

## **EXPERIENCE – TANYA FREUDENBERGER, SAN JOSE, CALIF. DOING IT ALL**

### **A spur of the moment decision to run for political office sparks a commitment to make a difference.**

This year I celebrate my ninth year of being a participant of the women's Sophia study group, and it is also my 23rd year of practice. I have always tried to take action to make this a better world and volunteer in many different capacities in and outside of the SGI. In August last year, I began what I consider to be a life-changing experience. I was prepared to support my husband's bid for trustee on our school board in East San Jose, one troubled by strife and division for many years. However, the day before filing, Rick told me that I had better get down to the Registrar's office and sign up. He said I had a better chance to win because I had more time and more friends. What??? I filed without a clue of what I was doing. I just knew that our current board had to be replaced by people who cared more about the children than their political ambition.

There were nine people running for three spots — three were incumbents, one was an ex-assemblyman whose family owns a lot of East San Jose and one was a woman who had already been campaigning for a year. For the first three weeks, I was more or less in shock. My daimoku mainly consisted of "Why did I do this? Why did I do this?" I knew I had to totally focus on the campaign and could not fulfill my other responsibilities for three months.

I had already committed to coordinate the five San Jose/Silicon Valley Sophia study groups, which started with 453 members, and another member said she would take over for a while. I am a district leader of a very active district, and two capable people readily agreed to share the task. Some friends of mine at my son's school were willing to take on the projects I was in charge of there. Others, like Rick, took over the other responsibilities I was carrying. It felt strange not being busy with SGI activities; I felt bad because I couldn't really contribute much until after the November election. However, I was encouraged by so many people to stand up and take responsibility.

I woke up on Aug. 31 realizing there were only two months left to campaign, and I started running. My first call was to my area leader to get guidance. Then I started learning about all the issues facing the school district and what the role of a board trustee was. I had dialogue with teachers, administrators, students and parents to listen to their concerns. From past Sophia study material, I read second Soka Gakkai President Makiguchi's writings about value-creating education. He said that "the basic goal of education is making children happy. One of the greatest problems of modern education is that we have lost sight of this most fundamental purpose.... When teachers give serious thought and attention to their student's happiness and well-being, they begin to see the character and personality of their students, their abilities and weaknesses." And SGI President Ikeda said, "Passion is the key to education...and passion comes from having a profound recognition of and commitment to one's mission." This guidance fit right in with my campaign statement!

Many, many friends and neighbors began to support me with a tremendous vote of confidence. I was determined to run this campaign with honesty and integrity — in other words, with the behavior of a Buddha — focusing on what was best for the students. My

Title: Doing It All Photo

Subject: World Tribune 07/02/99 n.3249 p.3 WT990702p03 San Jose, California

Author: Tanya Freudenberger

Keywords: California Community Doing Experiences Freudenberger Jose Photo Politics Tanya

fundamental prayer was that I be in a most effective position to ensure the most positive change. This new world of politics I discovered can be most confusing and intimidating for someone like me who usually says exactly what is on my mind. Even though much of the advice I received from those “in the know” was to state a position to please the voters, what stayed in my heart and mind was President Ikeda’s guidance. He said, “A true political leader should be someone ready to die for the people, if need be. Without that commitment, how is it possible to change the world...the strength of one’s convictions spurs one to action; the strength of one’s philosophy forces one to stand up for one’s beliefs. Genuine leaders are those who dedicate their lives to working for the welfare of the people.” So I stuck to my position.

I listened to a speaker at an Asian Pacific Democratic Club fund raiser, who voiced her concern that there were no John F. Kennedys or Martin Luther Kings today; her desire was to train herself to fill one empty slot. Her words encouraged me to fight even harder. I was prodded, pulled, poked, pushed and promoted by community and political groups, and wound up with the endorsement of the teachers’ union ACORN (a grassroots organizing group), the Santa Clara County Democratic party, and the Mercury News Editorial staff. This was a great victory.

The really exciting work took place in the streets – all of those members and other friends who walked precincts will vouch for the excitement of this activity. It was just like doing shakubuku – making vibrant life-to-life connections. Many of the walkers, from age 12 to 65, gained a new vision of their role in the process to make change in society. There were volunteers who couldn’t walk but made what seemed like millions of calls for me. And we had fun, too. There were friends who wore bowling shoes in gowns down a bowling lane to model at our fund-raising fashion show and other friends who worked behind the scenes and missed the whole show! Many of these were SGI members who worked alongside members in my community in full cooperation and dedication, proving that kosen-rufu is a reality.

Election day came. What a relief! I never thought I would look forward to clean a toilet — I hungered for a normal life. I was jealous because my husband was getting to do all the laundry. I didn’t get nervous until the initial results were not in my favor. Through the night, hundreds of supporters called and visited, but in the end the voters elected three other people. I was only 213 votes away from a board position with more than 2,700 votes.

I have the victory, however, because my prayer to be in a most effective position to ensure the most positive change has been answered. I got the education and contacts needed to carry out my campaign commitments without being encumbered by a board position. Since November, I have been appointed chair of a traffic safety committee in my three-school community. My vision for this group is to prove that a diverse community can work in unity and take responsibility for its own problems. We will shortly be organizing activities for our new community center — together. I’ve also been appointed to the steering committee PACT, a faith-based community organizing group. My goal in building relationships with people in this group is to introduce the real meaning of “faith equals daily life” from the perspective of Buddhism. The majority have not been introduced to Buddhism. I’ve also been appointed to the board of the Filipino Youth Coalition, and as an adult advocate for the Asian Pacific Youth Conference, as well as being publicly awarded by my school district for exemplary service. Ironically, the teachers in my school district just went through a very destructive strike, and the community is already crying for recall of the newly elected board.

Title: Doing It All Photo

Subject: World Tribune 07/02/99 n.3249 p.3 WT990702p03 San Jose, California

Author: Tanya Freudenberger

Keywords: California Community Doing Experiences Freudenberger Jose Photo Politics Tanya

I have such an appreciation for my Sophia study group because it has enabled me to learn more about President Ikeda's mission, the SGI's role in world peace, and how I can use this Buddhism to connect with others in my community. Thanks to my practice to the Gohonzon, the support of my family, the members, friends and community, I believe I am closer to understanding and living President Ikeda's heart and vision for a world of peace.

Title: Doing It All Photo  
Subject: World Tribune 07/02/99 n.3249 p.3 WT990702p03 San Jose, California  
Author: Tanya Freudenberger  
Keywords: California Community Doing Experiences Freudenberger Jose Photo Politics Tanya