

SHEA'S EXPERIENCE

When I was recently at the Florida Nature and Culture Center for a youth conference, I had the most tremendous experience. I was finally with other youth division members. Not only did we have a lot in common, but we also had a lot to talk about. The encouragement and excitement that filled me were exhilarating. While at the FNCC, I learned more about Buddhism than I ever had before. I realized how much I wanted it to be like this at home in Fairbanks. But I wasn't prepared for the struggle I would have to overcome when I came home filled with enthusiasm and confidence. Other people caught on and saw how great it must have been. I told many people how I hoped that Fairbanks could have the same spirit that I experience in Florida—and I kept hearing the same thing—take charge, start the change, help lead the youth in the right direction. I wasn't ready to take responsibility, so I gave up.

I started attending a new school in Fairbanks even though I didn't want to. I was failing school again and fighting a lot with my mom. Things progressively got worse and worse until I finally dropped out of school and got kicked out from home. This was my rude awakening. Discouraged and depressed I moved in with my best friend. The whole time I was there I was wishing that I could go home and start changing my life.

Toward the end of the school year last year, I was becoming very rebellious. A lot of it had to do with my parents' divorce and other hardships that were in my life at that time. I felt such self-pity that I didn't care what would happen to me. So I did whatever I wanted. This was a one-way ticket to jail.

In fact, I did break the law and was being brought to the juvenile facility by my mom. I didn't want to go, so I begged my mom to let me stay with her. When she saw that I was scared, she gave in. Now I tried to change, but no matter how hard I tried, I would still rebel. This was because of how weak my practice was—if you can even call it that. Also, since my mom got me out of trouble, and out of court, and out of a felony charge, I thought I had gotten away with something. But that probably just hurt me even more.

Later that summer, my grandma asked me if I wanted to go to FNCC. I was very reluctant to say yes, because I thought that it wouldn't be any fun and bore the heck out of me. But my grandma has away of forcing—I mean, *convincing*—people to see it her way.

There were three people who really helped me realize some things. The first person was the man I admire the most—my uncle Bubba. He told me that no matter what, don't give up. He pounded a phrase into my head, "It's not what you did, but what you are going to do about it." This opened my eyes to a lot of things. The second person is my grandma. Even though I never told her what was going on inside of me, she knew. So she called her spies to send me some encouragement. The third person was my friend and regional youth leader, Anthony. He called me at my friend's house and we talked for two hours. One of the things he said to me was that if I wanted to go home for Christmas, I could. I knew what I had to do. When I got off the phone with him, I chanted as long as I could.

Title: Shea's Experience

Subject: World Tribune 01/28/00 n.3278 p.B SD000128pB Fairbanks, Alaska

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Keywords: Alaska Cory Experiences Fairbanks Seize Shea Taylor Tribune World Youth

I went home for Christmas and talked to my mom about myself and she decided to let me come back home. I enrolled back in school and started to practice every day. Then I got this great opportunity to plan a youth division March 16 exchange meeting. This time I was up to the challenge. It was the northern-most kosen-rufu day meeting in the United States and it was a great success!

THIS WORLD'S A MESS

(Rap Lyrics)

This entire world is a mess.
The youth deal with drugs and pressure that cause stress.
Because of my state and the things around me,
Hate flooded my thoughts that would eventually drown me.
Now I have dreams about mad schemes
That I was plann'n' on, I wanna drop a bomb.
But I decided no, that ain't the way to go
You wanna change the flow then chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo
'Cause as long as you're sincere in your heart and in your mind
You'll have benefits until the end of time
So don't you worry and don't you fret
'Cause with good daimoku sansho shima's no sweat
Now I know all of this to be true
But when I watch the news I start to feel blue
'Cause I see all of these young people dying
All these mothers, brothers and sisters are crying
And all we can do is chant for the best
And hope one day this world won't be such a mess.
Now I know going through youth is hard
And sometime you feel like you are barred
Up in a cage, and all that's inside is a rage
But when things start gettin' to be too much
You should just sit down and chant a whole bunch
'Cause when you do it will open your eyes
And then one day you might realize
That life ain't about money and things
Or even fat diamond rings
It's about love, family and true happiness
And if the whole world chanted, it wouldn't be such a mess.
No matter how people treat you
Deep down inside they got the Buddha nature too
But there's a new war every few years
Cause the young people forget all the shedded tears
And that's what's happening to our youth today
Only it's not a war that's fought far away
It's a war that's been planned since the beginning of time
And all the battlefields are up in your mind
But just like all wars there's got to be an end
And that day will come when we walk hand in hand
And if that happens I must confess
This world wouldn't be such a mess

—Shea Braniff, Fairbanks, Alaska