

EXPERIENCE — CORY TAYLOR, NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIF. WINNING AN EMMY IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Editor, cinematographer Cory Taylor, an SGI-USA member, won an Emmy this August for his work as a sound editor for The National Geographic television documentary “Avalanche.” Over the last nine months, Cory was also the overall director of the Youth Grand Culture Festival. He wrote the concept of the festival, articulating the theme: Sound to the World! A Fanfare of Life and Peace! A Vibrant Dance of Successors Expressing Our Pledge for the 21st Century. Cory shares his evolution as a filmmaker and as a Buddhist.

Since I was in the fourth grade, I had a dream of becoming a filmmaker. I was exposed to the arts through my parents at a young age. They took my brother and me to all sorts of museums and cultural activities. As a result, I was always making up stories, putting on mini talent shows for my family. I loved to entertain, and in the fourth grade I became hooked on acting.

Later in the seventh grade, Mrs. Hudson, my filmmaking teacher planted a seed in me. I loved her filmmaking class, but she gave me a C. Mrs. Hudson told me I was very talented but added that I didn’t work hard; I never edited or polished my films. I think she was trying to teach me to be better than what I was. In fact, this seemed to be a constant theme of my school years...but did I get it? The truth was, unless I was really interested in something, I wouldn’t give it my all.

In 1985 I went to UCLA and I wrote and produced some plays — that’s where I also met my wife, Julie. It was in my senior year at UCLA that I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism by my roommate’s younger brother, Darin. He took an interest in finding out who I was, and tried to encourage me despite my huge ego. Because of his caring I eventually joined the SGI-USA in 1988.

Soon after, I came to the realization that my pursuit of the arts and filmmaking was motivated by my self-consuming need to feed my ego. I realized this through practicing Buddhism.

Fortunately around the same time, I met many young men’s division members who were seriously developing their lives based on SGI President Ikeda’s writings. And because I looked up to them, I wanted to do the same. I began to study his guidance and tried to apply it to my life. I’m really moved by President Ikeda’s heart, and like in the movie *As Good As it Gets*, when Jack Nicholson says to Helen Hunt, “You make me want to be a better man,” President Ikeda makes me want to be a better person.

Three years into my practice I got a job as a receptionist for National Geographic Television. At the time I thought it was going to be a “cush” job that would provide me plenty of time to write. But something was growing in me. I joined the Soka Group and Gajokai, and I was learning through participating in such activities and reading President Ikeda’s writings, about the value of hard work. I learned little lessons like doing more than is required, looking for things that can improve the quality of everyone’s experience at work, etc. Over time, I did my best to implement these ideas.

I had realized I was a 99 percent inspiration and zero percent perspiration kind of guy. I knew I wanted to do all these things with my life, but I didn’t know how. I knew I had to change, but I didn’t have confidence. While working for National Geographic, I decided

that I was going to learn how to make films—what goes into it and to learn how to work with people. I decided I wanted to become a filmmaker of rare quality.

In my eight years of experience at National Geographic, I was promoted many times—from a receptionist to a production assistant, to a researcher, to an associate producer, to an assistant editor, to an editor and a cinematographer.

Needless to say, the filmmaking business can be a dog-eat-dog world. There were so many instances where I was going to lose, overestimating my abilities. There were days when I wanted to push my boss into a corner and demand more opportunities. So many times I was going to give into the petty indignities. But President Ikeda's writes: "Mr. Toda once said every one's ideal is to get a job they like (beauty), that offers financial security (benefit), where they can contribute to society (good). But not many can find the perfect job from the start. The most important thing is to first become indispensable where you are.... You will realize that none of your efforts and hardships have been wasted. Mr. Toda taught that this is the great benefit of the Mystic Law" (*Discussions On Youth*, vol. 1, pp. 146–47).

