Dr. Jussi Jaakko Saukkonen, Sr., 83, of Newton, Massachusetts and Boynton Beach, Florida, died on Friday, October 3, 2014 at Tippett Hospice Home, Needham, MA after a courageous struggle with cancer. He was born on October 10, 1930 in Helsinki, Finland, the son of Jussi J. Saukkonen (educator, politician, Chairman of the Finnish-American Society and former Minister of Education of Finland) and Sylvi H. Saukkonen, high school teacher. He was the eldest of five siblings, Matti, Tapani, Anja-Liisa, and Outi, whom he helped raise during the World War II years and after in Karkkila and then in Helsinki, with summers in Särkisalmi and Parikkala in eastern Finland, where the family homestead is. He graduated in 1948 from Munkkiniemen Yhteiskoulu, the high school where his father was principal and his mother taught Biology, with an excellent record and fluent in Finnish, Swedish, German and English. During his university years he served as president of the University of Helsinki Student Union, represented Finnish students at numerous congresses, traveling throughout Europe. He studied at the University of Marburg and University of Heidelberg, Germany from 1954-1956. He earned a Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Helsinki in 1956. Subsequently, he served in the Finnish Army as a reserve medical officer with rank of lieutenant. He conducted post-doctoral research at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, as a Fulbright Scholar from 1957 to 1959. During this time in New York he met and married the love of his life, Leah Coron, a Juilliard-trained pianist and native of the city. In 1959 they moved to Helsinki, where he and his wife established a family with two sons, Jussi and Kai, and their beloved canine companion Tarkka.

In Helsinki, he served from 1959 to 1965 as Head of the Biochemistry Laboratory and then from 1966 to 1969 as Director of the Biochemistry Department at the Central Public Health Laboratory and as Professor at the University of Helsinki. He was a University Docent from 1962 to 1972. He also served as Editor of the International Journal of Cancer from 1965 to 1969.

He took a sabbatical at Rockefeller University from 1966 to 1968, in Dr. Irwin Chargaff’s laboratory, one of the world’s leading genetics laboratories at the time. In 1969, he became an Associate Professor of Microbiology at Jefferson, now Kimmel, Medical College, at Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) in Philadelphia, PA. In 1972 he was appointed Professor of Microbiology, a position he held until 2006. He served as mentor to Ph.D. graduate students in their research, as well as teaching medical students. He was instrumental in revamping the curriculum and
served as Chairman of the Curriculum Committee for many years.

In 1976 he was appointed the Director of Finland’s Central Public Health Laboratory, but he chose to return the following year to Jefferson and the community where he had built deep roots. In 1983 he became Senior Associate Dean of Scientific and Faculty Affairs for Jefferson Medical College, a position he held until 1991. He served as both Dean of the College of Graduate Studies as well as University Vice President for Science Policy, Technology Development and International Affairs from 1981 to 2003, one of the longest serving Graduate School Deans in the United States and a founder of the technology transfer program at Jefferson.

He helped build Jefferson into a strong medical research institution and helped educate numerous Ph.D., Master’s, and medical students. During his time at Jefferson he was a teacher, educator, scientist and leader. He traveled extensively for Jefferson, helping build international collaborations. He enjoyed working with his students and very much sitting down to a cup of coffee with his colleagues in the morning. He was a rationalist, a scientist, but a compassionate man with a curiosity about people and the world. He believed in education, hard work, and the growth of knowledge as the way forward for everyone.

During his time in the Philadelphia area he lived with his family in Wynnewood, PA from 1969 to 1987 and then on Delancey Street in the Society Hill area of Philadelphia from 1987 to 2004. In 2004, he retired, content with his academic and professional contributions, ready to relax, travel and enjoy his family. He and his wife subsequently established residences in Brookline, MA; Boynton Beach, Florida; and then Newton, MA. He loved traveling, visiting family in Finland and Sweden, and through much of Europe. He served as a Governor of the American Swedish Museum in Philadelphia and created the American Finnish Society of the Delaware Valley. He also loved attending concerts and cultural events with his wife; was an avid photographer, capturing delicate moments in nature with a camera; played tennis; and generally tried to fix everything himself. During the many years together, he helped raise and inspire his family, and was able to enjoy their now extended company. His family and friends will miss him dearly.

He is survived by his wife Leah C. Saukkonen, of Newton, MA and Boynton Beach, FL; his son Jussi and wife Helen of Newton, their children Julia and Daniel; his son Kai and wife Julie of Belmont, MA, their children David and Amy; and his sister Anja-Liisa Carlander and her husband Axel, their sons Christopher and Michael, Stockholm, Sweden; and by his sister Outi Sievanen, Helsinki, Finland. His brother Matti and his wife Sisko had
previously died, survived by their children Matti, Marja, and Leena, Dr. Saukkonen’s nephew and nieces. His brother Tapani had previously died, survived by his children Johanna and Anna, Dr. Saukkonen’s nieces.

A private family service will be held at the Newton Cemetery. The family thanks the many people who provided care for him at Massachusetts General, Spaulding Rehabilitation, and Newton-Wellesley Hospitals, as well as the Tippett Hospice Home. Donations in his memory may be made to: The Lustgarten Foundation (http://www.lustgarten.org) for pancreatic cancer research or the Stanly R. Tippett Hospice Home (http://www.vnacarenetwork.org/services/hospice/tippett).