

**UNFORGETTABLE FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
DR. JULES BRASSNER—AN ENTREPRENEUR COMMITTED TO WORKING
FOR THE GOOD OF SOCIETY**

In this series, SGI President Ikeda has recorded his impressions of the many friends he has made in his travels for peace. In his New Year's poem in the January issue, he states: "I will continue to knock on the doors/Of diverse cultures and civilizations, /Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive/At the heart of each, /Believing that sincere dialogue/In search of our shared humanity/Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world."

SGI President Ikeda meets with Dr. Jules Brassner and his wife, SanLee, May 3, 1999, in Tokyo. SanLee was born in Korea and was a successful businesswoman when she met Dr. Brassner in New York.

Gracing the Main Auditorium of Soka University in Tokyo are three statues — those of Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy and Walt Whitman. When Dr. David L. Norton, late professor of philosophy of the University of Delaware, saw the figures of these three world literary giants, he declared: "How wonderful! Now I see how open Soka University and the Soka Gakkai International are to the world, how sincerely they pursue values common to all humanity. Surely no other university can compare. I see here a great broadness of spirit. These statues are an expression of the magnificent spirit of Soka —value-creation — a spirit that transcends the comprehension of those Japanese who are narrow and closed-minded."

It is our dear friend Dr. Jules Brassner who donated these statues to the university.

Dr. Brassner is a successful American businessman. When he first visited Soka University, he said, "The auditorium is the symbol of the university. I would like to contribute something to the students that gives shape to the ideas of the university's founder." And noting the frequent appearance of Tolstoy, Hugo and Whitman in my speeches, he decided to have statues made of these great men to adorn Soka University's auditorium. At the same time, he presented a statue of Marie Curie to Soka Women's Junior College.

Dr. Brassner lives with the spirit to always ask himself what he can do to contribute to others.

When the statues were being cast, Dr. Brassner, accompanied by his wife SanLee, regularly visited the artists' workshop to see how the work was progressing. "Education," he said, "is the most important endeavor, and I wish to present President Ikeda, who has devoted his life to education, with works of the finest craftsmanship."

Also, when the Makiguchi Memorial Garden, named after the founder of Soka education, was completed adjacent to Soka University, he said, "People from all over the world will visit this garden, so I would like to present you with a statue that will give them courage and inspiration." And he commissioned a statue of Napoleon Bonaparte for the garden.

At the time, a Napoleon foundation in America asked him to join their board as a director, but he declined, saying that his interest in Napoleon was a reflection of his desire to assist and support us in our educational endeavors.

Dr. Brassner is a man of integrity, sharp wits, strong mind and great intelligence. He has a tremendous interest and curiosity in people. He is able to see the big picture. He is a man of swift action and evaluates the validity and accuracy of all information with penetrating thoroughness. Perhaps because he is such a good businessman, there is something about him

that reminds me of my mentor Josei Toda. His unabashed practicality and dislike of wasting time and resources on that which is meaningless is also something that he has in common with Mr. Toda.

While exceedingly generous, he will go out of his way, for instance, to choose a restaurant where he can get the best value; he will not pay more simply for trimmings and no substance. I understand that he was surprised and angered at the high price of neckties in Tokyo, where designer brands remain year-round favorites. He loves the roasted sweet potatoes that street vendors sell here in winter, a real “down-home” Japanese treat.

Dr. Brassner is seventy-eight. He is kind enough to have said that his encounter with me was a turning point in his life.

Dr. Brassner was born and raised in New York, the son of a factory owner. He pursued a career as an engineer. Serving in the navy during World War II, he was assigned to a research facility. He worked on eliminating the black smoke that issued from the submarines when they submerged and surfaced. After the war, he was a success in business. But wealth did not necessarily bring happiness in life. There was a feeling of emptiness in his heart that he could not dispel. He had questions: What is the purpose of wealth? What is the purpose of life?

But, as Napoleon said, “A talented man will fly out of any fetters that may bind him.”

One day, Dr. Brassner decided to cast aside all he had done so far and accept the challenge of a new life — a second life. One of his friends at this time was the American industrialist Dr. Armand Hammer (1898-1990), who had played such an important role as a bridge between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. When Dr. Hammer and I held a discussion in Los Angeles in 1990, Dr. Brassner sat quietly in the background, listening intently to our exchange.

“At that time, I keenly felt and resolved that I, too, must contribute something to others,” Dr. Brassner later said to me. “It was clear to me that the SGI was not an organization of empty rhetoric. I resolved, then, to work together with you, President Ikeda, for peace, culture and education.” In the spirit of a practical businessman, this decision led quickly to action. He commissioned a statue of Victor Hugo and presented it to the SGI’s Victor Hugo House of Literature in Bièvres on the outskirts of Paris shortly before its opening, along with photos and handwritten manuscripts of the French author.

He is a dedicated man. When the Kobe-Osaka earthquake struck in January 1995, he was in South America. But, learning of the disaster on television, he immediately made a sizable financial contribution to the victims.

Half-hearted efforts are the root of many evils. Dr. Brassner is never half-hearted. He always devotes his full energies to a project. He is strong. He is a fighter. As Walt Whitman writes, “O the joy of a manly self-hood! / To be servile to none, to defer to none, not to any tyrant known or unknown.” (“A Song of Joys”)

He is dynamic and decisive. But energetic individuals can easily overextend themselves. They need a partner at their side who can moderate and direct their energies. Dr. Brassner has that in his wife, SanLee. Mrs. Brassner was born in Korea, descended from a distinguished family of the Yi dynasty. She became a successful businesswoman, and met Dr. Brassner in New York.

I will never forget something that Dr. Brassner asked me once most earnestly when we were talking: “Is life eternal? Will I be reborn in my next life together with my family? The reason I ask is that I can’t imagine having a better wife than I do now. My family is the best imaginable.”

“If you pray for that,” I said, “you will surely be reborn together. Even should you be reborn as parent and child, you will still be together.” When I spoke to Dr. Brassner of the eternity of

life throughout the three existences of past, present and future, tears glistened in his eyes.

Pledging to be united with his loved ones throughout eternity, Dr. Brassner dedicates his days to working for humanity. There is no longer any emptiness inside him. He has won for himself a truly wonderful life.

There is an old saying of the East, “The wealthy are not benevolent, and the benevolent are not wealthy.” But Dr. Brassner proves that wrong. He is a man of wealth and benevolence. All Soka University students are grateful to him and are praying for his good health and long life.

His name will live on forever at Soka University.