

**HONORING OUR PIONEERS—DAVID KASAHARA,  
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.  
FORGING AHEAD ON THE PATH OF JUSTICE**

**Persevering through the difficult times of his Buddhist practice, David Kasahara now sees victory in his life and his quest to support the SGI-USA members.**

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In 1966, I was a young jazz dancer who had been active on the stage and in TV musical programs in Japan. I had a serious dream of studying jazz dance in America, the birthplace of jazz, in order to further my development as an artist. But when I got to New York, reality was much more severe than I thought. I had a tremendous struggle figuring out what direction to take. It was around that time that I met a woman who was a Soka Gakkai member, and she introduced me to Buddhism.

In the beginning, I was very resistant and skeptical about the Soka Gakkai. In those days, the Soka Gakkai was often portrayed as a “violent religious organization” in Japan. But not many Japanese people lived in New York around that time, and I was lonely and anxious to see some Japanese faces, so I ended up attending the discussion meetings. Even as bashful and judgmental as I was, I couldn’t resist the warmth of the members and began to practice.

In 1971, I became employed as a SGI-USA staff member working at the New York Community Center. Then, in the 1970s, the SGI-USA organization experienced a reformation that is sometimes referred to as “phase 2.” Some insincere people took advantage of this situation for their own selfish motives. Many members, who had been fortunate enough to receive the Gohonzon, ultimately stopped practicing and left the organization.

I was the only SGI-USA staff member in New York at that time. All the complaints and criticisms against the SGI were directed at me. Day after day, I patiently endured slander and abuse. People would say to me: “We don’t need any organization! We don’t need any leaders! We don’t need the Gosho!” I keenly felt that, if left unchecked, this would destroy everything we had achieved in our organization.

That is why, in the current Soka Spirit movement, the courage to face evil and understand its intent is essential. Our courageous attitude to speak out regarding the justice of the mentor–disciple relationship is paramount. A leader must have a sense of responsibility. If he or she practices halfheartedly, without a sense of responsibility, he or she will become an enemy of kosen-rufu.

When “phase 2” began, I was in charge of the youth division in New York. There were many occasions when I felt deep anguish at my not being capable enough as a leader. I struggled hard during those seven years, determined, no matter what, to protect our organization in New York.

Finally, in 1981, SGI President Ikeda came to New York. It was on this trip that he wrote his poem “To My Young American Friends,” heralding a historic new development of the kosen-rufu movement in the United States. The dark clouds, which had weighed so heavily upon the New York members, were blown away.

And as for myself, after those long years of struggle, I joyfully threw my whole life into President Ikeda's visit. I was able to receive encouragement from him personally and felt embraced by the vastness of his life. This was the turning point for me.

In June 1994, my oldest son, George, was killed in an accident. He was 22 years old. President Ikeda, who was visiting London at the time, sent me words of encouragement immediately after the accident. He said, "Mr. Kasahara, it is for the sake of this very moment that you have been practicing this Buddhism!" His brief encouragement touched me very profoundly.

No matter how busy President Ikeda was on his European tour, he continued to send me constant encouragement. He wrote a poem for me: "How brave you are/ As you depart/ Taking on all the sufferings of your fellow members with all your life."

When I received this poem, I made a strong resolution: "There is a deep meaning to George's death. Our family will change this sorrow into mission and live our lives to the fullest for the sake of George. I will dedicate myself to kosen-rufu in order to repay my debt of gratitude to my mentor and fellow members."

The passing of George has made the bonds of the remaining family members — myself, my wife, Patricia, my daughter, Margaret, my son, John, and my mother, who is 90 years old and has been living with us — much stronger.

Our family decided to donate George's organs to others who needed them. We were encouraged by a recent report that my son's organs are still alive and working in eight people who have since recovered from their illnesses.

The passing of my son also brought countless members to the community center, some of whom I had never met before, as well as many whom I'd worked together with over the years. In tears, they offered my family encouragement. Where else can you find such a wonderful, humanistic world but in the SGI!

On the other hand, when the chief priest of Myosetsu-ji temple in Flushing, N.Y., learned about the death of my son, he haughtily told people at his temple, "Kasahara got what he deserved—he did not follow the teachings of the high priest!" What a cold-hearted, inhumane thing to say!

Having heard this, I exploded in anger: "We will never be defeated by Nichiren Shoshu!" And the New York members also stood up in righteous anger for the sake of justice. We have since put even more effort into Soka Spirit activities, helping many temple members to find their way back to the Soka Gakkai.

I retired from working for the SGI-USA at the New York Culture Center at the end of January after having been fortunate enough to have worked as a staff member for 30 years. I have now started my new "third stage of life" as executive director of the Florida Nature and Culture Center, which was founded by President Ikeda. In my job, I have the pleasure of helping members from all over the United States and other countries who visit the FNCC.

As I look back upon my practice, it is President Ikeda's guidance that has supported and trained me. On one occasion, he told me: "Merchants must work to make money. Students must study to graduate. Likewise, you must practice hard to become a Buddha." His strict but loving gaze at that time is still engraved in my memory.

I cannot thank President Ikeda enough for guiding an immature person like myself into what I am today. Nor can I adequately thank the SGI. Today, I am deeply touched by the following passage in the Goshō: "A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse,

can travel ten thousand miles, the green ivy that twines around the tall pine can grow to a thousand feet” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 17).

This year, I made four New Year’s resolutions: 1) to have a lifelong seeking mind; 2) to have a lifelong youthful spirit; 3) to strive for victory my whole life; and 4) to have lifelong appreciation.

With these resolutions in my heart, I feel stronger each day that my mission in life has just begun. In this year of 2001, I am making a fresh start once again!