

**RECOLLECTIONS OF MY MEETINGS WITH LEADING WORLD FIGURES  
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PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE, DR. DAVID P. ROSELLE**

The hallmark of outstanding teachers is their ability to explain things simply. President David P. Roselle of the University of Delaware is such a teacher. In his speech at the ceremony in Tokyo at which I was privileged to receive an honorary doctorate from this distinguished American university, he shared the following anecdote with the young people gathered.

An expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students. As the story goes, the expert announced to the group: "It's time for a quiz." He then pulled out a large jar and set it on the table in front of him and proceeded to carefully place large stones inside. When the jar was filled to the top and no more stones would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class answered, "Yes." He asked, "Is it full, really?"

He then reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel, which he poured inside, shaking the jar so the gravel would work itself into the spaces between the stones. Then, he asked the group once more, "Is this jar full?"

By this time, the class knew what he was up to. "Probably not," one of the students answered. "Good!" he replied. And, he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand, which he started pouring into the jar. The sand filled all the spaces between the stones and the gravel.

Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good."

This time, he took out a pitcher of water and began to pour it into the jar until it was finally filled to the brim.

What this expert wanted to teach his class was this: "You should build your life in the manner I have built this display. If you don't put the big stones of your life in first, you'll never get them in."

Dr. Roselle went on to comment on this example:

Therefore, it's important for you to decide what the "big stones" are and get them in your jar of life first. Good possibilities are your loved ones, your education, your dreams, your commitment to a worthy cause, teaching or mentoring others, doing things that you love and taking special care of your health and fitness.

We have a saying in my country: "Don't sweat the small stuff." If you do sweat the little stuff (the gravel, the sand), then you'll find your life filled with little items, worrying about things that don't really matter, and you'll never have the quality time you need to spend on important things.

By sharing this anecdote, Dr. Roselle was trying to convey to the young people in the audience the importance of thinking first about what they want to use their lives for—what purpose they want to dedicate themselves to. Why are you at school? What is the true purpose of learning? He was trying to teach the young people present to think for themselves.

### **LACKING A PROPER SENSE OF PROPORTION**

When we met earlier this year, Dr. Roselle remarked that a university's worth is not determined by the length of its history or its size, but rather by the ideals and philosophy

it upholds. I wonder how well Japanese universities would stand up when judged by this standard?

The Japanese are often said to lack a proper sense of proportion. Perhaps because they have no philosophy or are too emotional, they have extreme difficulty judging what is important and what is not. As a result, both as individuals and as a nation, they tend to obsess about petty concerns and overlook the truly important matters.

University is supposed to be a place where students can cultivate a proper sense of proportion, but this will be impossible unless there exists an intellectual climate where teachers are given to philosophical introspection and humbly reflect on themselves. This is because, for a teacher to ask a student, "What are you going to make your priorities in life?" the teacher himself has to be thinking about such issues in his own life and be engaged in an inner quest. This is something that is missing in teachers who tend to be authoritarian and place themselves in a position above students. For real, life-to-life communication to occur, teachers and students, seniors and juniors, must have an open and equal relationship. I believe this kind of humanism is crucial for universities.

### **THE ONGOING EDUCATION OF TEACHERS**

The University of Delaware offers a unique program that supports the instructional improvement of its faculty. The purpose of the program is to teach faculty members how to create an environment in which students can feel happy and at ease pursuing their studies.

Mary Norton, who is the widow of the late University of Delaware professor Dr. David Norton (co-author of a book on the Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's value-creating pedagogy) and a scholar in her own right in the sphere of philosophy, ethics and critical thinking, remarked that university professors have a strong tendency to view themselves as specialists in their field first and teachers second. As a result, they are disinclined to make efforts to learn and develop themselves for the sake of their students. She noted that the astonishing thing about the University of Delaware program was that in spite of this trend, some fifty percent of the faculty have participated in it.

Students don't exist for the benefit of teachers; teachers exist for the benefit of students. That is why teachers must not be power brokers. Power invariably corrupts. Arrogant individuals cannot nurture and educate others. When teachers use students as a means to further their own ends, the flame of education at a university dies.

### **A UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT WHO PUTS STUDENTS FIRST**

Dr. Roselle is known as a president who values his students first and foremost. Often students walking on the campus will turn around to answer someone's call only to find themselves face-to-face with President Roselle. "How are your studies going?" "Is everything okay?" he asks. He says he wants to put the students at ease and develop a relationship of mutual understanding and trust. He also surprises students with his quick and careful replies to the many letters and e-mails they send him.

He is constantly working for the students' happiness and does all he can to ensure that the students have an enjoyable and meaningful time at the university. He says that what is important is the fact that all teachers have the power to exert a great influence on students and that they should therefore actively strive to make it a positive influence. This, he says,

is something that he is constantly trying to do. This is a conviction born of Dr. Roselle's own life experience.

### **LESSONS LEARNED FROM PARENTS**

Dr. Roselle was the first person in his family to receive a college education. He relates that his father was a "one-half orphan." His grandfather died young, leaving his grandmother with several small children to look after. Lacking the means to care for them all by herself, she was forced to leave the three youngest in an orphanage, and Dr. Roselle's father was one of those three.

Orphanages at that time, he says, often "loaned" their young charges out to people who needed help on their farms. Dr. Roselle's father was sent by his orphanage in New Jersey to work on a farm in neighboring Pennsylvania. Consequently, he only ended up with three years of elementary education.

After they got married, however, Dr. Roselle's mother encouraged his father to go back to school, and after much hard work he finally completed his high school education. He was a bright man.

