

**PAM BUCHANAN, LOS ANGELES**  
**The Demons Under My Bed**

**To clear a path to her dream, Pam Buchanan had to face a difficult past — and do some intense karmic housekeeping.**

My dream is to have a golden relationship with a fabulous husband and together raise beautiful, happy children. I realized last year that to actualize this dream, I had to get busy with my Buddhist practice.

My mother died when my sister was 3 and I was 2. My father soon remarried. When I was 3 or 4, my sister and I were molested by our primary baby sitter, my stepmother's grandfather.

And this abuse continued for the next seven years. I began overeating, smoking cigarettes at age 9, stealing from relatives and withdrawing from life. I never told my parents that I was being molested; I was certain I wouldn't be believed. When my older sister told them she was being molested, they brushed it off as drama.

I understood, even at that young age, that my parents were simply incapable of protecting me. It filled me with rage — a rage I couldn't act out on anyone. So I turned it on myself and later on others. I suffered from severe depression for years.

When I was 19, while working at a summer camp, a friend told me about chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I heard the words, and I knew I had to chant.

Chanting alleviated my depression, and I found the strength to keep living — for a while, anyway.

With no connection to the SGI-USA, I just drifted away from chanting. I eventually made the decision to follow my dream to move to Los Angeles. Slowly but surely my depression, rage and self-destructive tendencies returned. Fortunately, in 1988, I met a woman who told me all about Buddhist practice, the organization, the Gohonzon and kosen-rufu. I received the Gohonzon and became an SGI-USA member on Jan. 28, 1989.

Then, I began a long, intense struggle with the pain and rage that had been running my life. Sometimes I won and sometimes I lost, but I kept advancing to the best of my ability, from wherever I landed.

Over time, I came to see that the more I accepted responsibility for helping others, the harder I could fight to break through my suffering. The first measurable breakthrough happened on March 20, 1996. I realized that I had to end the pattern of abuse in my life, so, after 23 years of smoking, I quit on the spot. And I have not gotten hooked again.

In April 1997, I went to a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. I went to recharge my Buddhist battery. I went with the determination to make it the biggest turning point of my life...once and for all. I committed to mastering my personal demons from childhood and fulfilling my mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. I knew that unless I overcame my suffering, I could not help anyone else. I could not bring children into this world — I could not fulfill my dream — until I resolved my family relationships, which were based on hurt.

I had to clean up my family karma.

Last May I went home to New York City, for the first time in six years, to visit my older sister and her young daughter. Seeing my sister's pain and the fear in her eyes was like seeing myself without the Gohonzon in my life.

As we shared our lives, her pain was almost unbearable for me at times. But because I was connected to the people in this organization, I felt supported. I met SGI-USA members

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who lived right around the corner from my sister, and I introduced her to them. My desire was to give my sister hope that a happy life is possible and to be a role model for my niece, so that she would experience an alternative to living as a victim.

Over the course of my visit, I gained confidence in my prayer for my family's happiness. I felt that we were all at least taking a step in the right direction together.

When I returned to Los Angeles, I had to face my life again. I braced myself to face my bedroom, which I had not cleaned in five years. To say it was a mess is an understatement. No matter what I did — chant for hours, talk to other members with the same problem, get guidance, go to the FNCC, or dream about the day when my suffering would all end — I seemed to be almost paralyzed when it came to cleaning, especially when it came to my bedroom.

You see, when I was growing up, my dad would wake us kids up in the middle of the night and do a white glove inspection — if something wasn't clean, we had to clean it right then. Cleaning our rooms was punishment. If we wanted to go somewhere and our parents didn't want us to go, they'd say: "Your room's not clean. You can't go." But my parents' bedroom was the messiest room in the house! Nothing could be clean enough for them, yet, ironically, nothing was ever clean.

Just to make sure that I couldn't escape cleaning my apartment, I scheduled a meeting at my house. I had a month to get the living room and bathroom in order, but I didn't start cleaning until the day before the meeting.

Cleaning those two rooms was the easy part. I still had to tackle my bedroom, though. As it turned out, it took me three days just to collect the books off my bed. It was as if I had barricaded myself in bed by always having a book nearby to grab and read.

Then I had to move one of the beds out — you see, I had two beds in my room. I had bought a new bed and never gotten rid of the old bed.

One night, I put my old mattress and box spring on the curb and said good-bye to the old Pam Buchanan. I awoke the next morning full of energy. That's when the real work began — all of my demons were still under the bed.

I couldn't even see the floor through all the newspapers, magazines and empty boxes. And let me be completely honest with you: I had empty food cartons all over the floor, too — trophies from past eating binges that I meant to throw out but instead kept around to further chastise myself.

I needed a crane to lift everything out. I started to get sick from all the dust I was stirring up.

After I had filled six garbage bags, nothing in the room looked different. I still couldn't see the floor, and there was still a mess everywhere.

Every time a friend called to see about my progress and to lend encouragement, I found myself saying that I couldn't keep this up much longer; nothing seemed to make a dent in the room. About three days and 12 large garbage bags later, I was still complaining to one friend about how hard it was to clean.

I hate it when I get like that, because that's not who I really am, and my friend knew that, too. She got strict and told me just to face my room with courage. So I got off the phone, stopped whining and said to myself that "everything I do is getting me closer to achieving my dream."

Finally, it happened — I filled another garbage bag and looked at the floor underneath. I only needed to fill one more garbage bag, and then I could sweep. Another friend came over that day to chant, and, for the first time in five years, I didn't bother closing my bedroom door. It was so liberating.

For years, if you were to look for me in my bedroom, you couldn't find me. No one

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could. He (my molester) couldn't find me. I had barricaded myself behind a ton of shame and hurt.

But I'm no longer a victim. And I'm not just a survivor.

Nichiren Daishonin says: "Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside ourselves; both lie within our own hearts. Awakened to this truth, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called a common mortal. The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth, and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd. ed.], pp. 207–08).

Today, I can fully embrace my family. My older sister has started chanting and is learning gongyo. My relationships with my stepmother, my step-grandmother and my younger sister have been steadily improving. My relationship with my father has improved by leaps and bounds. I visited him on New Year's Eve, and we had a wonderful time.

About three weeks after I cleaned my bedroom, I started furnishing it in the way I've always wanted to. My house may not be spotless, but friends can now drop in anytime, and there's no shame, nothing to hide.

I've also started a daily exercise program, and I changed my eating habits — without resenting the need to do so or missing a beat. I am also changing my career. I don't have doubts that I'll ultimately fulfill my dream. Through this experience, I've learned that no matter where I am in life, I just have to continue. Attaining Buddhahood is a lifelong journey, and now I know how to clear a path toward it.

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