

## **The Third Stage of Life A Family Committed To Serving the Members**

*Participants in this installment are SGI President Ikeda, Mrs. Kaneko Ikeda, Seikyo Shimbun General Editorial Bureau Senior Director Osamu Matsuoka and Vice Director Katsusuke Sasaki.*

**MATSUOKA:** (Addressing Mrs. Ikeda) Actually, you are a great friend of the editing staff of the *Seikyo Shimbun*. On important occasions when President Ikeda is meeting with visiting dignitaries, you often take notes in the place of reporters, and we are frequently indebted to you when it comes to writing our articles.

**K. IKEDA:** Thank you. My role is simply to help and support my husband. Our relationship is like the sun and the moon. I am merely the moon that shines in the sun's light.

**D. IKEDA:** We both have different roles. There are times when the burning intensity and power of the sun are called for, and times when the soothing luminescence and serene wisdom of the moon are needed. A complementary relationship in which the partners work together is a beautiful thing.

I remember Premier Zhou Enlai of China and his wife, Madam Deng Yingchao. Even after the premier's death, Madame Deng carried on their joint struggle, working to serve the people as a fellow comrade. Sharing the same goals is so important.

**K. IKEDA:** I think she provided a wonderful, noble example, the way she kept alive the memory of her husband, with whom she had worked so hard for so long, and continued to devote herself to their shared ideals.

When Premier Zhou died, mourners sent many, many floral tributes, of course. Among them was a small wreath with the note, "To my comrade-in-arms Enlai — from Little Chao." "Little Chao" was Madame Deng's nickname. I couldn't help feel that her overflowing emotions were distilled in that term "comrade-in-arms."

Incidentally, since we were just talking about the moon, I fondly recall a poem I received from President Toda:

*May you possess both  
The gentleness of the moonlight  
And the strength of the Mystic Law.*

Rather than needlessly compete with one another, I think both men and women should devote their energies to working for the sake of others and for Buddhism. At the same time, I feel it's only natural that different people will play different roles in their efforts to realize this shared commitment.

**MATSUOKA:** Speaking of the moon, the first series of photographs you took, President Ikeda, were of the moon. As I recall, that was some 28 years ago.

I vividly remember how sometimes you would set up your tripod and use many different lenses, from wide angle to zoom, to take photographs. Now you take photographs in a much freer fashion, don't you?

**SASAKI:** That reminds me of an incident in Moscow more than 20 years ago. We were boating on the Moscow River at the invitation of Soviet Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education V.P. Elyutin and discussing the subject of education.

At one point you said, "Please wait just a moment," and went to the bow of the boat, where you took several photographs of the beautiful spring greenery. You said that you would never see this scene again, and that you wanted to record it forever in your heart. This is photographing with the heart, you said.

**D. IKEDA:** Yes, I take photographs with the heart. I think that if your sensibilities are rich and refined, you can capture the richness of nature's beauty. People's hearts are fickle, but Nature never rejects us. Nature is all-accepting and all-embracing.

## **Not To Waste a Moment**

**MATSUOKA:** When you take photographs now, you just click the shutter without even looking through the viewfinder. A well-known photographer has described your work as the art of "capturing the moment with the eye of the heart." Jun Miki, longtime president of the Japan Professional Photographers Society and a great admirer of your photography over the years, once told me that many photographers lose the best moment to click the shutter because they spend too much time looking through the viewfinder. He said that you, on the other hand, always seem to capture the moment perfectly, which is one of the reasons your photographs are so good. It's very difficult, he commented, to take photographs that reveal the depth and breadth of vision that yours do.

He also said: "President Ikeda's photographs are without affectation. I think the best way to describe them is 'artlessly beautiful' and 'effortlessly natural.' When you view them, you are struck by the infinite expanse of the photographer's spirit."

**K. IKEDA:** I think it's also important to remember that my husband isn't traveling around the world just to take photographs. He only manages to take photographs in the midst of an extremely demanding schedule.

**D. IKEDA:** I can't bear to waste a single moment. And sometimes my photographs serve to encourage and inspire our members. If the traveling exhibition of my photographs, "Dialogue With Nature," provide an opportunity for me to share with members a broad and expansive vision of the world around us, nothing makes me happier.