Dr. Roselle says that from his father, he learned that you could overcome adversity through hard work, and that from his mother, he learned determination, relating that she was a very determined person—absolutely determined that things would get better. He says that his parents had a lot of adversity in their lives, but they were always cheerful and overcame every difficulty in their path.

It was from this background, he says, that he became the first person in his family to attend college. As a result, I understand, Dr. Roselle was simply content to get an undergraduate degree and find a job after graduation. He didn't have much money for further study, either. But one of his teachers encouraged him to continue his studies, causing him to change his mind. Because of that teacher's faith in him, Dr. Roselle went on to graduate school, obtaining a doctorate in mathematics and, eventually, becoming a university president.

I was very moved by this beautiful story of a teacher and student, and I said: "It's fine when everything's going well for students, but when they're having a hard time, we must give them courage. That compassion is the very heart of a teacher. I believe it is the mission of educators to teach people how to survive difficult times and triumph over them."

### **FOUNDER'S LEGACY**

When I inquired about Reverend Francis Alison, the founder of the University of Delaware, President Roselle's response brimmed with the spirit of a truly dedicated educator. "What was Reverend Alison's legacy?" I asked. "His first class of students," replied Dr. Roselle without hesitation.

The university has a long history. It was founded in 1743, prior to the independence of the United States from England. The youthful Reverend Alison began with only ten students, ranging in age from eight to sixteen. He taught in his own home at first and there was a shortage of good textbooks. But none of this deterred him.

He inspired his youthful charges with his passion for creating an "ideal new world." He taught them the then-revolutionary ideas of democracy and the separation of administrative, legislative and judicial powers. From that first class emerged governors, congressmen, doctors and scholars; three of them signed the Declaration of Independence,

and one signed the new Constitution.

President Roselle also commented that nothing gives him more pleasure than seeing the wonderful growth achieved by graduates of the school once they make their way out into society. As the founder of Soka University and the Soka schools, I share exactly the same sentiments. The graduates of these schools are as precious to me as my own life.

Mrs. Norton remarked that she believes the essence of education lies in teachers caring for their students as if they're their own children.

Dr. Raymond Callahan, a noted historian and associate dean of the Arts and Science Department at the University of Delaware, made the trip to Japan with Dr. Roselle and Mrs. Norton. He stated that successfully communicating with his students was even more satisfying for him than his academic achievements — of which he has many, incidentally. Professor Callahan also has the past distinction of being selected by students as Teacher of the Year.

## **THE STATE OF HIGHER LEARNING IN JAPAN**

Those who are familiar with the university systems of both the United States and Japan say that the definitive difference between them is that American universities regularly evaluate the faculty. The academic achievements and the teaching performance of the faculty are both strictly monitored by their peers and students.

Some have gone so far as to say that in Japan, in contrast, academics spend all their time before they become professors trying to curry favor with influential senior professors, and then once they actually become professors, they can virtually get away repeating the same old lectures year after year throughout long, cushy tenures.

At some universities in the United States, students make anonymous evaluations of a professor's course at the end of each semester. I'm not suggesting that Japan automatically adopt this system, but I do believe that unless faculty members are objectively evaluated for their performance, they will tend to become complacent, snug in their cozy world of privilege, and unable to carry out the constant self-reformation so important for personal growth. This is not my opinion alone, but one shared by many in the field. Unless our institutions of higher learning change, the rest of the educational system won't change, and Japan itself will never change, either.

## **THE ABILITY TO RESPOND TO CHANGING TIMES**

I asked Professor Callahan what he thought determined whether a society, nation, or organization flourished or declined. His reply was admirably clear. He said it all depends upon whether that society can successfully respond to changing times. A society must constantly accommodate change. A society is headed for trouble the minute it thinks that its way of doing things is the only way.

Yes, the world is constantly changing—and changing dramatically, changing rapidly. One year now is like ten years in the past in terms of the rate of change we experience. Soon the twenty-first century will begin. The age is fast approaching when national boundaries will be rendered meaningless. In this new age, I wonder how long Japan will continue its singular obsession with test scores and academic credentials from prestigious universities.

In the United States, talented students often switch schools or do their undergraduate work at one school and their graduate studies at another. Instead of asking, "What school did you graduate from?" people ask, "What can you do?" Japanese universities are often

said to be hard to get into but easy to graduate from, with the upshot that students do notoriously little study. Unless we reverse this anomaly, how can our universities hope to produce people with the ability to respond to changing times?

Dr. Roselle has said that the purpose of education is to create world citizens. I wonder how many men and women of world-class caliber our Japanese universities have produced. How many young people have they sent out into the world who not only excel in a special field but also possess the language ability, the communicative skills, the creativity, along with a solid life philosophy and, above all, a passionate and universal humanism, to be able to freely engage and communicate with others around the world?

Isn't Japan's mindless educational system, which fails to focus on education's true purpose and is intent only on cramming as much knowledge into students' heads as possible, producing large numbers of university graduates who have neither practical foreign language skills nor democratic spirit?

### **EDUCATION IS VITAL FOR DEMOCRACY TO SUCCEED**

Dr. Roselle also offered his thoughts on the relationship between education and democracy. Citing one of the founders of the United States, Benjamin Franklin, he said that unless people are educated, the experiment of democracy would fail. He added that people with a strong sense of responsibility are necessary for democracy to function. Before going to the ballot box, for instance, each citizen should have an understanding of what's going on in the world, for only when each citizen has this knowledge can democracy move in the right direction, he said. With Japanese democracy "at death's door," this is a very urgent warning indeed.

First, we must reform education! To do that, educators must reform themselves. That is the first "big stone" that we must place in Japan's "jar" in the twenty-first century.