

SGI President Ikeda's Essays Never Lose Heart

SGI President Ikeda spent a year as an editor of a children's magazine, when he was 21. Golden memories of the writers and illustrators he worked with then — and their determination to encourage children to never lose heart — have stayed with him all his life.

Meeting people broadens our minds. It's almost 50 years since I worked as an editor at Mr. Toda's publishing company. That job gave me the opportunity to become acquainted with many writers and illustrators.

I entered Mr. Toda's company at the age of 21 in January 1949 and was given responsibility for the children's magazine *Boy's Adventure*. In May the same year, I became editor-in-chief.

I was determined to make Mr. Toda's company and this magazine the best in all Japan. I often spoke with writers and illustrators about it being a magazine that would give hope and inspiration to children.

One time I heard that the artist Shokichiro Yamaguchi, known for his elegant, refined depiction of Japanese warriors, had burned himself severely in a household accident. I went to visit him, and he was overjoyed that a young editor had come to see him.

He talked freely about his art. "At first," he said, "I didn't even know if a samurai wore his swords on the right or the left, and my editor scolded me. I wanted my paintings to be alive, to make my figures seem as if they were really in motion — to capture that moment when one sword strikes another with a sharp clang. And I studied night and day to achieve that."

I sensed in his words a fierce, challenging spirit.

Later, Mr. Yamaguchi contributed the illustrations to the novel *Nichiren Daishonin* by Kunizo Minato, which was serialized in *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

By the time I was made editor-in-chief, Mr. Toda's publishing company was already facing hard times, but I was determined to surmount those difficulties by coming up with new ideas for the best children's magazine possible, a magazine both entertaining and educational. From the October 1949 issue, I renamed the magazine *Boy's Japan* and completely revamped the contents.

I made a strong effort to publish good fiction. At that time, Sohachi Yamaoka was a popular children's writer. Although I realized what a busy man he was, I eagerly entreated him to write a novel for our magazine.

"Children are the messengers of the future," I said. "We want to give them courage and nurture their sense of justice, their sense of right and wrong."

The bearded Mr. Yamaoka smiled and nodded in agreement. "I'll do it," he said. "You've won me over with your enthusiasm."

He added: "A novel has to be entertaining, first of all. I'll do everything in my power to write just the kind of novel you want — a novel that will have readers wringing their hands in anxiety, sobbing when the hero is in trouble, and laughing out loud at the funny parts, all the while being inspired and ennobled."

And with these words, he began to write *Three Young Swordsmen*. In later years, Mr. Yamaoka also wrote *Takasugi Shinsaku*, about one of the central figures in the movement to overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate; it was serialized in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka

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Gakkai's daily newspaper, for 28 months.

Back in those days, another writer said to me, "You really are sincere" and wrote out an ancient Chinese saying for me: "Sincerity is the key to great achievements."

Boy's Japan was well received, and sales increased, but by this time Mr. Toda's business was in desperate straits.

Although it broke his heart, he closed his publishing company at the end of October 1949. The December issue was the last.

The children's writer Yoichiro Minami contributed to the final issue an installment of a novel as well as a poem entitled "To the Young, Who Carry the Future." The poem went:

*Whatever happens, let's never lose heart
If we lose heart, we're double losers
Everyone experiences setbacks or defeats sometime
It can't be helped
But we mustn't lose heart when that happens
We mustn't be fainthearted and become double losers*

After that, I worked alongside Mr. Toda to lay the groundwork for a new victory.

I had been an editor for only a year, when my career was suddenly ended. But my earnest encounters with so many fine writers and artists remain golden memories that I will cherish forever.

I wonder what my young readers of those days are doing today, the young children who read with me the words "Whatever happens, let's never lose heart."

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