermato-Venereology, Vietnam

Dr. Kyaw Lwin

Former Deputy Director, Leprosy Control, Department of Health, Burma (Myanmar)

Dr. Yo Yuasa visited our country for the first time in June 1979. It was at that time our National Leprosy Control Program was in deep crisis period having problems such as,

- a. UNICEF our main supplier of Dapsone since 1956 was withdrawing their assistance,
- b. number of registered leprosy cases for treatment continue beyond 200,000 cases, and more and more new cases were detected for treatment,
- c. many leprosy patients under prolonged period of treatment with dapsone were developing resistance to dapsone at the rate of 3 per cent annually,
- d. National People's Health Plan 1978 – 1982 was introduced and special disease control programs were integrated into the basic health service.

On the advice of Dr. Ko Ko, Regional Director of WHO SEARO, JSIF, SMHF started to explore possible assistant to our program for which Dr. Yuasa made communications to us and started sending 6 million dapsone tablets and other supplies.

During his visit he examined leprosy patients, interviewed leprosy field workers, health directors, and saw the problems we were facing at that time. Upon his recommendations SMHF decided to assist the program as mentioned above.

Dr. Yuasa also made known about our situation to ILEP which later started their interests in our program that came to the highest level in 1995 making for us to implement leprosy elimination activities that lead to meet our target in 2003.

We participated in many international SMHF activities

by sending our worker to SMHF which organized training workshops, seminars and coordinating meetings. One of the letters Dr. Yuasa wrote to us on 20 January 1979 was highly remarkable to us in which he mentioned to us SMHF sent further dapsone supplies and also advised us to approach other international agencies, especially ILEP members to acquire dapsone and other anti-leprosy drugs such as clofazimin and rifampicin in addition to WHO and SMHF for which the government was able to pursue his advice. At the same time he mentioned about our representatives participating in leprosy training workshop in Bangkok, especially Dr. Tin Shwe, and wrote that the faculty members of the training agreed that Burmese probably gained more than other country groups certainly a reflection on the high quality of our participant.

With these few words to show Dr. Yuasa's continued efforts and his dedication to the cause of elimination of leprosy especially to our country. We are grateful to him and SMHF for delegating Dr. Yuasa to our leprosy control program.

Dr. Yuasa made a number of visits to our services, just before his retirement he accompanied Mr. Yohei Sasakawa during which he mentioned to us that after his retirement he intended to bring his wife to Myanmar to see the country, for this he was not able to bring her because of her deteriorating health condition for which we regret.

Now he also has gone forever, he will always be remembered.

May Dr. Yo Yuasa rest in peace.



In Myanmar, 1996



Beautiful Myanmar

Dr. Tin Shwe

Country Representative, Myanmar, American Leprosy Mission, Former Programme Manager, Leprosy control Programme, Department of Health

The man we called our elder brother or uncle Yo Yuasa.

It was in 1979, that I was selected to attend the second workshop on training of Leprosy workers in Asia. During this first international exposure for me, I found a gentle and kind hearted Dr. Yo Yuasa for the first time. He always smiled and encouraged us whenever we met and talked to him.

Again in the later part of the same year, while I was working as a Medical officer at the headquarter of Myanmar Leprosy Control Program, Dr. Yuasa visited to my country to see our project, it was a time of crisis for the national program, as UNICEF, the prime donor of medicine to the project was pulling out from supporting the program. It was the kind-hearted Dr. Yuasa who showed us some way out in getting the required medicine through Sasakawa Health Memorial Foundation (SMHF). Oh! What a relief to have a good friend for the project (A friend in need is a friend indeed).

During the following years, Dr. Yuasa visited our country for many missions, such as "Independent Review", "Project review" and meetings and became more friendly with all of us in the project; understanding our socio- political situation, hardship, constrains problems and our endeavor in the fight against leprosy, he always helped us get both technical and material support from either the foundation or other ILEP members. An elder brother for all of us in the project.

In 1994, we again met at the "Hanoi Congress" (a historical event in the history of leprosy); we again shared our dreams and vision for future Leprosy control in Myanmar. With collaboration with Dr. S.K. Noordeen, Dr. Yuasa suggested holding a donors meeting to secure supports for the project. This meeting was organized in April 1995 at Yangon, and the ILEP partners, American Leprosy Missions (ALM), Netherlands Leprosy relief (NLR), Sasakawa Health Memorial Foundation and The Leprosy Mission International attended and joined hands

with WHO in bringing supports for the project through Dr. Yuasa's suggestions, contributions and recommendations. As I was the Program Manager at that time, Dr. Yuasa became an uncle for second in-line colleagues.

