

JIMMIE INABA, SAN FRANCISCO
Until the Last Moment

After 35 years of practice in the United States and helping lay the foundation for today's SGI-USA, Jimmie Inaba is not about to stop now. The universal sufferings of disease and old age can't slow him down.

Now I am standing at the most important time of my life. The reason is that I feel I need to finish up my life. Until today, no matter how much hardship I faced fighting for kosen-rufu, I tried to persevere. If I weaken now, all the fortune I have gained, all the efforts that I have continued until today will be lost, and I will not achieve my final goal of faith and practice.

Right now, I am looking back at my 72 years of life and also 35 years of my practice. It's been at times difficult and severe and at other times enjoyable. I am really excited to feel that I have climbed the steep hills as well as the lower hills.

I was born in 1925 in Pacific Grove, Calif., near San Francisco, not far from where I live now. After 72 years and living many places, now I have come back to the place of my birth. This is no coincidence.

Although I was born in the United States, in 1926 my family moved to Japan. My parents' plan was to give me a Japanese education and then send me back to the United States. But this plan failed because of the start of World War II. At that time, I was a high school student. In 1944, I was drafted into the Japanese army until the end of the war and, because of this, I lost my U.S. citizenship. I applied to get my citizenship back, but it took 12 years. In June 1958, I returned to the United States.

In the United States, life was not easy because of the difference in language, custom and culture. But I had to face a much bigger problem in my weak life-condition. I started to feel that I was surrounded by thousands of enemies. Because of this, my relationships with other people and how I related at my job were negative. I couldn't sleep many nights. During this time, I discovered a good way to find momentary peace of mind: drinking alcohol. My heavy drinking continued every night, to the point of alcoholism.

In 1960, my wife and daughter joined me in Los Angeles. I was so happy to be with my family, and I made a determination to change my life. But that was short-lived. My wife's chore every night was to carry me from the floor, where I was drunk, into bed. While I was working during the day, I kept asking myself what would be the future of my family if I continued this kind of life. Each day I made a resolution to stop drinking, but it didn't last. Sometimes I felt I was going step by step to hell and taking my family with me.

At the lowest point of my life, I was introduced to this practice by Gregory Nakasuji [now the *World Tribune* chief photographer], who like me in those days was a gardener. Every Friday, we would see each other when we worked on houses side by side. He introduced himself as a Soka Gakkai member, and he started to tell me about Buddhism. I had no interest in being part of any religion, and I knew the name of the Soka Gakkai. My knowledge of the organization was not the truth — all misunderstandings and rumors, I later found out. He talked to me seriously, but I could not listen.

Sometimes I felt I gave Gregory a bad time. But he was persistent. He came to me every week without fail. Sometimes we argued. Sometimes I yelled at him to never talk to me again, but he talked to me anyway. This continued for one year. Then I started seeing him differently and started wondering where his confidence and strength came from. Was it because he was stubborn, or was it because of the Gohonzon? The more time I spent

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thinking about this, the more I suffered, afraid that I was sacrificing my family because of my weak life-condition.

Then I made a big decision. “OK, I’ll do it! I’ll try.” I was ready to practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. That was Feb. 1, 1962.

My daily practice was not easy, but from the beginning I felt a strong response of joy in my life. Many things have happened in these 30 years, but I never stopped my practice. The fact that I have continued is the reason for my joy today. When I compare my life of 30 years ago, I can see my human revolution and how much my circumstances have changed. My financial condition, my family relationships as well as other relationships — everything has changed. The only thing I face now is what Buddhism calls the sufferings of old age and sickness. More than ever, I recognize the Gohonzon’s power and feel great appreciation for the organization.

In June 1995, my doctor found bleeding, and after several tests I was diagnosed with colon cancer. Surgery was scheduled for Aug. 15. I remembered that this important day would be the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. It was the ending of destruction and the beginning of construction. Also, exactly 30 years before on this date in 1965, I was appointed Los Angeles Chapter chief and received the chapter flag from then-Soka Gakkai President Ikeda.

He encouraged me with the words, “Try your best!” I felt the significance of the date of my surgery and these other occurrences. I was confident that my surgery would be a success. When I realized this, I had no fears or worries.

I strongly feel that all human beings have joy and strength in their lives, as well as confidence. Because of my sickness, I have understood more deeply the power of the Gohonzon and made a determination to enjoy the remainder of my life. President Ikeda has said, “By improving the quality of your life, you will at last approach true happiness.” I feel I am one of the members who has proven his words.

In December 1996, my doctor found some troubling signs from blood tests. At the end of January, he told me that the cancer in my colon had metastasized to my liver. My wife, Midori, and I had plans after my retirement to live with my daughter’s family. But because of the recurrence of my cancer, we accelerated our plans and moved at the end of February 1997. Fortunately, I have a good doctor and had surgery at the end of April. I recovered very well.

Now I have time to contemplate. My concern is for my fellow pioneer members who have practiced hard since the beginning. These people built the SGI-USA foundation. I feel we are very important people. When we pioneer members show a joyful daily practice, it tremendously encourages other members. Everyone should understand the Gohonzon’s power.

I wrote at the beginning of my experience that we need to have pure faith and burning passion for kosen-rufu in order to protect ourselves. I have been compiling SGI President Ikeda’s *The New Human Revolution* from the *Seikyo Shimbun*. This has been an encouraging and joyful job. After I read it, I mark the passages that impress me and I excerpt these for my records. Because of my illness and hospitalization, my work has been delayed, but I will catch up for sure.

At the time I started this project, I did it for my own sake — to understand his words more clearly myself. Now I like to share this with many members. I don’t know nor do I understand many things, but I feel strong joy in performing this work. I feel that I am coming closer, step by step, to President Ikeda’s heart. He is writing *The New Human Revolution*, and I am following him and searching his guidance. This brings me tremendous joy. When I perform this task, even if for a little while, I forget that I have

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cancer.

I am now a very happy person. In 1972, I was appointed caretaker of the Malibu Training Center. I was fortunate to receive guidance and encouragement personally from President Ikeda. My family and I will cherish the poems he gave me. At the time of my first surgery, he chanted daimoku for me. And again recently, I received his encouragement even though I am only one out of millions of members. In my heart, I have appreciation for everything President Ikeda and the SGI have shown me. Now I have a strong determination to keep searching President Ikeda's guidance and also to reply to his expectations, I will keep fighting until the last moment.

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