

EXPERIENCE — ZENSAKU MUNN, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO. TOUGH TIMES DON'T LAST

I was born into a family that practices Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Currently, I am a senior in the U.S. Air Force Academy. I'd like to share my experience since I enrolled in the Academy in the summer of 1996.

I came to a crossroads in my life where I had to decide on continuing my Buddhist practice without my mother and father pressuring me to do so. Since I was living on my own, I had to really push myself to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and keep faith in the Gohonzon. I realize now how temporary a parent's role is in supporting a child's faith and practice. Once children grow up and can no longer rely on their parents for support to practice, their faith is really tested. Of course, I think parents should set an example for their children, but ultimately each person must decide on their own to develop their faith and practice in Buddhism.

I decided to continue practicing based on the amount of fortune and actual proof that I achieved from chanting. I also attribute the continuation of my faith to the youth division that I encountered throughout my life. Each youth plays a crucial role in maintaining good relationships with his or her peers, especially during adolescence, when so many changes are taking place. Another big reason why I keep practicing is to try to set an example for the SGI youth division members that I know.

My most recent experience was on Feb. 26, where I received a new sense of strength in my faith and practice. When I first was accepted in the Air Force Academy — a great benefit within itself — I tried out and made the Falcon Football Team of the Academy. The team had 12 wins and 1 loss this season and was ranked No.10 in the nation. Within a month, I got cut from the team because I was too small to play Division I football. A friend directed my attention to boxing for intramurals. I instantly fell in love with the sport. Boxing tests your abilities, physically and mentally. It is a sport where you can put your pride, and manhood all on the line. It is also an individual sport so whatever happens you can only look to yourself to congratulate or blame.

In my sophomore year, I won the Academy Wing Open Tournament for 156 lb. weight class. It was the greatest feeling of my life to know that I was a champion and one of the best fighters at the Academy. This year I started as early as Christmas break to train for boxing. I wanted to achieve and excel to greater heights than the previous year. I did very well in the early bouts of the tournament. My opponent in the finals was very strong and an excellent fighter.

One week leading up to the Championship Bout, I chanted more than I have ever done since being at the Academy. I knew I was going to be in a long fight. Both of us were very experienced and equally had different talents. However, I trained every day and chanted so much daimoku. Just hours before my fight, I was in the Colorado Springs Community Center chanting for hours. I built up so much confidence and I was ready for a fight. While I was chanting, I thought of my friends and how this experience can be an inspiration for them when I win. The effort I put forth in chanting was surely the proof that was going to shine and influence so many members. I was going to prove to everyone that the power of the Gohonzon is true.

I walked into the ring that night a defending champion. I walked out of the ring a runner-up for my weight class. Of course, I was disappointed about losing. But for the first

Title: Tough Times Don't Last

Subject: World Tribune 09/10/99 n.3259 p.9 WT990910p09 Colorado Springs, Colorado

Author: Zensaku Munn

Keywords: Career Colorado Experiences Last Munn Springs Times Tough Youth Zensaku

time in my life I was satisfied with my performance despite the outcome. I was one of the happiest fighters in the arena after the show was over. I gave 100 percent and I have no regrets about the fight. People say that my fight was the most exciting out of all the matches because both fighters exerted so much effort. As bad as I wanted to win, I learned a very important lesson: The greatest fighter, whether in boxing or in your own life, is the one who gives 100 percent every time. No matter the results, the fighter gets back up and fights harder to overcome even greater obstacles. My coach once told me, "If you give 100 percent all the time, then you will never be a loser." I truly understand what that means now. I gave 100 percent and I know it is, in part, due to the daimoku that I chanted.

In *Discussions on Youth*, SGI President Ikeda said: "When you chant, you create the cause for your success. Daimoku is for your benefit. It strengthens your life force and sharpens your mind. It enables you to tap the vital inner strength to give full play to your talents and abilities."

After 25 bouts or so, I believe I had the best performance of my life, even though I lost. I put everything on the line and now that the fight is over, I do not feel any less of a person than I did before it. Although there may be competitors that think I am crazy, I feel that I have grown from this experience. I used to believe that no one could be satisfied with coming up short, but knowing the effort I made to pour every last ounce of my ability into the fight, I am truly happy with my performance. I do not regret a bit of that effort.

I hope that my experience can encourage the youth all over the world. Now that I look back, I have achieved so much in the past three years. I still have good grades, excellent health, a great car (which I adore), and a chance to become a pilot. More importantly, I have two loving parents who care for me and have given me the opportunity to reach my potential through this Buddhist practice.

I thank the many SGI members from St. Louis, Mo., Colorado Springs, Colo., and Japan who steered me in the right direction for my life; I hope that my experience will somehow direct even one person onto the right path. I also thank President Ikeda for all his guidance. He is an inspiration to me.

In short, I would like to leave you with a phrase that the Air Force Academy Boxing Team lives by: Tough Times Don't Last. Tough People Do!!!