In many other ways Dr. Yuasa helped not only the program, but also my carrier to take the duty of WHO STP and STC till 2000.

After leaving National Program and WHO, I joined ALM to be the ILEP liaison officer in Myanmar. At this time and whenever I attended either, WHO meetings, ILEP meetings or any other meeting; my elder brother was always supportive and an encourager.

Whenever we met in a meeting, field visit or /and reviewing Leprosy Affected Persons, his suggestions, his way of touching an affected person and his meek approach touched my heart and he became my role model.

One of Dr. Yuasa's wish was to bring Mrs., Dr. Yuasa to Myanmar to show the beautiful golden land of rich culture and hospitality, which could not be materialized. In 2005, I had privilege of visiting Japan with the invitation of SMHF. It was again Dr. Yuasa who gave me a big treat in Kyoto. Our elder brother and uncle have passed away now, but remain in our heart. It is a big loss not only for me but for National leprosy Control Programs and for the fight against leprosy in the world.

May his soul "Rest In Peace."



Dr. Tin Shwe (far left) and Dr. Yuasa (far right) in Myanmar

Dr. Cesar J. Viardo

Former Program Coordinator, National Leprosy Control Program-Multidrug Therapy (MDT), Department of Health, Philippines

I must confess that I owe him a big deal - and that is to correct a mistake claimed by another doctor that he, not Dr. Yo, was the principal architect of the development of the MDT blister pack used initially in the Philippines when Dr. Yo served as the WHO-WPRO short term consultant for the country.

In one of the several meetings of the National Leprosy Control Coordination Council with Dr. Yuasa the problem of drug delivery and storage of Lamprone as a principal component of leprosy/MDT was taken up. This arose from a comment from one NLCCC member that Lamprone melts under high humid conditions. Then too, the other components, Dapsone and Rifampicin had to be stored separately in different containers which would entail difficulties for field workers as well as the patients themselves. Finally during the course of several discussions on the subject of drug delivery and storage, Dr. Yuasa proposed a family planning pill-like approach to MDT blister packs.

Dr. Yuasa was able to contact 2 companies to produce the blister packs, though there was an initial objection that Lamprone ruins the machines for blister-packing and the machines had to be thoroughly de-stained of Lamprone before it can be used again for other purposes. The initial batches of the MDT blister packs were produced and delivered to DOH, expenses for drugs, blister packing, and delivery were courtesy of SMHF (Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation), which Dr. Yuasa also represented.

Part of Dr. Yuasa's job as short term leprosy consultant was to monitor and observe the details of leprosy control MDT activities. I remember very well when at one time after visiting a multi-bacillary case under MDT in one isolated house, I asked Dr. Yuasa if he can come with me and visit other houses in the village to look for more new cases. Dr. Yo cheerfully accompanied me and we reached a cluster of houses with its occupants doing their early morning chores. We sorted out 2 leprosy cases from 2 houses and another MB case from another house, all new cases with no treatment. Dr. Yo finally said: "Why all these number? I thought health workers had all found that needs to be found". To which I said: "You need not be alarmed, doctor. Mactan island (in Cebu) is highly endemic for leprosy, which is why we had to review their case-finding strategies because there will be more of this situation

elsewhere in Cebu. New trouble will come once they start MDT treatment - reactions, side effects, abrupt stoppage of treatment and several unforeseen problems, which is why we cannot let go of supervision activities at barangay (village) level, municipal, district, and provincial level."

In another unforgettable moment, Dr. Yuasa and myself were caught in the middle of a sugar cane field in the northern part of Cebu, looking for an elderly patient receiving his treatment alone in a ramshackle bamboo-thatched hut built by the eldest daughter to isolate the case. Dr. Yuasa asked tersely the elder daughter this question: "Are you going to leave your sick elderly father in that little hut in the fields, unattended, maybe starving, without any running water and toilet facilities?" Before we left, Dr. Yo pulled out his wallet and handed the old man two one-hundred peso notes.

