

## EXPERIENCE—TSUYAKO LIEBMANN, CHICAGO SOLIDIFYING THE BOND WITH MY MENTOR

**After surviving the hell of World War II in Tokyo, Tsuyako Liebmann dedicates herself to peace with her fellow Chicago members.**

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On the night of March 10, 1945, Tokyo was attacked by massive air raids carried out by U.S. B-29 bombers. With the roar of the bombers overhead, our house and the neighboring areas were soon engulfed in flames.

One moment, we managed to keep away from fierce flames and explosions, while in the next, we were threatened by debris propelled by hot air blasts. In the midst of people shouting and screaming, my whole family fled and wandered about the streets. After nine hours of trying to escape, we became separated from one another.

Some people who could not make it to the rivers burned to death. Even among those who managed to reach the rivers, some drowned. These hellish scenes were the consequences of a nation mad enough to start a war to expand its power.

Overnight, I lost both my mother and brother. Our family's financial situation had been quite stable, benefiting from the wartime boom prior to the air raids. However, in one day, our lives changed into a nightmare of deep grief. For the rest of my life, I will never forget the images of so many people losing their precious lives while pleading for help.

In 1953, I was invited to a Soka Gakkai discussion meeting in Yokohama, Japan. I was told that Buddhism could change the destiny of any person and that together we could realize world peace. I knew immediately this was the philosophy that I had been searching for. I began attending second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's lectures and question and answer sessions. On each occasion, my life would absorb the essence of faith, just as the dry earth soaks up water.

In 1955, I moved to the United States with my husband, Paul. With the news of President Toda's passing in 1958, I was at a loss, but continued to practice with members in the United States. As time went on, we heard that the young Daisaku Ikeda was to be inaugurated as the third president of the Soka Gakkai. In 1960, full of hope and excitement, I went to Japan to attend the inauguration. Moved by President Ikeda's impassioned speech, I determined, "Sensei, I'll dedicate my whole life to the kosen-rufu movement in America!"

Shortly after the inauguration, President Ikeda made his first visit to Chicago. At that time, I was appointed as the first Chicago district leader. Up to this point, my husband had not been eager in his Buddhist practice. Nonetheless, when President Ikeda met my husband, he encouraged him by removing the gold lapel pin on his suit and fastening it on my husband's jacket. This was a very significant moment in his practice.

I believe it was President Ikeda's wish that my husband and I work together in Buddhist activities. I did not know how to drive and my English was not that good, so on my own, my ability to participate in the organization was limited. But as a team, my husband and I were able to begin our kosen-rufu journey in earnest.

With my husband in the driver's seat, we visited the entire Chicago area. On weekends,

we drove to outlying areas to encourage members and introduce others to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Before we realized it, the groups in our district had expanded with members located in as many as 17 states. By the time Paul passed away in 1994, we had participated together in kosen-rufu activities for 40 years. This was our greatest fortune.

Whenever I had the opportunity to meet President Ikeda, he would always ask me, "Do you have any problems?" or "Do you need anything for your members?" His consideration touched and penetrated my heart. I have learned so much from him about what the attitude of a leader should be — thoughtful, considerate and sincere in their sense of responsibility for the happiness of others.

President Ikeda also stresses that, as stated by the Daishonin, "The treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all." This phrase is always with me.

In the late 1970s, a group of priests from Nichiren Shoshu, the Shoshin-kai, began plotting against President Ikeda, attacking him with slander and false allegations. The members of Chicago resolved: "Now is the time for daimoku. We can do nothing else except to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo!" We gathered every weekend and chanted waves of daimoku.

As a result of our daimoku and actions to protect our mentor, we were able to host the Chicago Culture Festival, and welcome President Ikeda during his unexpected visit to Chicago in 1980. Many capable leaders arose during those difficult, but joyful, activities, deepening the Chicago members' bonds of mentor and disciple with President Ikeda.

While the world of mentor and disciple is truly heart-warming, the world of those who have forsaken correct faith is truly miserable. As witnesses to their unhappy lives, SGI members in Chicago have been trying to visit and open dialogues with these former members, hoping that they will begin their practice anew.

On May 3, I was fortunate enough to attend the opening ceremony of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo. This was a day that I had long been looking forward to and it filled my life with joy to be able to continue advancing with President Ikeda toward the goal of world peace in the 21st century.

President Ikeda has given us the next goal, May 3, 2030. I will do everything in my power to repay my debt of gratitude to President Ikeda and give my full support to the next generation of leaders, who are as dear to me as my own children.