

# How Can We Be Respectfully Old in an Aging Society?

By Jerry Matsumura



Author Jerry Matsumura

## Note from the editorial staff:

The January/February issue highlights social security reform in aging societies. Social security is a key to achieving a happy life for elderly people, but it is not the only tool for realizing true happiness. The following three short stories told by Jerry Matsumura suggest it can be achieved by the efforts of the elderly themselves.

## 1. Super Role Models for Life in a Rapidly Aging Society

Our life expectancy has in many cases more than doubled over the last 150 years. However, we face other problems which some of our predecessors avoided by dying in youth or middle age. As we get older we have to cope not only with the running down of the machinery, which controls our bodily functions, but also with the deterioration of our mental faculties. The most difficult issue facing both the developed and developing world in relation to health care is that of rising costs.

How happy we would be if we could live a long life in excellent health, doing good for others! I would like to share two stories with you of Japanese people who achieved this. Both had to overcome physical weakness as a child. One is Dr. Saburo Shochi (1906-2013), whose life of 108 years ended in November 2013 and who had been regarded as the world's healthiest centenarian; in 2012 he was named in the Guinness World Records as the oldest person in the world to travel through Africa, Europe and North America solely using public transport, such as planes, trains, boats and buses. The other is Dr. Nobuo Shioya (1902-2008), a physician who died only 10 days before his 106th birthday in March 2008. If all senior citizens of our country were as healthy as these two role models, we would not have today's healthcare costs that are so wildly out of control.

Dr. Shochi, who started his career as an elementary school teacher at age 19, underwent a drastic change in his life when his own two sons were born with cerebral palsy. There was no school that admitted mentally handicapped children in Japan at that time. This led him to build a school, Shiinomi Gakuen in Fukuoka, at his own expense for his sons and other children.

The successful development of children at Shiinomi Gakuen resulted in a book and then a cult movie, making his school well known throughout the country. He is celebrated internationally for being an advocate of better childhood education, but he is more widely known as an expert on living a long and healthy life. He was

Photo: Phoenix Saburo Memorial Park



**Dr. Saburo Shochi**

*He was known as the world's healthiest centenarian and as a lifetime educator. His favorite motto was "Science has limits but love does not." He wanted to be the Pestalozzi of Japan.*

Photo: Shinwakai Kakiuchi-Sato



**Dr. Nobuo Shioya**

*He integrated Western medicine with breathing and visualization techniques to improve health and lifestyle. His philosophy is contained in "My Last Message".*

busy giving talks and lectures in all corners of Japan. He travelled around the world at least seven times, of which six trips were made after he reached the age of 100. It is said that he suffered no jet lag on his overseas trips. In Europe and the United States meetings were arranged with brain physiologists and medical experts studying longevity who wanted to see him. His favorite motto was "Science has limits. But Love does not."

He was a great admirer of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss pedagogue; he wanted to be Pestalozzi in Japan.

Dr. Shochi's good health was based on a total of 10 little healthy habits including "smiling", "chewing each mouthful thirty times" and "button exercises" (simple muscle training by using a button). Except for "chewing" which had been taught to him by his mother in childhood, he learned all these healthy habits through hard self-help efforts: looking after children with disabilities under severe economic circumstances, he himself could not afford to lie sick in bed.

Dr. Shioya's childhood was also marked by severe illness, so much so that his parents didn't believe he would survive. Because he

experienced the suffering of his own afflictions, he felt compelled to help others who were suffering in pain, and went to Tokyo University to become a physician. As a physician he did not charge anything to those who were unable to pay (he did not issue a bill for his services unless specifically asked in the prewar and early postwar period when there was no healthcare program).

Dr. Shioya studied Western medicine and later integrated it with his insights on correct breathing and on the power of visualization by which one can access the inexhaustible powers of the universe to make “dreams” come true. He made use of these insights in changing his frail body into a stronger one and in overcoming his own diseases, as well as in treating his patients, which made him a very popular physician in Tokyo.

He also made use of this knowledge in his personal life, for example, in golf. In 2002, two months after his 100th birthday, he managed to win his 9th Seniors Golf Tournament title. Earlier, at the age of 94, he achieved his third “Age Shoot” (obtaining a score less than one’s own age) which is still a world record.

When he was 74, Dr. Shioya took part in a trekking tour on Mount Everest organized by the *Asahi Shimbun*. At first, given his age, no one wanted to take him along at all, because it was feared he would get altitude sickness and perhaps even die from it. Most of his fellow travelers were between 20 and 30 years old — only one was 52. Still,

Dr. Shioya was the only one who did not come down with altitude sickness: indeed, the “old geezer” wound up tending to and taking care of the youngsters!

A new horizon opened for Dr. Shioya in 1993 when he was 91. Instead of living a happy, quiet retired life as planned earlier, he suddenly decided to devote the rest of his life to propagating his insights and embarked on a campaign tour to all corners of Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa at his own expense, giving lectures and lessons on correct breathing and on the power of visualization.