All those times when I was going to give up or make a foolish choice, through chanting, reading President Ikeda's guidance, receiving encouragement and really trying to "walk the walk" by putting the guidance into action, I was able to make different choices. As a result I became a trusted employee. I was able to develop a work ethic and was afforded more opportunity at work. I found myself going on film assignments around the world. I traveled to the Caribbean to film an active volcano, Russia to film Siberian tigers, New Mexico to the world's most pristine underground cave, and through Oklahoma to chase tornadoes.

Every step of the way I could have made a choice that would have meant the end instead of a beginning, but I learned how to support others—how to care about other people—not to just pursue my own goals at the expense of other people, but how to make the right kinds of causes so that everybody wins.

This summer I was nominated for two Emmy awards in the categories of cinematography and sound editing. Then in August, I received an Emmy award for my work as a sound editor in a documentary called "Avalanche." The Emmy award is actually testimony that I was able to contribute in those work relationships, to The National Geographic Society and to the interpersonal dynamic in this work situation.

Through Soka Group and Gajokai, I learned the value of hard work. Chanting for people's happiness and safety, standing post in a parking lot night after night, rushing around to district activities—all these opportunities were changing my life fundamentally. They were necessary to train myself.

I was so insecure in college. For example, if I met a student who was a better filmmaker than me, instead of feeling wonderful, I felt like I had to outdo that person. Or I'd find a flaw in them. I was unable to celebrate someone else's greatness because I felt it diminished my own. Simply trying to outdo others for a sense of self-worth is not self-worth at all. I'm continuously battling that. I'm learning that when you genuinely care about people, you build a confidence that no one can take away.

In making "Avalanche," I worked for a great producer Barry Nye. He is the most successful editor ever at National Geographic—a multi-Emmy award winner. He chose me as his editor when he decided to produce. The challenge of "Avalanche" was that we were given the assignment in the middle of summer when there was no snow. We had to deliver by the following winter.

Title: Winning An Emmy Is Just The Beginning

Subject: World Tribune 10/15/99 n.3264 p.3 WT991015p03 North Hollywood, California

Author: Cory Taylor

Keywords: Beginning California Career Cory Emmy Experiences Hollywood Just North Taylor Winning

We joined forces with avalanche cinematographer, Steve Kroschel and flew to Anchorage, Al. last October. We started avalanches with two of the world's most renowned avalanche experts. We filmed on a glacier at about 12,000 feet where the temperature is 10 degrees. We dropped dynamite out of helicopters on the mountain tops to start these avalanches. That was when I got frost nip on my fingertips. It was excruciatingly painful in that 30-below wind-chill, but it was a small set back for a successful shoot.

I believe one of the important qualities of good writers and directors is that they have a rare insight into humanity. To me that's what separates a regular movie from one that really impacts you. The degree of insight into humanity that the director and writer possess, often determines whether a movie resonates on a much deeper level or not. Who among us has the greatest insight into humanity—it's President Ikeda. Who actually gets into other people's lives and cares about them more than him? No one. He's not doing it for selfish purposes. He really cares and caring is what it is all about. I want to care like he does.

The Emmy award belongs to the members of the SGI and President Ikeda. Actually I decided to give the Emmy to President Ikeda to express my gratitude for all that he has done. So I went to Japan to do that.

At the Kyushu General Meeting, where he received an honorary doctorate from the National University of Central Peru, he presented it back to me. He said you have proven through your action Nichiren Daishonin's words "unseen virtue brings about visible reward." He emphasized the qualities of genuineness and humility, as opposed to being cunning and clever. And said that youth should not seek out glory too quickly.

My promise is this: to fight against my superficial nature, to continue to try and live a contributive life. I will continue to challenge my weaknesses through my Buddhist practice. Just as President Ikeda states in his message to the Youth Grand Culture Festival (see p. 4): "Wholehearted commitment opens the path to victory. Earnest sincerity has the power to move people's hearts." I view winning the Emmy as the beginning. Now my battle begins. The question is who do I become from here.

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