

**PERSPECTIVE: From the Same Deep Blue Sea**  
**By LuANN ADAMS**  
**New York**

I grew up in a small Minnesota town where a local college recruited many students from New Jersey. At first the racial mixture of students was embraced by the town, but as Vietnam War protests were led by marching students, local support for the new college was withdrawn, it closed, and much of the blame went to “those blacks.”

When I was 21, during my last graveyard shift in a facility for multi-handicapped men, the building was broken into by two black men who beat me and the residents. They raped me, holding a gun and a knife to my throat, saying, “Jesus said, ‘Don’t be afraid to die.’”

As hard as I tried to keep them from hurting the residents, I couldn’t. The dear residents, one of whom almost bled to death, were helpless against the violence. One managed to reach a telephone operator, who sent police cars with sirens. That saved our lives, but the men ran off and were never caught.

This was not the first time I had been attacked by men. It fit into a horrible pattern of being brutally beaten or sexually abused, most often by strangers, every one to three years since I turned 13. I truly thought I would be a victim the rest of my life.

Because this was the worst attack (added to the fact that a roommate had been stabbed and beaten by a black man), I developed great fear and anger toward dark-skinned men. Intellectually I knew that there were good and bad people of every race and that I could not give in to despair. But I tried desperately to avoid contact with men, especially black men. I often shook with fear, working as a waitress, when serving African American customers.

Five years later, I started practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. One of my first inconspicuous benefits from chanting was overcoming my victim mentality. I truly chanted to create peace in my heart, to change my anger, and to have a healthy, loving relationship with a man. I am happy to say that after 10 years of chanting, this has now come true.

As a professional storyteller, I am drawn to pieces about children overcoming obstacles and finding the courage to not only survive but to win — and to encourage others with their triumphs. I often tell SGI President Ikeda’s stories and have created storytelling adaptations of them to music with a genius of a composer and fellow Buddhist, Marcia Thomas-Jones, who is African American.

For six years, the New York Public Library asked me to tell stories from Africa for Black History Month — in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island libraries. I chanted lots of daimoku before each performance to connect with my audiences and the material. I discovered that I loved African folk tales and could have fun and empathize deeply with the characters (as well as with the struggles of my fellow African American young women’s division members). However, my compassion for African American men (except for fellow Buddhists) was limited to the characters in my stories.

Last year, I was preparing a new program of stories for performances in Ohio. As I worked to develop the characters in the story of “Pink and Say” (by Patricia Polacco, an incredible, true story in which a young African American soldier saves the life of a young Ohio farm boy during the Civil War) with Marcia’s beautiful music, I was snowbound in Cincinnati.

My determination was, through this story, to overcome my residue of prejudice. I knew my heart had to be full of peace and love to sincerely touch the hearts of the children and their teachers, especially those in the inner-city schools. I wanted them not only to be appalled at the cruelty of war and prejudice, but to see the tremendous bravery and beautiful, inspirational spirit of the young black soldier fighting for his beliefs.

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I chanted for hours as the snow fell harder and harder. The Cincinnati Playhouse was producing *An Asian Jockey in Our Midst* then, a new play about an African American couple dealing with their prejudice against Asians. I was one of two people who came to see the Sunday matinee that was canceled due to the snow. Darryl Edwards, an African American man starring in the play, was standing in the lobby and we struck up a conversation. He was interested in my work and after two-and-a-half hours of talking and laughing, I realized that I liked and admired him as a person.

He came to see me perform and afterward told me how much he was especially moved by "Pink and Say." His compliments touched me; I knew that something deep was changing in my life. He was the first African American man, non-Buddhist, I had ever had a heart-to-heart talk with. We became friends and I felt the last residue of my old prejudice melt from my life.

This is what I so much wanted to overcome, not only for my work, but to truly emulate President Ikeda's role as an ambassador for peace. As he says over and over, it's all about life-to-life connections. Now I really understand.

Yes, I still have flashbacks. But as I struggle and win, I want to encourage all the children I have the privilege to meet that no matter what their circumstances are, with hope and courage they can overcome anything and win, too. I have learned that peace begins in my heart. And also that, as President Ikeda says in *Over the Deep Blue Sea*, "We are all sailors come ashore from the same deep blue sea."

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