

EXPERIENCE — PHRANNE ROBINSON, GREELEY, COLO. NOT DROPPING OUT OF LIFE

After nine years, I finally completed my doctorate in psychology. The truth is, that is not really the benefit. Getting a doctorate does not say you are a great Buddhist. I mean, it is great to have a doctorate, but there are thousands of people out there who have their doctorates without ever hearing about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The benefit is really about the internal changes that I went through to be able to receive my doctorate.

It has been difficult for me to get through school. I dropped out of high school halfway through my senior year, and took about five years to go through junior college—a two year school. Whenever the course work got challenging and I had to study, I would drop the class. Then, in 1978, I started chanting and began to see the potential within me—to have the courage to take some chances on my own future, and to have the fortitude and drive to make it happen. So, little by little I finished a bachelor's and then a master's. For some reason, I have always wanted to get my doctorate and, I wondered, could I challenge my karma enough to make that happen?

You see, I am a runner. I am one of those people who pervert the saying “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” When the going got tough, I was always the person who got going—someplace else—away from the challenge and pain. I usually went—to a new school, new town, new relationship. I was not the sort of person who stayed to make sure her dreams got fulfilled.

After many hours of chanting and SGI activities, I applied for, interviewed, and was accepted to the doctoral program at the University of Northern Colorado in the winter of 1990. As Nichiren Daishonin says: “Great events do not have small omens. When great evil occurs, great good will follow” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol 5, p. 161).

Well, 1990 was fairly tumultuous for me. It was filled with really big obstacles. In February, my Mom passed away, the same month that SGI President Ikeda revamped the whole SGI organization. My husband and I got divorced; the judge decided to give us split time with the children meaning they lived with me 50 percent of the time and 50 percent of the time they lived with him. This was devastating to me and filled me with thoughts of suicide. I moved three times that year. And, I started graduate school. I had accumulated so many stress points that my stress line was off the chart. So, of course, my body reacted. I had a small stroke and lost the use of half my face.

Any normal person would probably take these obstacles as a hint from the environment that the doctoral thing was not suppose to happen. Had I been the person I was a few years ago—before I started chanting—I probably would have moved to a monastery, ashram, or reservation to escape the pain and challenge of all of that stuff.

But, you know, chanting works. Chanting works in ways we sometimes only guess at but cannot really define. I was a different person in 1990 than I was in 1978 when I first started chanting. I had courage, fortitude, determination and spirit. Wow, would my mother be surprised!

Now, I would love to tell you that I chanted, participated in activities, and tried to introduce others to Buddhism and all my obstacles went away. But, the truth is, nine years is a long time and there was much for me to change. So, I kept chanting.

I buried my mother and chanted through the emotions connected with that. I kept up my

Buddhist practice and determined to stay in touch during the reorganization of the SGI. I finally won full custody of my children who are now living with me full time. I have been living in the same house in Greeley for the past eight years. And, I chanted until the arterial block opened and I regained the full use of my face.

But, that was not the end. On top of all the stress and loss of facial musculature, my male professors decided they were not happy with my performance and tried to have me removed from the program. A battle ensued, mostly along gender lines until my prayer pushed things over the edge and I was reinstated as a graduate student of good standing. Unfortunately, my research advisor told me she did not like my dissertation topic and that I had to change it which sent two years of hard research down the drain. I had to start all over! Through it all, I performed gongyo every day, chanted as much as I could, worked for the happiness of the other people in my district, introduced others to Buddhism whenever I could, and read the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*.

So, today, I can say I have won; with the support of my children and their chanting, we won together. I appreciate both of them for their patience and love. Thank you, James and Wild Cat. After graduation, the kids and I stayed in Jamaica for two weeks to celebrate.

Because of our Buddhist practice, determination and the encouragement and prayers of many senior in faith, I was able to receive my diploma in psychology this May. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all those who have, over the years, encouraged and supported me through my struggles. I would especially like to thank Ms. Sumi Reker who has chanted with me and for me over the years. She has spent hours listening to me complain and always found the wisdom to point me back to the Gohonzon one more time. I offer my deepest heartfelt appreciation to her for all she has done.

Please understand, it is not that I have had fewer problems completing a doctorate than going to junior college. It's not like after 20 years of Buddhist practice my life goes smoothly and easily. It's that—as people chant sincerely and consistently to the Gohonzon—their life-condition grows higher so they can meet their challenges.

It took me more than five years to go through junior college—not because I had children, a divorce, financial problems or a stroke. No, I kept dropping classes because I had to study to pass. Or, because the ocean waves were breaking and I had to go surfing, or because I didn't feel like getting out of bed. My life-condition was so small, that any little thing was a problem for me.

After seeing Niagara Falls a few years ago, I realized that I would like to have a life-condition as expansive as the Falls. You could throw boulders and logs in and it keeps on flowing along. That's why I keep chanting. I want to have the kind of life-condition that keeps bubbling along, flowing through my life, no matter what boulders are put in my path.

Getting a doctorate was my dream. It was my carrot, so to speak. It is one of the things I wanted in my life so intensely that I was willing to challenge and CHANGE my karma to achieve it. What is your carrot, your dream? Don't ever lose sight of that.

Now, I want a career, I want psychotherapy clients, I want kosen-rufu to happen in my lifetime. And, those children—the little babies I chanted so hard to protect—they are teenagers now, so my prayers for them need to be five times as strong. I'm determined to keep going together with my SGI friends so when we meet on Eagle Peak, we can say we never gave up!!

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