

## **EXPERIENCE—CHIENO TAKAKI, TORRANCE, CALIF. USING PRAYER TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE**

**Facing possible eviction from their home, Chieno Takaki and her husband use their practice of faith to uncover a plan to defraud them.**

I moved to the United States from Japan in 1957. I then married my husband, Clarence, who was already here. The move was difficult for me and I was very homesick, crying almost every night. I was so distraught, I even tried to commit suicide. It was during this period that I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and joined the Soka Gakkai. Quite honestly, I was not seeking out Buddhism. I was looking for a friend and companionship.

A month later, October 1960, my husband and I were able to meet SGI President Ikeda on his first trip to the United States. President Ikeda was very warm and encouraging to all of us. This was a turning point in my practice. My husband and I were appointed as men's and women's group leaders for the first district of Los Angeles Chapter. Without having a deep understanding of Buddhism or the ability to speak English well, we participated in SGI activities.

When we first moved to the United States, my husband and I grew flowers to earn a living, but in 1966, we began growing strawberries. We would begin picking, by hand, every morning at 2:00 a.m. and continue until 7:00 a.m. We knew that if we waited until sunrise, the strawberries could become damaged. We would even talk to our crops, telling them, "Good morning, strawberries!" and "Good night, strawberries!" When we shipped the strawberries out, we felt as though we were sending off our children. We put our entire lives into our work.

Some time later, in 1979, I began to experience pain in my abdomen. The doctors discovered that I had a tumor that had been growing for quite a while. While I weighed around 90 pounds, the tumor weighed eight. The doctor told us that I would have only about a 50 percent chance of surviving an operation to remove the tumor, but the operation was our only recourse. My husband prayed sincerely, saying, "Gohonzon, if my wife is of any use for kosen-rufu, please cure her disease."

The surgery was a complete success. I believe that my husband's prayer was the main cause of my survival and recovery. His prayers saved my life.

In 1991, my husband had a stroke and was hospitalized. We then learned he would no longer be able to walk and would have to depend on a wheelchair. Because of this new turn of events, we decided to sell the farm and move. (My husband completely recovered, however, and was able to walk again in a few months.)

Three years later, we began to sense that something was not right. Since we had left the farm, we had not received payment from the person who bought our land. Around this same time, we received a notice from the bank to evict us from the home we were then living in. This was most unusual because we had purchased that house — in cash. We were shocked to say the least. After conferring with friends, we collected all our documentation and met with an attorney to discuss our options.

Shortly thereafter, my husband decided to sue the bank. I was surprised by my husband's decision because he is usually rather reserved and not one to pick a fight. However, based

on my prayer, I decided to support my husband's decision. This would be our joint struggle.

I remembered the encouragement we received from President Ikeda in 1960 when he spoke of his fearless faith in the Gohonzon. I truly believed that we were going to overcome this obstacle, no matter what.

I began to practice even harder than before. I often thought of the words of Nichiren Daishonin: "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 536). We chanted more, worked with the members and fought to strengthen our local SGI organization.

The case went to trial in 1997. No one thought that we would win. Even our attorney told us we were going to lose. However, through the course of the trial, it was revealed that we had been the victims of a scam. The person who bought our land, the real estate broker and the bank had conspired to defraud us. We won the case.

But, it did not end there.

The verdict was appealed and in 1999 the case was brought before the California Supreme Court.

For this case, I knew I would have to strengthen my practice more than ever. Yet the anxiety and stress were often too much to bear. I would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night so worried that I would start chanting daimoku.

During this trial, I was also asked to take the witness stand; it was the first time I had been called on to do so. However, I was not shaken. Based on my prayers, I answered clearly and honestly, as I knew I had nothing to hide.

Again, we were victorious and this past July we received the money that was due to us. The man who initially bought the land from us was later convicted and sent to prison.

The day we won was also my birthday. I will never forget this day as long as I live. I felt a profound appreciation to the Gohonzon and the incredible power of daimoku.

After we learned of the verdict, I sent a letter to President Ikeda to report our victory. I was surprised when we received a response: "Congratulations for your victory! I sincerely pray for your great health and honorable prosperity."

All my sufferings and struggles over those seven years became the greatest joy when we received this encouragement from President Ikeda. I could not even speak through my tears. I was the happiest person in the world.

I have such gratitude for the Gohonzon, President Ikeda and all the members who have been continuously supporting us. My husband and I are determined to continue showing actual proof in our practice and doing whatever we can for the kosen-rufu movement.