

## THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA PARIS TRICOLORS

It was a busy day. Many a time I came and went along the rain-washed Paris streets. It was my first visit in a long while, and Paris was as beautiful as ever.

No other city has so many art houses. But in no other city is there less need to visit a gallery; for Paris itself is a museum.

Yet the city is so human; chic and fashionable, she is also a little shy and a bit of a cynic. People of elegance, wit and rich intellect fill the streets.

The day was June 20, 1991. I had arrived in the early evening the day before from sun-drenched Trets in the South of France.

I left my hotel in a Paris suburb a bit early and headed downtown. In the morning I was scheduled to meet with the Minister of Culture M. Jack Lang. And that evening, too, I was invited by President of the Senate M. Alain Poher to his official residence. Scheduled for the next day was the opening of the Victor Hugo House of Literature. Between the two engagements I just mentioned, I had to attend a discussion to go over final plans for the opening.

A downtown hotel room was my base for the day's activities. I left and entered the room many times, and whenever I returned, I went to the window and looked out.

On the balcony were planted delicate red geraniums. Across the street lay the Tuileries Gardens. Marronnier, acacia, and linden trees looked fresh, cloaked in their motley shades of green. In Paris, nature too was stylish. With her proud smile, Nature seemed to say: "Ça c'est Paris!" [This is Paris!].

Once the area surrounding the Garden was a tumultuous stage upon which was played the drama of the French Revolution. Just before my eyes stood the National Assembly, where the Parliament declared the overthrow of a monarchy and the birth of a republic.

Into this space, so rich with a sense of history, a row of French flags—blue, white and red—thrust themselves forward as if silently to assert their will. The tricolor flag symbolizes the Republic's founding spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity.

But there was a time when glorious Tricolor had to shrink in the shadows of another flag. During the Nazi occupation of 1940 to 1944, the swastika-emblazoned banner of Nazi Germany was hoisted everywhere in Paris—flying from hundreds of hotels, apartments and estates, and even from the Eiffel Tower. It was four years of humiliation. Nazi flags also lined this street, Rue de Rivoli. In fact, the occupying Nazi armies had been headquartered at this very hotel on whose balcony geraniums now bloomed.

What kind of flag do we raise? Under what flag do we live? A flag is one's "spiritual coat of arms."

General Charles de Gaulle once said as he handed a regimental flag to the students of a military academy: "This flag demands that you give up your freedom and money. But instead you shall gain what is unparalleled; that is, glory" (translated from the Japanese).

During the Nazi occupation, General de Gaulle, from his exile in England, called out to French citizens to resist the invading forces. One fisherman, in response to the call, sailed to England alone. Crossing the Channel, he hoisted on his small boat the French Tricolor, the pride of his mother country.

At last came the day of the liberation of Paris. One radio announcer, declaring that he was "mad with elation," broadcast the news and then recited a poem by Victor Hugo:

*Wake up! We have had enough humiliation.  
Rebuild great France! Rebuild great Paris!* (translated from the Japanese)

To this, Parisians opened their curtains and windows. Neighbors embraced one another. People ran through the streets, shouting with joy. A great chorus of “La Marseillaise” resounded through Paris.

“We have our own song. We have our own flag,” was the message.

Happy are those who hold high such flags and advance until they score the final victory in life—until the very last moment when the flame of their life force is extinguished.

“This is the flag of my life!” “This is the flag of my conviction!” is their declaration.

People are born to realize their ideals. We are born not to drag ourselves along in shackles, but to spread wide our wings. This was Hugo’s passionate message.

I toast to Paris, the city of Hugo! I toast to Paris, city of liberty!

When I returned to my room after meeting with Mr. Poher looking out at the sky from the window, I saw a double rainbow; standing in splendor, its columns were like parapets of a celestial causeway.

*Tenth in a series*