

**YOUNG DAISAKU (2)**  
**Questions About Life and Death**  
**BY KEN SARAGOSA, PHILADELPHIA HIGH SCHOOL CHIEF**

Daisaku Ikeda spent his childhood in a part of Tokyo called Kojiya. The area has since been filled with concrete, and the shores of Tokyo Bay that Ikeda grew up along have been filled in with land. “Before the area became a heavy industry zone,” Ikeda writes, “the entire span of the Omori coastline looked like a fishing village. There was no smog. The water in Tokyo Bay was clear blue” (*My Recollections*, pp. 1–2).

His childhood, however, was not “clear blue.” The once prosperous family business fell on hard times — and in 1935, when Ikeda was in the second grade, his father, who had long suffered from rheumatism, became bedridden. Except for brief periods of remission, Nenokichi spent most of the rest of his life in bed.

Eight children, a bedridden father, a declining family business and an economy stretched almost to breaking — these circumstances brought the Ikeda family to its knees. But Ikeda remembers the strength and perseverance his parents showed amidst such adversity.

Mrs. Ikeda bore the burden of sustaining the family business and raising the children almost single-handedly. “She never took a holiday,” Ikeda writes. “She did her utmost to serve her incredibly obstinate husband.... She had eight children of her own, seven boys and a girl. On top of that she looked after two children of relatives. As though she hadn’t enough to do around the house, she did her share of the chores in our family business” (*ibid.*, p. 7).

By the time Daisaku was 10, the Japanese military had begun inducting his brothers so he also bore an increasing share of the family’s burden. His daily routine began at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., when he would help harvest seaweed for the family business. Then he began his paper route, which brought in a few extra yen each month for the family, followed by school. After classes, he came home to clean seaweed and then delivered the evening newspapers. This was his routine for three years.

Poverty, however, was not the only factor in young Ikeda’s life. Perhaps even more central to his later views was that he was plagued by illness. Doctors’ visits and medication were a constant feature of his youth and though they drained the already meager family resources, his parents were determined to do whatever they could to help their son. The extent of Daisaku’s illness would become clearer as he grew older, for when he was a teenager he was told that he would die within a few years.

But even before this diagnosis, Daisaku spent a great deal of time pondering death: “The fact that questions about life and death never left my mind during my youthful years apparently had, as you may well imagine, some connection with the truth that I was constantly in poor health. As I wakened from a nightmare, drenched in sweat, I found myself wondering, ‘What happens to people after they die?’” (*ibid.*, p. 14).

Despite these facts, however, Ichi tried to instill in her son an optimistic, hopeful attitude. It was not only the hardships Daisaku experienced that enabled him later to appreciate and understand the struggles of others, but the love and attention his mother showed him — even when circumstances appeared bleakest. It is clearly due to the memory of all this that Ikeda holds mothers, especially those women who must bear alone the burden of sustaining a family, in such special esteem.

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