Unfortunately Dr. Shioya worked so hard to achieve his fourth “Age Shoot” after winning his 9th Seniors Golf Tournament at the age of 100 that he fell ill and became bed-ridden for most of the rest of his life.

Shortly before his death, he wrote a short message on the true path of life entitled “My Last Message” which was published in the Japanese weekly magazine *Golf Digest* on March 25, 2008 and which is widely read on the Internet. In this final message to the Japanese people he stresses the importance of deep breathing to draw in the Cosmic Life Force, love for others, and gratitude.

In conclusion, we can learn two lessons from these two super role models: the need for a positive outlook on life and a strong genuine sympathy for others.

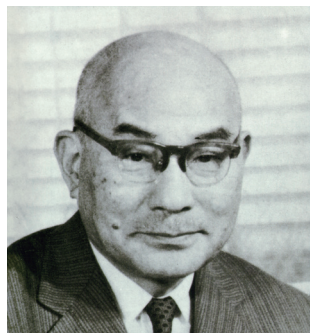


## 2. “Like Mother, Like Son” — a Story About Dr. Toshio Doko’s Mother

Dr. Toshio Doko was the industrial leader who restructured Ishikawajima-Harima Industries (IHI), once the world’s largest shipbuilder, and also Toshiba; and he also served for several years as chairman of Keidanren, the association of Japanese big businesses. Then, from age 84, came his illustrious career in public service, chairing two government commissions — firstly, to chart administrative reforms, and secondly, to see these reforms implemented. Furthermore, he played a major role in the break-up and privatization of the former Japanese National Railways (JNR). He died at the age of 91 in August 1988.

Dr. Doko was a genius at organizing and administering. He liked people. He was also a person of principle. His selfless devotion to the causes that he believed in — and his Spartan lifestyle — made him a folk hero. Rich and poor alike could identify with him as he expounded his views on how to make Japan a better place to live.

Photo: Tachibana Gakuen School in Yokohama



**Dr. Toshio Doko**

*He was the greatest postwar industrial leader and model servant of the people who aimed to make Japan a better place to live. A folk hero who believed in serving society.*

Photo: Tachibana Gakuen School in Yokohama



**Tomi Doko**

*The mother of Toshio Doko founded a girls’ school in Yokohama during the Pacific War in an effort to make women awaken to the importance of human lives. One of her favorite sayings was “Let the righteous be strong.”*

Most of his earnings as chairman of both Toshiba and IHI he gave back to society, in particular to a private school which his mother had started.

Dr. Doko called his mother the greatest influence on his life, saying: “She hammered two things into me. She said I must develop a strong, healthy body. And she taught me that a man must take responsibility.”

His mother, Tomi Doko, established a girls’ middle school in 1942 when she was already aged 71. In prewar Japan, middle school education was not compulsory, but it was expensive, so many households were unable to send their children to middle school; and within households, priority was given to boys’ education.

Now, Tomi Doko, a farmer’s wife and a self-educated lady, had not been to middle school but she managed to keep abreast of the times by reading. Why, though, did she establish a middle school? To cut a long story short, in the first place, as a devout follower of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, she had a firm belief that “Life is the Highest Blessing Attainable to Man”. Moreover, she had been deeply concerned about the Imperial Japanese Army’s militant nationalists, after their invasion of China in 1931, in the so-called “Manchurian Incident”; yet as an ordinary housewife of pliant disposition she had taken no action then.

However, when the Pacific War broke out in December 1941, a year after her husband’s death, she suddenly declared to all her family that she would establish a girls’ school, saying: “Human beings must value their lives in all circumstances. If I voice clear

opposition against the war now, I will simply end up being thrown into prison by the police for ‘dangerous thinking’. If, instead, mothers are made wise and strong-minded with sound thinking, conscious of the value of human lives, they will produce good results.”

“I am ready to offer my own life for service to God. I am very much concerned about the future of Japan,” she said.

When her family heard all this, all her children, including Dr. Doko, were astounded and immediately voiced strong opposition to her plans on the grounds that she was already over 70; besides that, if not exactly penniless, they were also far from being wealthy. However, she had no time for such objections. She immediately began to call on all her friends and people in the neighborhood, explaining about her great cause and purpose, saying: “I am seventy. If you are benevolent enough to offer incense money when I die, please give it to me now.” She also did the rounds of landowners and peasants in her neighborhood, looking for a site to lease. Amazingly, within less than a year, she succeeded in establishing a school in Yokohama. The school is now a large middle and high school complex called Tachibana Gakuen.

Tomi died three years later in April 1945, at 73. One of her favorite sayings was: “Let the righteous be strong!” — in Japanese, *Tadashiki mono wa tsuyoku are!* These words are inscribed on the memorial stone in her honor in front of the school gate. They are a reflection of the life she lived.



