

## **JESSICA'S EXPERIENCE TRIUMPH ON THE ROAD TO MARCH 16**

In August 1997 I was floored...literally. I had swelling in my feet, which prevented me from walking. So, for two days I had to crawl around the floor of my house, which was very humbling. And that was just the beginning.

The doctor said I had some kind of severe joint inflammation, which not only might last all my life, it might worsen over the years. I would need steroids to walk and I would never be able to do the activities that a normal person could do. This was especially tough since I was only 22, and I had been physically active all my life, skiing and running. I even played college soccer.

At that time I was set to move forty miles north to Los Angeles. There I would develop my career as an actress.

I made the move, but meanwhile my mysterious illness was continuing. I got a new doctor in L.A., one who was very warm and caring and wanted to find out exactly what was going on with me. Through tests, he concluded that I had total body arthritis (swelling, soreness, and fatigue).

I spent the next weeks depressed and constantly crying. Since I had just moved to a new city and since my obstacles were strong I did not connect to any members. My daily Buddhist practice was weak.

And things were getting grim. I thought I was crazy since I was crying all the time. This made me ashamed, too ashamed to tell anyone about my condition. I went on anti-depressant medication. A few weeks later I had a room-spinning panic attack. I was at the movies with my boyfriend watching *Scream 2* of all things. Everything started to swirl. I couldn't see. All I could do was put my head in my hands.

The big news came in early December of 1997 (a couple weeks later). The doctor found antibodies for Lupus inside me. Lupus is one of the worst diseases imaginable. Life with Lupus is extremely limited. Lupus victims wear-out easily and they spend much of the day enduring harsh pain for which there is no cure. I was scheduled to take a second test in January. If this test found any Lupus antibodies, I would be confirmed to have Lupus.

I spent Christmas in Montreal, which for me usually meant skiing. But on this trip, I spent most of the time inside while my boyfriend and his family were out on the slopes. Deep down I felt defeated by my condition. I didn't expect to win.

When I returned to L.A. it was January. The preparations for March 16 were getting under way. Mystically, I was invited to attend the kick off meeting on Jan. 11. (Los Angeles was having its Global Family Festival, a giant stage production to commemorate March 16).

The kickoff meeting totally blew me away. Members from the five L.A. regions got on stage and fired up the room. The energy, the power, the commitment to kosen-rufu — everything was amazing. I was totally blown away. I kept thinking that this is going to change my life, that I have to get my life up to this level. Ed Feasel gave words that touched me profoundly. He talked about a little car that fails to make it uphill because its engine is too small. He likened the car to our lives: "How do we make ourselves have a stronger engine? There's only one way: chant."

It was at this time that I finally sat down in front of my Gohonzon and did some serious chanting. Tears flowed. I made an incredible conviction about my health. My second

antibody test was coming up and I decided: "There is NO WAY I'm going to test positive. I have to win. I WILL win. This is my crucial moment."

Days later I received my second lab results. Negative! I did not have Lupus!!

I got active in the March 16 preparation and eventually was asked to take one of the main acting roles. The show would go four times for a total of 5000 audience members. What an opportunity! But, then maybe not. Being a main character meant having a more frequent and difficult practice schedule. Because of my health, I was hesitant to take part. I did not have Lupus, but my body was still recovering from its weakness. I imagined that a big role in the Global Family Festival might be too intense.

But, I realized that I had to do this for kosen-rufu. I had to be able to carry out the task.

Ultimately, I participated as one of the main actors. The festival was unbelievable. Working, uniting with everyone, it was beyond words. And the effect on my life was amazing. In my daily life I acquired a job in an entertainment production office, which was totally cool (it just popped into my lap). And later in the year I wound up acting in a television commercial for America Online, my first national appearance! My friend Shan insisted I write my experience.

The real deal is that I have such gratitude for the SGI. I owe this organization so much. And I want to continue supporting our movement for the rest of my life.

Title: Jessica's Experience

Subject: World Tribune 02/26/99 n.3231 p.10 WT990226p10

Author: Jessica Mingo

Keywords: Experiences Health Jessica March Mingo Road Triumph Youth