

# Mom still struggles with son's execution

## National / Crime & Legal

by **Daisuke Sato**

Kyodo

FUKUOKA – Recalling her son's funeral, the mother of executed killer Yukinori Matsuda said he appeared to be at peace in his coffin surrounded by flowers.

"You couldn't see your mother's face before you died," she had said to the body.

The funeral for Matsuda, 39, took place last Sept. 28 at the Fukuoka Detention House in Sawara Ward, Fukuoka, a day after he went to the gallows.

A senior official at the detention house told the mother, who came from Kumamoto Prefecture, that Matsuda behaved well up to the last moment of his life.

Matsuda, sentenced to hang for a 2003 home invasion and double murder, did not leave a final message. His last words to his mother were conveyed by a prison official: "Mom, I feel terribly sorry for having caused you so much trouble. Please stay healthy and live a long life. I was so happy that I was your son."

Matsuda was arrested in November 2003 for stabbing two people to death in their home in the town of Matsubase in Kumamoto Prefecture, now the city of Uki, the previous month.

In September 2006, the Kumamoto District Court sentenced him to death. The presiding judge said Matsuda did not show remorse and the court had no choice but to impose capital punishment.

In October the following year, the Fukuoka High Court upheld the sentence. Although Matsuda soon appealed to the Supreme Court, he dropped the appeal in April 2009.

But in responding to a survey conducted last year by Social Democratic Party leader Mizuho Fukushima, an Upper House member opposed to capital punishment, Matsuda wrote, "I feel very sorry for what I have done and I cannot express my regret with words," indicating deep remorse over the killings and the hurt inflicted on the victims' relatives.

Ko Misumi, a lawyer who represented Matsuda during the district court trial, also said his client was sorry for his actions.

"Mr. Matsuda told me many times how sorry he was for the victims and that he was prepared to hang," Misumi said. "But he didn't seem good at expressing his feelings and failed to articu-

late what he was thinking in court.”

Matsuda also told him he could not forget the moment when he held his mother shortly before being arrested, the lawyer said.

“He knew that his mother, who became aged and small, was tormented by the crime he committed and he cried over and over out of remorse,” Misumi said.

When his time came, Matsuda moved forward calmly to the gallows after thanking the director of the detention house and other officials for having looked after him during his time there, sources said.

When his corpse was taken to the hearse, one of the officials told his mother her son was a good inmate.

“At that time, I wanted to ask the officials who pressed the (gallows trapdoor) buttons, ‘How did you feel when you pressed it?’ ” she said, but she managed to fight back her desire.

“I understand that they did it because that’s their job and they wouldn’t be able to answer any questions like that.”

She said people she considered friends had come to avoid any association with her, with some even suggesting that the assistance she received from her husband’s retirement allowance was actually dirty money.

She put up boards bearing the names of the two victims on a wall at her home, putting her hands together in front of them every day in an offering of prayer. Her husband did the same until he died three years ago.

“I’m glad that my son returned home during my lifetime,” she said. She talks every day to his photo placed on a Buddhist altar in the living room.

As of Dec. 31, there were 133 inmates on death row, the most since 1949.

Justice Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki said at his inaugural news conference in December that he will respect any verdicts made by the courts but that he alone will have the final say on executions.

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