

Our Friends Are All Aboard!

Last month 88 Soka Gakkai youth visited three U.S. cities and made friends with many SGI-USA youth. Here are some stories of the friendships made:

Hirofume Inoue: This is a wonderful experience. I feel absolute freedom from the exchange. Last year, SGI President Ikeda gave guidance to the young men's division members that we should be strong. Don't worry about the system or authority, he said. I feel tonight there is total freedom in the San Francisco organization.

Jonathan Lakritz: This is the first time that I've been involved in an activity like this from beginning to end. At first, I was just involved without feeling the spirit of the activity. But I began to appreciate the creativity that had to occur to make this exchange happen. We really racked our brains to make it meaningful. The response from the members during the exchange was so sincere, and this validated all of the effort. Even though I may never see any one of the exchange members again, it is heartening to know that we are together in the world sharing the same mission and dream for peace.

Tomoyuki Kitazawa: Debra, you must come to Japan and dance for President Ikeda. When I watched you dance last night [at the Dallas Culture Center], I could feel the energy that came from deep within you. No words could express the feeling that came from you. I watched your face as you danced, and there was so much life and energy in your expression. It made me very happy. You must come to Japan and introduce your beautiful way of dancing to all those who cannot come to America. It is your duty to do this because your dancing has great power — it reminded me of a character in the Lotus Sutra, a bodhisattva who appears to dance and celebrate, spreading joy because Shakyamuni has given his teachings. You will make a great cause for everybody for kosen-rufu wherever you dance.

Debra Weaver: I used to cry because I was so unhappy, but right now I am crying because your words have made me so happy. You know, I used to dance out of desperation and frustration. I danced to escape — to be something I wasn't. Dancing was a way that I could deny my life and live in a fantasy world that belonged to the character I was portraying. But when I did this dance for the SGI, somehow, for the first time on the stage, I was myself, Debra, being who I truly am. That is what Buddhism is supposed to be for — to become one's true self. For me, that was the test of my practice. I am so touched by what you say because I see that I connected, heart to heart. Technically, I am nowhere near being able to dance as I once did, but nevertheless, I have discovered that I can communicate my happiness, I can share my joy and my real self, with the audience.

Akiko Kobayashi: In three seconds, the three of us were able to communicate our feelings to one another in a friendly way. When people talk with one another, looking into one another's eyes, they can communicate from their hearts. But why do we have many problems, such as war and discrimination? We, as youth, will have to talk with as many people as possible and build mutual understanding to make a peaceful future. I am firmly resolved to stand up for this cause.

Title: Our Friends Are All Aboard

Subject: World Tribune 09/05/97 n.3155 p.5 WT970905p05

Author:

Keywords: Aboard Experiences Feature Friends Youth

Nobuko Kobayashi: Through this U.S.–Japan exchange I gained so much from the Japanese members. I heard about the youth activities that are currently going on in Japan and I felt a strong bond with my new friends, knowing that together we are fighting for kosen-rufu. These friends I know I will never forget. Junko Kanagawa is studying Russian. Her dream is to help with kosen-rufu in Russia. And Akiko Kobayashi wants to become a teacher. I was so impressed with these young women — they both had so much confidence in the Gohonzon, despite their young ages. I also noticed they had so much confidence and hope for the future. I really learned a lot from these young women. I gained so much from this exchange and learned so much from both the American and Japanese members. Words just aren't enough.

Title: Our Friends Are All Aboard

Subject: World Tribune 09/05/97 n.3155 p.5 WT970905p05

Author:

Keywords: Aboard Experiences Feature Friends Youth