

**A Hero In My Own Back Yard**  
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It is easy to see that the world is obsessed with celebrity. A steady stream of entertainment media spews out every detail of the latest media darling's life. News shows choose to entertain us but ignore real problems.

I don't get it.

Are people so miserable they have to spend their time absorbing drivel on people they will most likely never come in contact with? As SGI President Ikeda said in "Discussions on Youth": "It is foolish to become a puppet of media manipulation. I hope you will resolutely follow your own path in life."

Several days ago, while waiting for my truck to be repaired, I picked up a gossip magazine. Of what real importance to me were the lives of anyone in these publications?

We need to look around us for people of outstanding ability — in our communities, even in our families.

I know of a person to look up to right in my own back yard. He is Shaklin, the maintenance man at our apartment complex. Shaklin is an African American in his 30s. Several days ago, I noticed I hadn't seen Shaklin for a few days and asked my wife, Yoshi, about him. She said that the new manager had probably fired him. She was right.

Yesterday morning, Shaklin showed up to collect his last paycheck. I watched as people came out of their apartments. "Shaklin, it's so good to see you. How are you?" "Shaklin, I heard you're moving, do you need any help?" "Shaklin, we miss you."

Yoshi went out to talk with him. Without any bitterness, he told her that the new manager had let him go. She told Shaklin about a problem we had in the apartment that the manager had told us to fix ourselves. Shaklin insisted on looking at it, even though he didn't work here anymore. He seemed concerned because there was a frayed wire that wasn't safe and suggested we again tell the manager about it.

Yes, we do miss Shaklin. His set time to start work was 9:00 a.m., but he usually arrived around 7:00 a.m. He walked all around the complex and cleaned up. And not with one of those annoying, polluting, gas-powered air blowers — with his hands. After taking care of his duties, Shaklin would leave for school, then come back in the afternoon to finish up.

I noticed that he approached each task with great care and patience. This complex was the cleanest and friendliest we have ever lived in because of him.

Shaklin moved slowly and steadily. He talked very softly, as if he didn't want to disturb any part of the universe. His presence seemed to have a calming effect, and I'm sure the elderly people in the complex felt secure knowing he was around.

We told Shaklin if he needed a job reference, we would be glad to give him one. He replied that he didn't really need one, because he had already gotten several job offers. You see, when someone is sincere and works hard, others notice. As Nichiren Daishonin teaches, what is important is our behavior as human beings.

President Ikeda has stated: "There are many people of upstanding character who don't practice. When we look at how these people live we see much that accords with the Buddhist way of life." He always talks of the wisdom of the common people.

There is much in Shaklin's behavior that I admire. His sincerity, honesty, concern for others, hard work and lack of bitterness are all traits that I, as a Buddhist, will strive to emulate.

So, you don't need to read gossip magazines or watch television to find heroes. Look around. Like me, you just may find one in your own back yard.

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