There were a few times I visited Ilocos Norte, located in the northern part of the Philippines, with Dr. Yo. Dr. Yuasa's lifestyle when traveling is very Spartan indeed. Even if he had to stay for 3 or 4 days in a given location, he would bring with him only his ubiquitous cream polo barong, a pair of black or grey trousers, and a pair of black socks, all of which he laundered himself before retiring at night. He loved spiced Ilocos sausage and garlic fried rice for breakfast, and for his lunch and dinner he was partial to stewed Ilocos veggies, or whatever was offered on the menu. While in Cebu, his first order for breakfast would invariably be ripe mangoes.

Dr. Yuasa was a great, generous and dedicated humanitarian. He was an instrument in allowing the organization such as SMHF and WHO, as well as other European and North American NGO's whose objective is leprosy eradication, to collaborate with each other and bring about world leprosy eradication through its individual advocacies which can range from training leprosy workers, teaching of communities and people on leprosy, provision of anti-leprosy drugs, monitoring and supervision activities, and rehabilitation of cured and disabled patients. There are not many more doctors, health professionals and other individuals as Dr. Yuasa's in this world.

Suffice that my memories of Dr. Yo shall remain my own - in my mind - a great leader, mentor to many, well-liked and loved by everyone with whom he had been associated with. A very mild-mannered, soft-spoken, no-nonsense health provider.

Thank you Dr. Yo, for the excellent and fond memories.

Dr. Josephine Robertson

Lecturer, The University of Queensland, Australia

It seems impossible that Dr Yuasa is no longer with us.

I was privileged to meet Dr Yuasa in 2001, when I became the research officer on the International Leprosy Association's Global Project on the History of Leprosy. From that time, I had the opportunity to spend time with him and talk to him at length. These are a few of the things I learnt about his early days before he became medical director of the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF).

The young Yuasa must have been impressive, for James Ross Innes took him under his wing, in 1958, after the International Leprosy Congress in Tokyo and subsequently arranged for him to study medicine at Edinburgh University. Yuasa cherished a copy of the letter from Ross Innes to the Dean of Edinburgh Medical School observing that Yuasa "would change the face of leprosy". Yuasa saw Ross Innes as his "personal mentor", who treated him almost as his son. The intention was that Yuasa would work for BELRA/LEPRA, training young doctors in African countries. When Ross Innes died, Stanley Browne took over the role of mentor. Yuasa describes this succession: "Dr Stanley Browne, who after receiving a personal request from Dr Ross Innes on his deathbed to look after me, together with some leprosy work, such as being the Secretary Treasurer of the International Leprosy Association, did a wonderful job, perhaps beyond what was hoped by Dr Ross Innes. Without them I would not have become what I am today, hence my deepest gratitude to them."

Browne's primary affiliation was to the Leprosy Mission, so it is no surprise that Yuasa ended up in Nepal. In preparation, he had to undergo training in reconstructive surgery, and he was given the choice of training either in Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia; at Karagiri, in South India; or in Hong Kong, with Grace Warren, and he chose the latter. He always spoke warmly of that time with Grace Warren. In the meantime, his wife discovered that she was pregnant, so she remained in Japan to look after their new baby daughter and to take care of her father-in-law, who was eighty two.

Yuasa arrived at Anandaban Hospital, in December 1971, succeeding John Harris, a cousin of Paul Brand.

He was fully prepared to spend the rest of his life working in Anandaban, and in September 1975, he became involved with WHO's plans for a five-year national leprosy control program with the government of Nepal. This was the very first attempt to plan a national program in leprosy endemic countries in the world, and it would afford Yuasa valuable experience when he undertook the work as the Medical Director of SMHF. The position of Medical Director was created when Yuasa joined, eighteen months after the inauguration of the Foundation. Kenzo Kiikuni persuaded Yuasa to join for the five years that eventually became thirty years.

Anyone who knew Dr Yo Yuasa recognised in him the same vocational intensity that had animated men like Stanley Browne and Robert Cochrane —people who gained very little personally from what they had done, except a sense of having made a difference in a world in which there was great suffering. His fierce sense of purpose unmistakably informed the international agenda, both through WHO and also through ILEP. It was very hard for him to relinquish involvement in the work against the disease. From my point of view, he was typical of all of those who have worked against leprosy: passionate, single-minded, and missionary in the broadest sense. But he was also uniquely politic, gentle, and determined.

Someone special has gone from the world and we are the poorer for it.



