

**RON GLASS, LOS ANGELES**  
**No Porches**

***Actor Ron Glass is resolved to participate in life fully in his 40s, 50s and 60s  
and not just sit back and watch.***

I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1984 after being rescued by a compassionate practitioner of this Buddhism who found me drunk on my butt at a Hollywood party.

After some resistance, I agreed to try chanting. I was 38 years old when I received the Gohonzon. I had lived in Los Angeles for more than 10 years. I had spent eight successful seasons on a hit TV series called *Barney Miller* and one season on *The New Odd Couple*. I had guested on scores of episodic shows, done "Movies of the Week," stage plays, and on and on.

I was considered a promising, already accomplished actor with every apparent reason to be happy as well as successful.

What nobody knew was my family pattern — karma, if you will.

In my immediate family, we were five: A social darling of a sister; an all-star athlete; a handsome Casanova; a near intellectual prodigy and then, well..., there was me.

A tradition of outstanding potential was apparent in my family for several generations. In fact, we were taught that this combination of outstanding potential and the mystique of just being a Glass guaranteed our glorious destinies.

All charged up with this incomplete formula for success, we broke into life. The inevitable failures, disappointments and obstacles in life would invariably take their toll. Somewhere around age 40, the members of this extraordinary stock — without a pot to pee in or a window to throw it out of — would retire to their proverbial porches. There they would soothe their dashed aspirations by poking fun at the foibles and pipe dreams of themselves and others.

Somewhere between ages 40 and 45, while in self-imposed retirement, I found myself mired in this family pattern.

Without a strong consistent practice of this Buddhism, I would most likely never have been able to recognize this family legacy. From the beginning, I was active in organizational activities and always consistent in both my daily practice and in my concern for the members I was responsible for, both as a group chief and as a district chief.

I had excellent mentors, models, leaders and, also, really excellent critics. To all of them, I am forever indebted.

So, to get back to my story, around 40 to 45, I found myself either practicing really hard or partying even harder but never feeling completely satisfied — not ever. I sought and received guidance. The senior member with whom I spoke was strict. He said my life was shallow. BOOM! He said I should challenge myself to uncover depth, meaning, significance and purpose.

Around this same time, SGI President Ikeda challenged SGI members to become successful in society and respected in their communities.

With several halting starts, finally I committed to making a change. I continued to get guidance and encouragement as I redoubled my efforts in my district.

After several determined chanting sessions, I reversed some challenging relationships within the district so that many members could blossom, make breakthroughs and truly enjoy activities and their daily lives. Also, a quote from SGI President Ikeda in the *Daily Guidance* began to stand out for me:

I sincerely hope that not only in your 20s, 30s or 40s, but also in your 50s, 60s and throughout your life you will live with a lively spirit and a faith filled with a strong seeking mind, fully enjoying the benefits of Myoho and the protection of the Buddhist gods.

I began to see I was using getting older to excuse my retreating attitude. As I continued to make sincere effort in practice and activities, I began to consistently experience renewed vitality, great energy of purpose and a strong determination to reply to President Ikeda's guidance. Being in one's 40s, 50s, 60s, etc., is no excuse to just observe life. We must participate.

So, with considerable insecurity, I got a personal manager, new agents and got back into the mix. Chanting assiduously, I auditioned often and became a regular on a short-lived series call *Rhythm and Blues*. When it was canceled, I was wrecked. I was doing my part, so why wasn't the series successful?

The tug of my family karma returned. Perhaps the failure of this series was a sign. Perhaps I should retire to some porch and give in to the family tendency to give up in the face of struggle and disappointment.

Instead, I performed Lou in the stage production of *The Speed of Darkness*, probably the most difficult characterization I have ever taken on.

Shortly before opening, I was hit by deep feelings of inadequacy and incompetence. I wanted desperately to give up, back out — quit. But due to the support of a senior member, much daimoku and the echo of President Ikeda's challenge, I continued. I got great reviews and won the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Award for best performance by an actor.

This victory was followed by a wonderful TV pilot — that never even aired. Again, that spot on the porch was looking very attractive. In fact, I hung out on that porch for a minute. Within a short time, however, I rolled up my sleeves, again changed my representation and took on a stage play at the Old Globe.

Although the play was successful, I was not critically embraced as favorably as I had expected. But the confidence I was building through consistent daimoku sustained me.

In addition to my work, I became very active as a board member and celebrity spokesperson for the Al Wooten Jr. Heritage Center in South Central Los Angeles — a haven for children in a community threatened by drugs, gangs and hopelessness.

I realized that in my effort to respond to President Ikeda's challenge about being productive in society at whatever age, I was now experiencing appreciation, meaning and purpose in my life.

Most recently, I revamped my representation team yet again and determined to use my practice as the heart of all my activities.

The result is that I'm playing a wonderful role, Ronald Felcher, on the NBC sitcom *Mr. Rhodes*. This job affords me the opportunity to challenge myself to take the Buddha to work five days a week. And when doing interviews, I have acknowledged my Buddhist practice and its effect on my life to a national audience. This is the victory I determined to accomplish in 1996.

I really hope *Mr. Rhodes* continues beyond this season, because I love the character I'm playing. Weekly exposure on national television affords me a unique opportunity to challenge myself, use my practice and show actual proof.

However, whether *Mr. Rhodes* continues or not, I will continue. I am determined to respond to President Ikeda's guidance regarding a youthful spirit and a youthful practice that are characterized by vitality, renewal and energy — refreshed, whether in my 40s, 50s, 60s and throughout my life. There may be snow on the rooftop, but there's still fire in the furnace.

I guess there's no porch for me.

**WT**

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