

EXPERIENCE — SEIJI TAKAKU, PASADENA, CALIF. THREE BROTHERS TRANSFORM THEIR LIVES

Seiji Takaku shares how he and his two brothers are creating lives of fulfillment based on their practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Their transformation ultimately encouraged their father, who had opposed their practice in the beginning, to join them. 'After seeing all the dramatic changes that had taken place in his our lives,' Seiji explains, 'my father could no longer ignore the validity of this practice.'

If you ask me what is the greatest benefit that I have received since I started practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I must say that it is the fact that everyone in my family is an SGI member. Because of this practice, we have created such a strong family. However, 15 years ago things were not going so smoothly.

My older brother, Masaharu, was a heroin addict in Japan and almost killed himself from a drug overdose. At the time he was \$60,000 in debt from his drug habit. My younger brother, Masayoshi, was studying to become a chef at my father's request. My father is a chef and he wanted Masayoshi to follow in his footsteps. However, my brother secretly quit his job, behind my father's back, to pursue his dream of becoming a full-contact Karate fighter. As for me, I was the only son who had the opportunity to attend college in Japan. My father was very proud of me. However, I dropped out after one year. All this turmoil happened at one time during 1988.

At that time, my father was against any form of religion — especially the Soka Gakkai. Understandably so, according to my father. He had an experience that influenced his opinion. When my older brother was only 4 months old, he was diagnosed as having a rare incurable disease for which doctors could find no cure. My father was feeling so angry and hopeless. An SGI member who lived near my parents told him "if you pray to the Gohonzon your son will be cured. Having a good doctor is not the only way to cure his disease." Although this person sincerely desired to help my family, my father thought this person was suggesting not to see a doctor. As a result, he became furious and seriously mistrusted the Soka Gakkai.

So you can imagine how angry my father became when he discovered that Masaharu, at 19, joined the SGI. If you can believe it, he tried to introduce my father to the practice just after asking for money to help cover his \$60,000 debt! Despite my father's opposition, Masaharu taught the rest of my family about Buddhism. A year later, my mom joined hoping that her sons could lead a normal life. Another year later Masayoshi, joined in the hopes of becoming a Karate fighter. I, on the other hand, did not mainly because my older brother continued to abuse heroin, and my family suffered a lot as a consequence.

In 1989, in search of my own dream for the future, I decided to come to the United States to learn English. By doing so, I'd enroll in a good college and hopefully return to Japan and find a good job there. After a year I tried to attend a community college with the idea of transferring to a university, but I was rejected from every one I applied to because of my poor English ability. Things did not go as I had planned. I really wanted to return to Japan.

One letter from my younger brother and a phone call from my older brother, however, convinced me that I could achieve anything if I put my mind to it. Chanting Nam-myoho-

renge-kyo, they explained, would allow me to do that. After refusing to practice for so many years, I finally decided to give it a try. My brothers taught me gongyo over the phone, and I chanted very sincerely with one goal in mind — to get into a good college.

So many things have changed within the past nine years of my life, changes that could only have occurred because of my family's Buddhist practice. My older brother, Masaharu, now married with two beautiful children, overcame his drug addiction, and is the proud owner of a successful hair salon in Japan. My younger brother, Masayoshi, after 10 years of dedication, became the Light Heavy Weight World Champion of Karate last year. His accomplishments were recognized several times by the *Seikyo Shimbun* and various magazines such as *World Karate*. He has also appeared on numerous TV programs. He is married and has a beautiful daughter.

As for me, I graduated from UCLA with the second highest honor, *magna cum laude*, with a grade point average of 3.8. I received my master's degree in experimental psychology at California State University, Long Beach. I am currently finishing my doctoral dissertation at Claremont Graduate University where I have recently passed my oral exams. I received a Haynes dissertation grant, which will pay for my remaining year in graduate school.

As for my personal life, well, I finally met "Miss Right" two years ago. She was even willing to marry me without my having a steady job! My wife, Takako, has unselfishly supported me throughout my entire doctoral program for the past two years. No words can express my gratitude for her untiring trust and support.

But the greatest benefit happened last year. As I mentioned earlier, my father completely opposed the SGI for the longest time. However, after seeing all the dramatic changes that had taken place in our lives, my father could no longer ignore the validity of this practice. At age 60, my father finally joined the SGI! He is now chanting every day and doing a complete gongyo after a year of practice. When my wife and I visited Japan this past winter, he led morning and evening prayers on several occasions. My mom told me she is the happiest woman in the world.

Before concluding I would like to say that none of this would have been possible if my older brother hadn't joined the SGI and had a sincere desire to become happy. I'm so grateful that, amidst his struggle of drug abuse, Masaharu never gave up on this practice and his dream of sharing this Buddhism with his entire family. Once I asked him how he managed to maintain such a strong conviction, he said, "Because I trust SGI President Ikeda and this practice."

Just as I believe every person has the right to become happy within his or her lifetime, I also believe everyone has the right to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. With this conviction in mind, my wife and I decided to host introductory youth meetings every month. It is our hope to support people in their practice of Buddhism and pursuit of all their dreams.