

AUDREY'S EXPERIENCE

My name is Audrey Yiadom. I am 15 years old and was born into the practice of Nichiren Dai-shonin's Bud-dhism. I have been practicing this Buddhism on my own consistently since 1994. At the beginning of eighth grade, I started thinking about what high school I wanted to attend. My goals were to attend a high school that would prepare me for college, be academically challenging and be the safest and happiest place for my life. My neighborhood high school where I was assigned did not offer any of the things I desired.

So, in January 1997, I took the admissions test to enter the Science and Technology program at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, one of the best schools in Prince George's County (Maryland) and located just 10 minutes from my house. I was sure I would pass the test because I had very good grades and performed well on other standardized tests. I did not worry about the test at all and was very confident until the day of the exam. When I was taking the test, I became so nervous that I skipped a number, and messed up my whole answer sheet.

By the time I realized my mistake, it was too late to correct it. After the test was over, my intuition told me I had failed. I tried to be positive, but it didn't help. About two months later, I learned that my prediction was right — I had failed the test. I wasn't sure what to do, but I was still determined not to attend my neighborhood high school. The only thing I knew to do was to continue chanting and doing gongyo.

The next morning I went to my principal to talk to him about the situation. He said there was nothing he could do. I went home discouraged and chanted for about an hour. I prayed that even though I had failed the test, people would still realize that I belonged in the program. I went to school the next day feeling confident. My prayers had been answered. My principal had a change of heart and was eager to help me get into the school. It was as if he had a split personality!

I continued chanting to get into Roosevelt. My school administrator really helped me, and assured me that I should be able to take the test over because I had skipped a number. He told me I should write a letter explaining my circumstances. The testing board agreed to let me take the test over again in July 1997.

The first time I took the test, I did gongyo and chanted, but my attitude was different. I didn't take the time to prepare for the exam. I didn't study and the night before the exam, I didn't get enough sleep. This time I was determined that I would pass the test because I was not going to any school other than Eleanor Roosevelt High School.

I was happy but scared because I knew I would have to do a lot of studying and chanting. And that is exactly what I did. I bought a practice book of the SSAT, a standardized high school admissions test, to study. Both my algebra and English teachers helped me to study for the math and verbal sections. The school year ended with me feeling confident that I would be going to Roosevelt.

Over the summer, I chanted and studied whenever I would worry or get nervous about taking the test. The day of the test I was well prepared. My chanting and studying helped me to maintain my confidence. I was very happy and energetic while taking the test. Afterwards, I was sure I passed. And still, I continued chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

You can imagine how devastated I was when I found out that I did not pass the test

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again. This time I thought there was a conspiracy against me! However, I still did not give up, and even though I was mad and disappointed, I continued to chant.

My friend who is an SGI member helped me to maintain my confidence and kept encouraging me to keep trying. I wrote another letter and even met with the testing board in person. But I was still denied due to lack of space. I found out that 2,000 students applied to take the Science and Technology admission test, but there were only 200 spots available. I had no other alternative but to continue chanting.

Around that time, my best friend's parents also encouraged me to attend Roosevelt, and that's what I actually did for my freshman year. My prayers were to go to Roosevelt, and I did. I didn't attend the Science and Technology program, which is why I was taking the test. Regardless, I was at Roosevelt and I was happy, but I felt the whole experience left me asking myself whether or not Roosevelt was really the best place for my life and was I happiest there.

Even though the high school I was attending was the best school in my county, I started to look for the best schools in the area. My older sister, Cheryl, agreed with me, and started calling private schools for information. I had previously tried to apply to private schools before, but never finished the applications. I guess it was not the right time. I began to apply to private schools and discovered I had to take the SSAT, which I had been studying for all along.

I became concerned because I discovered that the private schools had many advantages as well as disadvantages. For example, they were not as diverse; I would be leaving my friends; and the schools were far from home.

I started visiting many schools that were in great learning environments, including Georgetown Day School in Washington, D.C. I had a lot of fun, and by the time my visit was over I had already made some new friends. The school offered me the type of education I wanted, but what made it even more appealing were the class sizes. There were only 15 students in each class. I was so happy there and felt very safe and comfortable, I knew this was the place for me!

I chanted for two things: to be able to have the money to go there and to be accepted. My main concern was finances. My family did not have the money to afford this private school. Last year when I came back from activities commemorating March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, I learned that I had been accepted to Georgetown Day School. They had granted me 95 percent of the \$17,000 tuition, leaving me a small portion of \$800 to pay!

I am very happy that I got a chance to attend Roosevelt for my freshman year. I had some great experiences, and made many lifelong friends. Trying to get into the right school helped me deepen my faith and see how I can have anything I want for my life. My determination was to go to a better school, but I ended up being able to go to a place that I never expected.

I am now in my second semester of my sophomore year at Georgetown Day School and I strongly believe that, academically, this has been the best decision for my life. The teachers and students at my new school are very helpful and I am learning many things.

My life continues to grow. My school is far from home and my classmates come from very different economic and social backgrounds than myself. Yet, I really want to not only do my best in school, but also make many good friends.

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