**K. IKEDA:** We must never lose our sensitivity to beauty, our ability to appreciate fragrant flowers, beautiful music or lovely paintings.

## **Never Give In to Defeat**

**SASAKI:** May I ask, by the way, what your motto is, Mrs. Ikeda?

**K. IKEDA:** It's basically: "You may not always win, but never give in to defeat. Live in such a way that you are not defeated, no matter what the circumstances."

**D. IKEDA:** That's a crucial point. I am always emphasizing to the students of our Soka schools the importance of not letting themselves be defeated. As long as you're not

defeated, you can always look forward to another opportunity for success in the future. The key is not getting down on yourself. You have to remember to value and treasure yourself.

**MATSUOKA:** When you were raising your children, Mrs. Ikeda, what did you try to keep in mind as a mother?

**K. IKEDA:** How my own stress and tension, due to demands on my time, might adversely affect my children. We live in a world of relentless competition — not only in the adult world but even in the realm of children. That’s the kind of age we live in. As a mother, I tried to keep some inner latitude in reserve so that I could create an atmosphere of emotional warmth and security for my children.

I think that the maternal instinct is the human emotion closest to nature. Nature is extraordinarily accepting, and I think mothers must be the same. If a mother is concerned only with her ambitions for her children — for example, that they get into a good school or earn good grades — her relationship with them will be cold and unfeeling. I think we should have a warmer, more relaxed attitude. Even if our children don’t get top grades, for example, we should be happy and grateful that they are strong and healthy.

### **Teaching Children About Faith**

**SASAKI:** I hope you don’t mind our endless questions, Mrs. Ikeda. Our readers have been eagerly waiting for your participation in this discussion and have sent us so many questions.

If I may ask, how did you teach your children about faith?

**K. IKEDA:** The same as in any other family, I’m sure. Gongyo is the basic practice in a Soka Gakkai family, and I started teaching them to do it by reading it together, one word at a time. I discussed how we should instruct the children with my husband, and we both agreed that we should be neither too strict nor too lax. He said, “It all comes down to the mother’s faith in the end.”

Morning gongyo is the way we start our day, so of course it’s very important, but there were times when the children were running late for school. On those days, instead of making a fuss as they went out the door — which would probably have had the reverse effect I hoped for — I would see them off with a smile and say reassuringly: “Don’t worry. Today, I’ll do gongyo for you.”

**D. IKEDA:** You have to use your head when teaching children about faith. But I have seen many, many families over the years, and I think I can say that the faith of the children really *does* depend on the faith of their mother. Not that I’m letting fathers off the hook!

**K. IKEDA:** Our eldest son, Hiromasa, was born on April 28, 1953, the anniversary of the day on which Nichiren Daishonin publicly declared the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (in 1253). My husband was away from Tokyo attending a youth division meeting with President Toda.

Mr. Toda was overjoyed when he heard the news of our son’s birth. Using a calligraphy brush, he wrote a poem on the folding fan he was using: “On the birth of your child / how I rejoice / under the spring moon.” That fan is one of our family treasures.

I often took Hiromasa along with me to Gakkai activities from the time he was little. He even came along with me to many of the general meetings, leaders meetings and lectures on the Gosho led by President Toda.

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When my husband became president, Hiromasa was a first grader. From that time on, he always attended the annual Headquarters Leaders Meeting as a member of the Ikeda family. Through that early involvement, he grew into a person who really loved the Soka Gakkai. He made his own file of clippings from the *Seikyo Shimbun* when he was a boy.

**MATSUOKA:** You and President Ikeda had three children — all boys.

**K. IKEDA:** Yes. Two years after Hiromasa, our second son, Shirohisa, was born. By that time, my husband was incredibly busy with Gakkai work. Our third son, Takahiro, was born on April 11, 1958, just nine days after the death of President Toda on April 2. I was not able to participate in the ceremony passing on the mission of kosen-rufu held on March 16 because I was so close to giving birth to Takahiro. But Mr. Toda asked me to visit him at the head temple where he was staying that month, and I went there on March 18. I could see that his condition was very serious. That was our last meeting.

The period after Mr. Toda's death was a very difficult one for the organization. Many people predicted that the Soka Gakkai would disintegrate and disappear, so my husband was rushing all over Japan to encourage the members and was hardly ever home. The boys used to wait for him to return from his trips, looking forward eagerly to the little gifts they'd made him promise to bring back for them. He'd dash out the door saying: "Don't worry! I won't forget!" but I knew that he'd be so busy it would be impossible for him to find time to look for presents.

