

SGI President Ikeda's Essay My Student Days

President Ikeda remembers his student days at Taisei Gakuin. There he met a wonderful educator, who inspired him about what education should be.

The Soka University campus was completely in view from the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall. As the sky glowed scarlet with the fire of sunset, the sound of the school song — who was singing, I wondered? — came floating on the breeze. As I listened to the song, my student days came alive in my mind once again.

Whenever the school's founder and president made an appearance, the classroom was filled with light.

It was 50 years ago, in April 1948, that I graduated from the night school of Toyo Commercial High School and entered the Politics and Economics Department of Taisei Gakuin's night school. Later, Taisei Gakuin became Fuji College.

In those days, the school buildings were near Nakai Station (in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward) on the Seibu Line. The school was renting buildings that had survived the war bombings, and they were dark, decrepit. The floors creaked, and wind and rain blew in through the broken windows.

But whenever the school's founder and president, Professor Yumichi Takata, made an appearance, the classroom was filled with light.

"Hello there, students!" he would call to us in his rather high-pitched voice before beginning his lecture. He was slight and pale, but his eyes sparkled with life, and his voice was filled with enthusiasm.

I studied political science under Professor Takata, and I loved his lectures. I was even more drawn to his character.

He regarded political science as a practical means to manage society and ease the people's suffering. In his lectures, he often lamented what was happening in Japan and the rest of the world and strongly advocated establishing global peace based on sound moral principles. In particular, I will never forget his insistence on the importance of developing our humanity.

At times, he would start coughing painfully in class. He was suffering from tuberculosis. But when he stopped coughing, he always resumed his superb lectures with even greater passion.

I had tuberculosis myself, and I was moved by the power of his lectures, delivered as he struggled with illness.

After class, Professor Takata would talk casually with us, making the effort to engage us in conversation and discussion. When I told him one day that I had begun editing a boys' magazine at Mr. Toda's company, he smiled in delight and said: "You seem to be well versed in philosophy and literature, so you'll make a first-rate editor. In the future, let's find an opportunity to talk about education and about the issues of society and the individual."

Burning bright in his every action and gesture was his passion for nurturing young people who aspired to achieve great things.

Because I had to take an indefinite leave of absence from school when Mr. Toda's

business fell into serious difficulties, I only benefited from Professor Takata's inspiration and guidance for a little more than a year.

A teacher should give his or her life to the students.

Later, Professor Takata devoted his energies to the establishment of Fuji College. Though he was very ill, he worked extremely hard — he did all the groundwork for the school's foundation. The school was finally accredited in March 1951, and at the end of April that year it held its first entrance ceremony as Fuji College.

But Professor Takata's condition took a grave turn for the worse, and he died May 17, 1951, just a few weeks later. He was only 42. The night before he died, he said, "Education is a process in which the teacher gives his life to his students."

This is the spirit of a school's founder.

About a year and a half before I founded Soka Junior and Senior High School (in 1968), I was approached by Fuji College with the strong suggestion that I write several papers, so that I could be graduated from that institution. Knowing as I did Professor Takata's beliefs about education, I agreed, and I wrote some 10 reports, including "The Establishment and Special Features of Industrial Capital in Japan" and "Trends in Japanese Industry from the End of World War II to the Korean War." I presented them to Fuji College in early February 1967, was given credit for them and was graduated from the Economics Department.

I love my alma mater. I am grateful to it. I am proud of it.

It was there that I encountered a great teacher, a man who had a profound impact on my life.

I founded Soka University in 1971 with the same spirit as Professor Takata: the determination to give my life to the students. I was 43.

Twenty-seven years have passed since then, and we have seen 24 graduating classes.

In a curious coincidence, Soka University President Kinnosuke Komuro taught for a time at Fuji College.

At the alumni reunions of the Soka schools every year, graduates from all over the world gather. I am happy that they love their alma mater so much.

The greatest gift I could ever receive as the schools' founder is the noble spirit that beats in the hearts of all our graduates — it is their pride and joy as people dedicated to serving humanity the world over.

I believe that Professor Takata is watching over me with these same sentiments.

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