

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
Wings of Imagination
By HO GOKU, pen name of SGI president Ikeda

The fresh greenery of May sparkles. From this month, I have begun to write a new children's story. Set in Mongolia and titled *The White Horse and the Grasslands*, it is being serialized in the *Shogakusei Bunka Shimbun*, the biweekly newspaper of the Soka Gakkai Boys and Girls Group. This is my 18th children's story since I published *The Cherry Tree* in 1974.

Mr. Toda once said to me, "Daisaku, I want to ride across the Mongolian plains with you on horseback!" I will never forget those words of my dear mentor, who held such fervent hopes for the peace of Asia and the world.

The great grass plains of Mongolia stretch out forever, under endless skies. I, too, want to gallop across those grand open spaces with our children, the emissaries of the future. I want to send breezes of courage and hope into the blue sky of the human spirit. With those thoughts in mind, I lifted my pen to begin *The White Horse and the Grasslands*.



Speaking of horses, I am reminded how seven years ago, Mr. Duisheyev, at that time the deputy prime minister of Kyrgyzstan, which is also renowned for its wide grasslands, gave me a magnificent horse that we decided to name Aotogo (Youth). Some of our Soka Gakkai members in Bekkai, Hokkaido, offered to care for the horse, and we were all awaiting the day of its arrival. Unfortunately, Aotogo was not allowed into the country because of strict Japanese quarantine regulations and was sent back to the grasslands of its birth.

One of the reasons I am writing this new story is to repay the kindness of Mr. Duisheyev and my friends in Hokkaido. As I write, my heart is warmed by the vision of Aotogo racing across the open plains.



Looking back, the first task that was entrusted to me when I began working at Mr. Toda's publishing company was editing a children's magazine. In May 1949, at 21, I became the magazine's editor-in-chief. I decided to introduce famous children's stories from around the world in its pages.

I liked children very much and wanted to nurture the wings of imagination in their young minds. I still fondly remember having Teikichi Miyoshi, the artist who later did the illustrations for *The Human Revolution*, do the illustrations for the story of Cinderella when we published it.



I also recall once when the manuscript for a story called "The Childhood of Pestalozzi," announced in the previous issue of our magazine, was going to be too late for our press date. The author was already busy writing a novel for us in installments, and I wasn't in a position to push him. Still, having announced it, we couldn't disappoint our readers, either.

So I sat down at my desk and, in a single session, wrote the story of the childhood of the great Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, just as if I were telling it aloud to a group of children.

I think that experience is what led me to writing children's stories.

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Three years ago, a three-page entry about me was included in an American reference book titled *Something About the Author: Facts and Pictures about Authors and Illustrators of Books for Young Children*. In it, my works were said to exemplify the virtues of hope and perseverance in the face of adversity. I was happy to see that my purpose in writing for children had been grasped so accurately by book critics.

My children's stories were first introduced to the world through the efforts of the well-known illustrator of children's literature Brian Wildsmith. He drew the illustrations for four of my books, including *The Snow Country Prince*. I was impressed with the tremendous beauty of his work, a veritable symphony of gorgeous color.

The first time I met him, at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in 1988, I asked what he thought children really seek. He replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Happiness." It was a clear answer, right on the mark. And I agreed with him completely.



Happiness blooms in the garden of the heart. Big, beautiful blossoms of happiness flower in a rich, strong, spiritual soil. But neither hopes nor dreams will grow in a barren spiritual soil that is dominated by

violence and greed. And there are few adults today who will clearly spell out for children what is right and good, what are life's true treasures.

The spiritual decline of children means the decline of humanity as a whole. That is why I decided to cultivate the hearts of young children, to plant seeds in them — the seeds of justice, of courage, of hope, of honest effort, of kindness.

Writing children's stories is an attempt to do this.



The day fast approaches when the children who are emissaries of the future will gallop upon white steeds across the plains of the 21st century. When I think of that day, the bell of hope rings loudly in my heart.

Communicating the treasures of the heart to these children is my most fervent wish. I believe it is the responsibility of all adults.

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