

HONORING OUR PIONEERS GREGORY NAKASUJI: PHOTOGRAPHER OF KOSEN-RUFU

Age: 70 (born Oct. 14, 1930)

Joined SGI: Sept. 19, 1960

Hometown: Gobo, Japan

Occupation: Photographer

Favorite camera: Canon A1

Favorite photographer: Ansel Adams

First shot: SGI President Ikeda's first visit to L.A., 1960.

Most difficult shot: Fireworks from a boat at the Seattle Convention, 1971.

Words of wisdom: Don't hesitate.

Greatest challenge:

Just after the Women's General meeting in Los Angeles in July 1966, I woke up and couldn't see. There was a mucous-like film covering my corneas. I went to see a doctor, who took X-rays. He thought it was a tumor on one of my eye muscles. I began chanting four to six hours a day at the first community center in the United States located in East Los Angeles. Two to three days later the mucous disappeared. I thought that was the end of it, but the mysterious condition returned several times—usually before important SGI events. This happened on and off for nearly 10 years. Then in 1976, I went to New York to cover the Bicentennial Tri-City Convention, in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Because I was afflicted with the condition, I kept falling down and bumping into things because I couldn't see clearly. It was so difficult to photograph. Just after the convention, I woke up and my eyes again were completely healed. The doctors couldn't believe it.

My prayer was for my eyes to heal if I had a mission. The rest is history.

Most memorable year:

In 1980, when SGI President Ikeda came to the United States to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the kosen-rufu movement, he asked to see my photographs for the past 20 years. He looked at all of them one by one, and selected the best ones for a book covering the history of the NSA organization in America, *NSA Album*.

Also that year on my birthday, Oct. 14, President Ikeda presented me with a medal commemorating the 50th anniversary of the SGI. I was shocked and honored; I never expected it.

Advice to photographers:

As a photographer you have to be on time. You have to be responsible on a daily basis. Sometimes if you make even one mistake you can end up with nothing, whether you are late or mishandle film or whatever. The hardest part is to take full responsibility—mistakes and all.

It's important that you pay attention to your surroundings when you take pictures. For example, at a meeting, try to capture the atmosphere and spirit of the people there.

No matter how the world changes, we still need photographs. And remember to use photography to protect people. As photographers for kosen-rufu, our job is to create harmony in people's lives.

Final determination:

In 1995, I officially retired as the *World Tribune* photographer. I sent a memo to President Ikeda that day. The following year he came to visit. I saw him at Soka University of America, Calabasas. As soon as he saw me, he came right over and expressed his concern for me. “Please don’t retire from photography,” he said. At that moment, I determined to keep taking photos as long as I live—or as long as my body holds up anyway! I have been very fortunate with respect to my health.

Advice to the youth:

As a photographer for the past 40 years, I feel I did my best to support President Ikeda’s dream for peace. I feel a deep sense of pride. If I had to do it all over again, I would.

Chant to find your own mission. Every day is your campaign. As much as you can, devote yourself to kosen-rufu, whether in society, at work, with friends or family. You have to decide in your own mind what you are going to challenge. That’s the way to create world peace.

Special thanks:

As you may have guessed, I wasn’t always a photographer. When I first came to the United States in 1956, I was a farmer. I’ve done everything from operating a lathe to fixing sewing machines to gardening. Literally, I took my very first photograph with a camera that I just received for my birthday. It was of President Ikeda’s first visit to Los Angeles.

I continued taking photos over the years. I remember President Ikeda encouraged me to dedicate myself to recording the history of American kosen-rufu with my photographs. I developed a real sense of mission at that time, and I’d like to thank President Ikeda for having confidence in me.

I’d also like to thank the many people who have helped me to learn photography over the years—Glen Allison, Byron Cohen, Jean Pritchard and many others. In fact, the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* have been so fortunate to have so many wonderful volunteers, many whom I’ve had the pleasure of working with, that contribute their time and creativity, without which we could never produce such great publications. I, too, began as a volunteer photographer for the *World Tribune*, and I will never forget the training and benefit I received.