What I'd do is buy little gifts for the boys myself and put them away so that he could give them to the children when he returned from his trip.

**MATSUOKA:** I can just see the heartwarming scene you are describing. How was President Ikeda's health in those days?

**K. IKEDA:** He tired very easily and in general was not in good health. He often woke up at night and wanted something cold to drink. I'm sure he had a fever. Even during winter, he always had night sweats, and when he woke in the morning his face was flushed.

I've always felt that my mission in life has been to protect my husband's health, so I am overjoyed to see how unbelievably healthy he is now compared to his condition then.

**SASAKI:** I'm sure every member of the Soka Gakkai feels the same way.

**K. IKEDA:** I thank them all for their good wishes.

As our three sons grew older, each gradually gained his own appreciation of faith and began to apply himself to the practice and Gakkai activities. I remember once, when our young-est son, Takahiro, was a high school student, he wanted to go on an astronomy field trip to Ogasawara (an island located some 550 miles south of Tokyo). I told him that he really should be attending a meeting of the future division that was taking place at the same time, but he said he had promised his classmates well in advance, and he couldn't back out.

I discussed the matter with his father, who said: "Our faith is something that we are involved in for our entire lives. Let's take the long view and allow him to go to Ogasawara. The important thing is that he sticks to his faith for the long haul." I confess that I, too, was relieved to hear him say those words.

As they matured into adulthood and their understanding of faith deepened, our children began, on their own initiative, to approach their father about Gakkai activities and efforts for kosen-rufu not only as a parent but as a mentor.

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**MATSUOKA:** Even to us outsiders it's apparent that there's a mentor–disciple relationship between President Ikeda and his sons. It's very inspiring.

**K. IKEDA:** Our second son, Shirohisa, died at the age of 29, and like any parent, I was deeply grieved. I experienced the greatest sorrow and suffering that a person can know. Until you go through something like that yourself, you can't really relate to other people's pain and suffering. Everything in life is a lesson; such experiences, painful as they may be, make us who we are.

**SASAKI:** When I met Shirohisa's son and your grandson, Taka-hisa, the other day, I was surprised at how he'd grown. He's quite a young gentleman. [This past April, he started university.] I remember seeing you once, Mrs. Ikeda, talking happily with Takahisa and his mother. It was a wonderful sight. You looked so happy as you walked along holding hands with your grandson. I'll never forget it.

**K. IKEDA:** When Hiromasa graduated from university (Keio University) and was looking for a job, he received offers from many companies. But perhaps because he had seen how dedicated his father was to education, he decided to become a teacher and went to work at Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High Schools.

Over the years, however, as my husband's exchanges with individuals and organizations outside the SGI have grown, Hiromasa has increasingly helped out by acting as his father's representative. I sincerely pray that he may always serve the members to his utmost.

Takahiro graduated from Soka University and also decided to become a teacher. He took a post at Kansai Soka Elementary School. But lately we've been so busy that he's often acting as an assistant to his father as well.

**MATSUOKA:** I heard from President Ikeda that when Takahiro was thinking about what to do when he left school, you advised him, Mrs. Ikeda, to become an elementary school teacher rather than a university teacher, especially given the importance of elementary school teachers in shaping their young students' lives.

**K. IKEDA:** Yes, I did say that. Both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were elementary school teachers, after all. The Soka Gakkai (Value-creating Society) has its proud beginnings in the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society).

**D. IKEDA:** I make a clear distinction between my public and private lives, and so I haven't talked much about my family in the past, but our discussion in this installment has revealed all our secrets!

**MATSUOKA & SASAKI:** Thank you so much. We had so many requests from our readers.

**D. IKEDA:** As Mr. Toda's disciple, I will devote myself to kosen-rufu as long as I live. My entire family is at the service of the Soka Gakkai, of our members. When I accepted the post of SGI president in Guam in 1975, I said to representatives from around the world: "I hope you do not seek after your own praise or glory, but instead dedicate your whole lives to sowing the seeds of the Mystic Law for the sake of the peace of the whole world. I shall do the same thing." And that resolve will remain the same until the last day of my life.

*(To be continued)*