

**YOUNG DAISAKU (3)**  
**Life During Wartime**  
**BY KEN SARAGOSA, PHILADELPHIA HIGH SCHOOL CHIEF**

Daisaku loved his paper route. While delivering papers, he would imagine himself a crucial messenger of much needed information. These imaginings sparked in him the ambition to become a journalist:

I began thinking that in the future I'd like to be a reporter for a newspaper or a magazine.

The problem was that during my years in grade school and upper elementary school — and even after the war in night school — I simply never enjoyed the opportunity to study thoroughly and with composure. To compensate I had to struggle to make time for reading. (*My Recollections*, p. 20)

Reading was the source of his spiritual nourishment.

In July of 1941, Kiichi, the oldest Ikeda child, was discharged from the military and returned home. Daisaku then no longer bore so much responsibility at home and began to hope that he might stay in school. But in December of that year Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Ikeda vividly remembers delivering the paper announcing the attack. The war was escalating beyond imagination; within a year, Kiichi was once again drafted into service and by 1943, all four of Daisaku's older brothers were serving in the military.

The entire nation became swept up in a patriotic fervor. Ikeda often mentions that growing up during the war "learning English was regarded as a 'traitorous' activity.... Young and innocent, we abided by the government's education decrees" (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 62).

The Meiji rescript on education recited by students every school day read in part: "Offer yourselves courageously to the state, and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of the Imperial throne." Daisaku, too, was caught up in emperor worship. "The frightfulness of education," he later wrote, "is that it can paint whatever colors it pleases on the blank canvas of the tender mind. That much is clear to me now" (*My Recollections*, p. 24).

In 1942, 14 years old and just finished with school, Daisaku attempted to enter military service. Japan's military was routinely inducting and training adolescent boys. Though he saw how much it hurt his parents to watch their sons go to war, he wanted to fight and prove his heroism. His father refused to sign the consent form, saying that "four are plenty!" (*ibid.*, p. 25).

Daisaku bore the primary financial responsibility for supporting his family, so he gave up his paper route for a job at the Niigata Iron Works, actually a munitions plant. The young men working there were generally too young or sickly to serve in active duty. Here, too, young Daisaku lived under the daily indoctrination of the Japanese military government.

But it was here that he began to understand the horror of war. The factory was manufacturing miniature submarines, called "human torpedoes," the naval equivalent of kamikaze planes. The war had entered its last, desperate stages. Ikeda remembers that "young men imbued with the idea 'Your life for an enemy ship — ram it!' sailed into the jaws of death" (*ibid.*, p. 30).

Daisaku struggled to do the only thing that might, at least in his heart, allow him to break out of the hell he was in. He remembers: "My solitary joy in those days was getting immersed in some book during noon hour on a strip of grass within the factory compound.... I was so fascinated by what I read that my mind soaked up everything it touched" (*ibid.*, p. 33). With great difficulty, he pieced together a very small but precious personal library.

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