Dr. Yuasa (front row far left) and his mentor Dr. Stanley Browne (front row 2nd from left), Carville

Ms. Anwei Skinsnes Law

International Coordinator for IDEA (the International Association for Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement)

Dr. Yo Yuasa – A Friend for Life

A photo of Dr. Yuasa greeting Clint Añabieza at the international conference on Robben Island captures the spirit, dignity, and kindness of this gentle man who always regarded people who had experienced leprosy as both friends and partners.

Dr. Yuasa knew what it was like to have a disease that led to separation from society. As a young man he developed tuberculosis and went to the Trudeau Sanatorium in Saranac Lake, New York, for treatment. This experience clearly affected his life and enabled him to understand clearly the issues facing people who had leprosy.

When he received the Damien-Dutton Award in 2002, Dr. Yuasa talked about how he first visited Nagashima Aisei-en in 1946. He singled out two individuals there who had made a great impression on him. One was Mr. Tanaka, who Dr. Yuasa referred to as “one of the pioneers in social rehabilitation, at least in Japan.” He described how, after being discharged from Nagashima Aisei-en in the 1970s, Mr. Tanaka, “entered a mayoral election in his hometown, narrowly losing by only a small percentage of the total votes.”

In 1958, Dr. Yuasa would return to Nagashima Aisei-en to teach English at Nagashima High School, the first high school created in a HD sanatorium in Japan. One of Dr. Yuasa’s students was Miyoji Morimoto, who became his friend for life.

I first met Dr. Yuasa in 1973, on the road leading to Anandaban Leprosy Hospital in Nepal. I had just graduated from college and was traveling with a friend. We always had our mail delivered to leprosy hospitals since my father knew people in many of these places. It was Christmas and, as students on a limited budget, we were hoping that we would have a Christmas card waiting at Anandaban with an extra \$10.

We rented bicycles in Kathmandu and rode for hours

until we finally realized it would be impossible to get to Anandaban. Just as we were about to turn around, a jeep appeared. In it was Dr. Yuasa – he handed us our Christmas mail. We often talked about that meeting when we would meet each other over the years. Dr. Yuasa became a friend for life, someone I could ALWAYS turn to for advice and assistance.

In 1988, when we were looking for sponsors to enable individuals who had experienced leprosy to attend the International Leprosy Congress in The Hague, Dr. Yuasa approached several ILEP organizations and encouraged them to support our efforts. In 2016, there were some 40 individuals who had experienced leprosy at the International Leprosy Congress in Beijing. Even though Dr. Yuasa was not with us physically, certainly he was with us in spirit.

There were important discussions held at the recent Congress about participation and inclusion. As I reflect on these, I think about Dr. Yuasa. He knew the difference between participation and inclusion. While it is easy to invite people to participate in meetings or discussions, Dr. Yuasa knew that inclusion meant much more. It meant seeing others as equal to yourself, as friends and partners.

I am so very grateful for Dr. Yuasa’s influence on my own life and on the lives of so many others through his support of the establishment and evolution of IDEA.



With Mr. Clint Añabieza on Robben Island, South Africa



Ms. Law and Dr. Yuasa

Upon publication of the Memorial Booklet

Etsuko Kita

Chair, Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation

Much of the long history of leprosy activities of Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation overlaps with that of Dr. Yo Yuasa while my contact with Dr. Yuasa occupies a very small span of time in this history. The first time I met Dr. Yuasa, with President Kenzo Kiikuni, was in June 1992 when the president of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where I had studied for a short period the year before, was paying a courtesy call to Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation. I was asked to receive and guide the president at the Sasakawa Memorial Hall. This also was to become my first contact with leprosy project of the Foundation. I was invited to take up the position as Chair of the Foundation 20 years later. I was given a special privilege to spend one day a month to learn about the work of the Foundation, a year prior to taking up office in 2013. Dr. Yuasa was also working at the Foundation on irregular schedule and we shared one computer between the two of us. As I worked on the same keyboard that Dr. Yuasa used for his work, my mind was carried away to thinking about leprosy, then an unknown world to me. These were the rare occasions that I had a chance to encounter Dr. Yuasa.

Now the giant has left us.

He has left us entrusting his dream of eliminating leprosy to the next generation.

I promise that we will pursue his cherished dream.

May he rest in peace.



Anandaban Leprosy Hospital, Nepal, where Dr. Yuasa served as the superintendent from Jan. 1974 to Oct. 1977

Front Page Photo: by courtesy of DOCTOR'S MAGAZINE Feb. 2001

Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation

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