

**EXPERIENCE—AMY LOWE, CHICAGO, ILL.
SINGER/SONGWRITER WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS
BY VERONICA EVANS, CHICAGO, ILL.**

Anyone who meets Amy Lowe can feel her passion for connecting with the world through her music. Her bright eyes and focused nature don't reveal a clue to her past difficulties. As an accomplished singer/songwriter—the vehicle for this passion—it has taken her on a road no one could have foreseen.

When Amy was 16, she faced the most traumatic event any child can suffer—the loss of a parent. Her mother drowned during a sudden storm while sailing with Amy's father. "My whole life changed overnight. I felt trapped in a terrible nightmare. Each day I would wake up and hope that it had all been a mistake—that my mother was really still alive. But instead my sense of security—my safety net, my view of the world—shattered. Things would never be the same again. In vain, I hoped, waited and wished I would wake and discover that my mother's death had just been a bad dream. Instead, my family fell apart."

As death can do, the stability, love and direction that was a constant, vanished overnight. Being the last child living at home, the support she desperately needed was unavailable because her father was equally suffering from the loss. These events led her on worldwide journeys far too complex for her age. "At 18, I worked and saved enough money to buy a backpack, a plane ticket and a train pass and left for Europe; I went as far away from home as I could go."

Her education, music and soul were virtually without direction until she met the Daishonin's Buddhism in 1982. As she chanted to fulfill her dreams of being a singer/songwriter, she was asked to work for the Chicago Public Schools' Urban Gateways Program and eventually became an artist in residence. Even though working with children never occurred to her, she accepted the challenge and set about writing concepts she thought would be fun and appealing.

A chance meeting and subsequent collaboration with a comedy writer resulted in the musical comedy, "FunStuff," which was performed at The Chicago Improv for five years.

"Since 1982, I practiced Buddhism diligently. One constant in my life has always been music, so one of my first prayers was to be able to make my living through my art. Soon the doors opened as I continued to chant about my career and my mission. I wanted to create value through my work writing music and performing in ways that inspire and bring joy, reaching the hearts of both children and adults."

After that successful run, she began expanding her repertoire and performing for children at schools, libraries, bookstores and festivals. This expansion eventually led her to Al Strutz of Emphasis Entertainment Group, who assisted in the production and nationwide distribution of her first CD entitled *I Like Gum*.

It seemed the more Amy chanted, the more her musical career ventured into uncharted waters. And along with her successes, came the inevitable twists that surface as one endeavors to move forward in life.

This entire time, with the encouragement of many friends in faith, she was able to weather the loss of confidence and hope that can cause us to think our dreams are impossible to achieve. Amy was inspired also by the following passage from SGI President Ikeda: "Nothing is wasted in faith. One never loses out. Please be confident that all your efforts to help others and promote Buddhism are accumulating immense treasures of good

fortune in your life. This is what is meant by inconspicuous benefit” (*From Today Onward*, p. 111).

As Amy continued to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, she found her writing and performances were better than ever. She was able to put her mother’s death into perspective and find her place in the world. In fact, for the first time in her life, she was also able to remove the painful cycle of her experience and help heal her family’s suffering.

“I chanted to have so much appreciation for my parents that I would choose them again in another lifetime. Like dew melting in the morning sun after 16 years of Buddhist practice, I felt in the depths of my heart true appreciation. I was so glad to have the parents that I did. Without them, I wouldn’t be alive or have encountered Buddhism.” She began to realize how this tragic event in her life allowed her to connect more strongly to different kinds of people and transform that experience into song.

Five years ago she was approached by Urban Gateways to put together a performance for children about the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. She united with storyteller Megan Wells, and after nine months of research “Fire In Boomtown” was born. “Megan and I work very differently, so shortly after we became partners in the creation of ‘Boomtown,’ the struggle began—along with doubts about our partnership. As a songwriter I am very verbal; I thrive on discussing and sharing ideas as they develop, molding and shaping them with my partner. Megan, on the other hand, says nothing, takes her time to gather information, until she has something substantial to share. Before I became confident in her work, the waiting fostered a lot of conflict for me. The initial process was very frustrating. But through chanting, we have grown to love and respect our partnership. And, although at times we still butt heads, we know each other better, and the years of growth and hard work have paid off.

“We now call ourselves ‘Story and Song’ Amy Lowe and Megan Wells.’ She brings out the best in my art. People say we have a magic.”

Because of the overwhelming success of “Fire In BoomTown,” they were asked to produce a similar show on the history of Arizona. Then the Chicago Historical Society also commissioned another show on Chicago and the American Expansion entitled “Go West.” In addition, last November, she was interviewed by the *Chicago Tribune*, resulting in an article in the Nov. 8 Womanews “Turning Point” section.

Unbeknownst to Amy, “Fire In Boomtown” and Emphasis Entertainment Group were nominated for the 1999 EdPress (Association of Educational Publishers) Distinguished Achievement Award in Electronic Media. The other nominees were World Book Encyclopedia, MacIntosh, Edmark and IBM.

Because no one from her team thought there was a possibility of winning against such giants in media, they didn’t bother to attend the awards banquet, which took place at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. However, because of Amy’s experience in making the impossible somehow possible, and encouragement from a close friend, she went to the banquet armed only with her daimoku and feelings of appreciation for just being nominated. To her utter surprise, after being reviewed by 39 judges with prestigious educational and media affiliations, Boomtown won!

“For years I chanted to create award-winning work that would inspire people and reach their hearts. In addition to the EdPress award, ‘Fire In Boomtown’ recently won the Parent’s Choice Gold Award as well. I love finding and telling important historical stories, giving voice to those who have none, sharing rarely told tales that raise questions and

show courage and strength to rise again—stories that reveal the array of human foibles, mistakes, victories and trails. I believe that my mission as a musician is to share songs that inspire, entertain, bring joy, awaken, cause dialogue, stir memory and educate.”

While being interviewed, Amy spoke of the importance of artists being recognized in their field. More than that, she spoke of the tremendous journey she was able to take because of her practice of Buddhism. She also spoke of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings and their meaning in her life, her favorite quote being: “A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then he will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff....Kyo’o Gozen’s misfortunes will change into fortune. Muster faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412).

Currently, Amy is receiving support from the Illinois Arts Council as a resident artist and tours various schools and communities. Last year she was asked to help “build community” within a particular school through developing a multi-cultural holiday program. Through songs and storytelling, Amy facilitated communication among parents, faculty and students.

“By trying to find stories about their heritage, parents and teachers learned things about each other that they never knew before. The community felt the spirit. I felt like this opened doors and dialogue.” More recently, she has been working with developmentally challenged kids to find their voice through storytelling and songs.

“Ever since I was a little girl I wrote songs to express my emotions; I always wrote songs—that was my dream. Now my dream is to have my songs performed by major artists—people that reach hundreds and thousands of people.

“I struggled for years but I now make a living from my music. It wasn’t easy. Just because you have talent doesn’t mean that you’re going to get there. You have to have persistence and fortune. And you may be persistent but if you don’t have fortune.... It took a lot of daimoku.”

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