

## PERSPECTIVE: Step Up to the Plate

By LISA JONES

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### **While digging through the SGI-USA archives, Lisa Jones came across a photograph of SGI President Ikeda that inspired this 'Perspective.'**

Baseball cap on backward. Wearing one of those penguin-logo shirts. My dad had one just like it, I remember, in the late '60s or early '70s. Around the same time that this photo of SGI President Ikeda was taken.

In most of the pictures I've seen, President Ikeda is wearing a business suit and meeting with world leaders and intellectuals. I love this photo because it reminds me that he's just an ordinary person who strives to be the best he can be. With spectacular results.

I think it's sad that some people misunderstand why we admire President Ikeda. To me, he's a living example of how people can apply Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in daily life, pursue dreams and be happy. I see him as a teacher and a friend, despite never having met him.

In 1990 — just before Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated President Ikeda and all SGI members — Nichiren Shoshu officials rebuked Mr. Ikeda for allowing Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" to be performed at SGI meetings; the masterpiece is non-Buddhist, they asserted.

In 1991, I saw President Ikeda in person for the first time. I had been practicing Buddhism less than a year, and knew next to nothing about him. The orchestra and chorus performed "Ode to Joy" as Mr. Ikeda entered the auditorium.

It's more accurate to say that he exploded into the auditorium; although he's small in physical stature, he has a wonderfully immense presence. Walt Whitman once wrote: "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes,/We convince by our presence." The moment I saw President Ikeda I knew that I could wholeheartedly support him. All I could think was, "Wow."

Later, as I read his books and speeches, I developed a left-brained appreciation for his knowledge and ideas. Even so, while President Ikeda is a first-rate intellectual, it's his humanness — which I feel in his poem "Moonlight," among others — that thaws my cynicism.

This photo also reminds me of the last time I went to a baseball game: a warm July night last year at Coors Field in Denver — the Colorado Rockies were playing... someone. I was there to see fireworks, not baseball. I don't remember who won the game.

After the game, the ballpark went dark and the crowd hushed. The first rocket went up. I followed the ascending trail of orange sparks...climbing...hovering...pow. A kaleidoscope of light. Then another, and another. Explosions choreographed to Sousa marches and Springsteen songs. Gunpowdery-smelling clouds of smoke. Thundering reports that drummed through my ribcage.

Then the finale began.

At the first surging chords of "Ode to Joy," a spontaneous roar rose from the crowd. It's an anthem of human triumph, forever linked in my heart to President Ikeda.

I've never seen a more overwhelming barrage of fireworks. It was like being pummeled with brilliance. I glanced down the row at the faces of my family members, rapt in delighted amazement. All I could think was, "Wow."

An image — a moment, whether captured on film or engraved in one's memory — conveys more than any argument, simile or rhyme.

To me, this photo conveys an aspect of President Ikeda's spirit that I would like to

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develop in myself. The spirit to stand up and take my turn at bat. To calmly assess everything that's thrown at me, and to have the wisdom to know when to swing.

And when I do swing, to connect with the ball and slug it into the center-field seats.

**WT**

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