

ANNE MARIE OFFER, NEW YORK 'Offering' Something of Value

When I began practicing, I was resistant to almost all aspects of the SGI organization. You might say I was a "tough nut to crack." However, last Sept. 11, I celebrated 14 years of practice. I am now taking responsibility as a chapter chief in Manhattan. I will be forever grateful to my sponsor, who saw the deep suffering in my life and gave me a way to overcome it and become happy.

I began practicing back in the days when folks spoke of Big Actual Proof — cars, boyfriends and glamour jobs. But this was not the type of benefit I looked for or received. My benefits and challenges have been "inside jobs." It hasn't been a picnic to do my human revolution, but I have successfully overcome a very negative relationship with my father, an eating disorder, many career challenges, family illnesses, deaths and more. I value each of these opportunities, which have strengthened me and enabled me to become a more compassionate person.

My greatest benefits have resulted from developing qualities such as true confidence, a sense of self-worth and belief in the greatness of my life. Because I have developed myself through my Buddhist practice, I have found myself on an exciting and unexpected path.

I'm an actor. That's why I moved to New York. I have had wonderful experiences in this field. However, as a child, I always fantasized that when I was famous I would be interviewed on a talk show. On a college theater tour, we would do mock talk shows in the hotel rooms and I would host. Several years later, while I was running a theater company, members of the company would say, "You should have your own talk show." It was just a dream.

About seven years ago, though, I started thinking about this seriously: "Other people may want to parachute out of a plane. I want to do a talk show. You should do everything you want to at least once in your life." I just wanted to do it once — produce a talk show that would make a positive difference on television.

I was impressed and influenced by SGI President Ikeda's dialogues with world leaders and other individuals and wanted to do the same thing. I wanted a show that would encourage and challenge viewers never to give up on their dreams.

From my determination and lots of prayer sprang *Something To Offer* (a wordplay on my last name), based on the theme that we all have something special and unique to offer the world by pursuing our dreams and goals. *Something To Offer* is a half-hour TV show that I thought I would do once. Six-and-a-half years later, I have hosted and produced more than 130 episodes and interviewed more than 400 individuals. What's amazing, too, is the outpouring of support I've received from family, friends, SGI members and even strangers, who have contributed their time, talent, equipment and even wardrobe — it's just been amazing.

Last year I was advised to focus on inviting more high profile guests to attract needed financial backing. After chanting for the courage to make this happen, I secured an interview with Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman to be a vice presidential candidate.

That success gave me the impetus to pursue and land interviews with Ed Koch, former New York City mayor, and legendary jazz musician Lionel Hampton.

While making these interviews a reality, I was inspired by President Ikeda's dialogue with Rosa Parks — so much so that I made a determination to interview Mrs. Parks myself. I knew she lived in Detroit, my hometown. My sister, who works for the city paper there, located the address and I wrote a letter of invitation. I continued to chant, call, write and

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read about Mrs. Parks' life to prepare myself for this interview. But I could not seem to get a straight answer: Yes. Maybe. Call Back. Who again?

At times giving up was a definite possibility, because for me not knowing is torturous. I'm the type of person who's just got to know what's happening. Everything was unsettled for so long, but thanks to what I have learned in the SGI I just kept trying.

Six months went by. During President Ikeda's visit to New York last June, while this interview was still up in the air, I worked with the Exchange Members Committee. Inspired by President Ikeda and the efforts of all the members, I determined to act as if the interview were all set and be ready to interview Mrs. Parks at a moment's notice.

I had done all my research and preparation when I called Mrs. Parks' assistant, Ms. Elaine Steele, as arranged on July 5. At first she suggested July 7 for the interview, but then said: "Oh, but you're in New York. How about Aug. 22 or 23? But call back in August." I was grateful for the lead time, because my budget couldn't handle last-minute airfares.

Although the waiting was difficult, I received an extra benefit. The day I would have been interviewing Mrs. Parks in July, I interviewed Les Brown, the motivational speaker. Mr. Brown was another person I had been pursuing for several months.

This business is hectic, ever-changing, unpredictable. Being persistent, patient, spontaneous, adaptable and persevering are necessary. I had none of these qualities, or had not accessed these qualities, before I practiced Buddhism. But these are exactly the qualities I have now, which were tested by and which landed me the Rosa Parks interview.

It happened! On Aug. 22, I had the honor of interviewing Mrs. Parks. There were tremendous benefits from the efforts I'd put forth: I could film four additional shows while I was in Michigan. The studio crew and staff worked gratis. I could bring my director along and make a funding pitch. All that happened echoed what a leader told me early in my practice: "Strong determination produces incredible results beyond our wildest comprehension."

And President Ikeda has said: "To resolve to accomplish your goals is what counts. If you earnestly put your mind to something, your brain, your body, your environment — everything — will start working toward achieving that end." As proof of these words, after my interview with Mrs. Parks her assistant said: "I need a copy of this tape to show other people how they should interview. You really do your homework and ask intelligent questions."

This rare praise is nothing but actual proof from the Gohonzon. I feel I have found my mission. I now have the ability to draw the best out of my guests, to provide them a safe place for dialogue that encourages viewers to challenge themselves as well.

To share this gift with more viewers, we are discussing future production of the show with a small station in New Jersey, as well as additional airings in the New York suburbs. I have just completed a demo that I hope will move this show into an even larger viewership.

I want to "offer" television the spirit of the SGI — value creation. I am determined to have a Value Creation Network in the near future.

I wish to thank the founders of this Buddhism, especially President Ikeda, for all their efforts which have inspired me so. Because of President Ikeda's example, I'm a special dreamer — with a wealth of successes behind me and many more to come.

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