

**Yukiko Loucks, Niagara Falls, N.Y.
Hope Takes Charge**

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There were very few members in all of upstate New York when Yukiko Loucks and her young twin daughters arrived in 1970. Yukiko had married an American serviceman. By deciding to follow him to the United States, she had drawn an ultimatum from her mother: "If you leave me for this man, you will leave my heart forever."

Perhaps her mother was trying to protect her from a future doomed to loneliness and despair. But Yukiko decided to leave anyway.

When she began to settle her life in Niagara Falls, a city close to Buffalo, her husband left her. She was abandoned with few English skills, no job, very little financial security and, worst of all, a complete lack of experience in life. She came from a privileged background that filled her youth with temporary fortune. Imagine not even knowing how to wash your hair because a servant was always there to do it for you.

At first, Yukiko decided to run back to Japan and beg forgiveness. And if this wasn't possible, suicide seemed the only alternative.

The only connections to hope she had at this time were the Gohonzon, which she brought with her from Japan, and her faith in it. As she chanted to the Gohonzon, her way of looking at what seemed like overwhelming problems began to change. Instead of asking how can I die or give up, she began to ask how can I live for kosen-rufu. One of the things Yukiko had learned from her practice in Japan was to seek guidance, so she sought out her leaders in Boston. Rather than offering pity or encouragement to go back to Japan, one leader, in particular, challenged her to help herself by helping others learn the power of the Law.

This guidance was Yukiko's lifesaver. To this day she remembers the support of this leader during those difficult times. "His life and his compassion will remain in my heart forever," Yukiko says. He would drive nine hours on weekends, sometimes in the fiercest weather, to support the few members who were practicing around Buffalo, she remembers. As unlikely as it may seem, that leader actually was a new member of one year himself. Rob Eppsteiner was simply following the same guidance he gave Yukiko.

"When I think back on that time, I remember how my life was touched by seeing her sense of mission overpower her suffering," says Mr. Eppsteiner, who now is an SGI-USA vice general director. "She had been left by her husband to care for two small children. She was a stranger in a strange land. Yet her mission coupled with her passion to help others become happy with this practice was so strong. So, for myself as a new member, her passion overflowed into me. I was encouraged. She was like a bright light, always brighter than any suffering she may have been going through. I realized that our connection or tie was to propagate the Law together."

As more and more American members appeared around her, Yukiko became more hopeful and encouraged. She could see proof of the Gohonzon's power in each of them. With her two daughters by her side, she began to trust more and chant more daimoku. When her schedule at a local Japanese restaurant kept her from evening meetings, her members would pick her up even at midnight, so they could study together the Japanese books on Buddhism that only she could translate. The cause was being made in the living room of one Japanese pioneer to establish a stronghold for peace.

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Today, more than 20 years later, Yukiko continues on her path of human revolution along with her daughters, Kimberly and Grace. And in the city they pioneered, many members now practice in a community center.

“For myself, as well as my daughters,” says Yukiko, “we believe that we owe our lives to this organization. Because of the support of others, we are continuing our practice today and on into the 21st century.”

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