### 3. Shibusawa Eiichi & Andrew Carnegie

Around the turn of the 20th century two great industrialists and philanthropists, Shibusawa Eiichi and Andrew Carnegie, left huge footprints on the progress of society on both sides of the Pacific. Shibusawa, who was the outstanding entrepreneur in modern Japanese history, was a great admirer of Carnegie, who was only five years older, revering him as his lifetime model. Both held that societal progress relied on individuals who maintained moral obligations to themselves and to society; in Shibusawa’s case Confucian classics played a role similar to that of the Bible.

Shibusawa was born the son of a rich farmer in Fukaya, 74 kilometers to the northwest of Tokyo, in 1840. He founded some 400 companies and institutions, most of which are still operating. These

include Mizuho Bank, Tokyo Gas, Tokyo Marine & Fire Insurance, Oji Paper, Kirin Breweries and predecessor companies of the Japanese National Railways (JNR), on top of the Tokyo Stock Exchange and Bankers’ Association.

For Shibusawa, the common good, the progress of the country’s economy was more important than personal gain and power. He demonstrated this unselfish attitude time and again in organizing new joint enterprises from which he could expect little or no gain.

In the social/public welfare field, Shibusawa took a leading role center stage, very much relied on as the promoter, organizer, supporter or adviser of most major projects. Contributing to public education represented another example of his public involvement. He

Photo: Shibusawa Memorial Museum



**Shibusawa Eiichi**

*He was the outstanding entrepreneur in modern Japan, founding over 400 companies and institutions most of which are still operating. He believed in the common good and the country's economic growth over personal wealth.*

Photo: Carnegie Dunfermline Trust



**Andrew Carnegie**

*A steelmaker who became the modern world's pioneer philanthropist, he funded numerous projects all over the world including many libraries, as well as the research work which led Marie Curie to win the Noble Prize. Carnegie Foundations are still active today and are looked upon as models for man helping man.*

helped in the founding of Hitotsubashi University, for example, to train young men for business careers, as well as Japan Women's University which was the first to admit female students.

Carnegie was the first son of an impoverished linen weaver in Dunfermline, the old capital of Scotland. He made his fortune in the manufacture of iron and steel during the years of opportunity, 40 years of extraordinary personal and national vigor. It was largely through Carnegie's ideas and example that American philanthropy got off to such a bold and brilliant start at the beginning of the 20th century. He devoted the last 30 years of his life to giving away the fortune he had accumulated in the first 50, nearly \$350 million (equivalent to \$100 billion in today's dollars, according to one estimate), to philanthropic projects.

One of his main interests was education, and he gave money to found public libraries (some 2,811 public libraries were built in the English-speaking world with his gifts, including 1,946 in the United States and 660 in Britain) as well as to universities and colleges and other places of learning.

Shibusawa wanted Carnegie's life and activities to be widely known among his contemporaries and in 1922 he published a Japanese translation of Carnegie's autobiography, for which he penned a magnificent preface; a copy of this Japanese book is still kept at the Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum in Dunfermline. He also took numerous opportunities, in speaking and writing, to recount Carnegie's ideas and activities.

Carnegie died in Lenox, Massachusetts, in 1919 at the age of 84. His long-term, carefully laid philanthropic plans were only just

beginning to bear fruit. He was not being over-optimistic in the hope he expressed at the end of his life: "My chief happiness, as I write these lines, lies in the thought that, even after I pass away, the wealth that came to me to administer as a sacred trust for the good of my fellow men, is to continue to benefit humanity for generations untold." One of his favorite sayings was "The man who dies rich dies disgraced." This is shown at the entrance to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

Shibusawa died in 1931 at the age of 91. Even in the final few years of his retired life, he daily received visitors in his home who called on him for his charge-free advice and help, regardless of their station. He received visitors in his parlor in the order of their arrival. Shibusawa utterly forgot himself in helping others. He was never satisfied until he had exhausted his ideas and suggestions to the visitor seeking his counsel.

In December 1930 (when he was 90), he caught cold and was bedridden. A group of about 20 social workers suddenly visited to request his advice and help in relieving the 200,000 malnourished Japanese suffering in the depth of winter. At the news of their arrival, Shibusawa, who was running a high fever, insisted he receive them. His doctors and his family opposed his seeing them, but finally relented on condition the interview be strictly limited to five minutes.

Shibusawa received them in his parlor and listened to their story. Having pledged to help the visitors, he immediately ordered a car for calls on the finance and home affairs ministers and also had his secretary phone the two ministers to arrange appointments. The two ministers, who revered him, countered they would call on him. However, Shibusawa remonstrated that he must call on them because he was the supplicant.

His physician warned him that going out in the cold weather would be dangerous and tried to stop him. To this Shibusawa quietly replied, "The very reason for my receiving your great care is to make myself useful on such occasions. Even if I die by going out against your advice today, I will be quite satisfied if those two hundred thousand unfortunate people can be saved. Isn't that correct?"

His physician and his family members were all left in blank dismay and had no choice other than to see him off on his calls. Later in the following year he suffered from asthma and then intestinal obstruction, before dying in November 1931 at age 91.

**JS**

*Kosuke "Jerry" Matsumura is a freelance journalist based in Tokyo, formerly affiliated with HUGO Publications in London.*