

MAURICIO'S EXPERIENCE BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN EVERY MOMENT

I was born in Mexico City in a loving family. Brought up Catholic, I got used to going to church as a duty. I was always nicely dressed and paid more attention to the girls than the sermon. I was convinced that by just attending, I had Heaven guaranteed. I demanded God to grant me the happiness and wishes that I thought I was entitled to, but was not willing to change or move a finger for. I learned to accept that I was born a sinner but that God loved me just the same. Looking up to the sky (where I was taught he was), I asked away and wondered why my prayers were not answered. I never worried about the bad causes I was making, because all would be forgiven. I thought that sincerely apologizing to the priest on Sunday cleaned up my chart every week. I aspired to the luxuries that life had to offer no matter whom I had to step over, and made fun of everybody who was different than me. I lived 22 years of my life on an emotional roller coaster basing my happiness on circumstances, material things and attention from others.

Growing up, I developed my thirst for a quick-fix approach to happiness and looked endlessly for a magic potion in self-help books. Aspiring to be an actor and architect, I came to San Antonio, Texas, in 1993 with my brother and parents. My father was going to open a trading business with my uncle while my brother and I finished studying.

Attending an acting class, I met Brant Miller, an actor, composer, singer and screenwriter. Not only did I admire his acting skills, but his high life-condition and charisma made him a very interesting individual. We became quick friends and visited each other to rehearse acting scenes. While practicing at his house, I noticed unusual religious paraphernalia like incense, candles, a bell, evergreen and a curious wooden box. Several months later, while talking about life, death and the reasons why we live, I found out I was a Buddhist in Catholic clothing. I agreed with all he said about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and I left that day with a smile on my face and a flyer with the phrase *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. Although the idea of reciting a phrase I didn't understand sounded ridiculous, I trusted him and had faith he wouldn't let me do anything that would hurt me. I was desperate enough to try anything; I had no job, no money and poor relationships with my family. I said the words in the car all the way home wishing with all my might for them to be the secret to happiness. He kept mailing me articles that I devoured, and I hounded him with questions that he gladly answered. He visited me all the time. One time after chanting together for 20 minutes, I got a call from a builder who wanted me to design houses for him. I started feeling happier and benefits started rolling in. I attended all the meetings and subscribed to the *World Tribune*.

Six months after my first meeting, I received the Gohonzon on March 16, 1998. I built my own altar and chanted in front of it as much as I could. I stopped listening to the radio in the car because it disrupted my daimoku. I went to all the district, youth and Spanish meetings. I also attended the YMD conference in June 1998, and went back a year later for the Spanish conference. I was fortunate to attend the youth cultural festival in Los Angeles last September, which made me cry so much and made me feel so proud to belong to such a wonderful organization. My mom was so

scared for me, though, because she thought I was praying to Chinese people!

I have been chanting for about two years, and the benefits and transformation I went through are just unbelievable. Once I made the determination to change, obstacles came my way; but thanks to my study, now I see them as the universe forcing me to become the man I am capable of being. I stopped complaining about my past or my circumstances and started facing my reality. I now know that who I am and what surrounds me are the results of the causes I have made in my past. There will be no prosperity out here if I don't change what's inside first.

I lived 26 years of my life with the understanding that God was up there and I was down here. I thought I was only required to be religious one day out of the week. Today, I'm a Buddhist 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Buddhism is about action and about being 100 percent in the moment. This practice has permeated all aspects of my life and given me the means to bring out the best of me in every moment; that side of me that has always been there but that I was unable to tap into. Now, I feel like Aladdin every time I chant and I rub the mirror of my life every morning and evening. Little by little I become the kind of person who attracts the happiness that I want. I don't pray for good things to happen but for the courage to face everything that comes my way— finding the value, the medicine, the lesson. This time, I'm strong and ready to pay the price to be happy. I want to make every day count, plant a seed in everybody I meet and create value everywhere I go. I want to design spaces and act in movies that will encourage others. In *Learning from the Gosho*, President Ikeda states: "A great human revolution in the life of one person can change the destiny of humankind and our planet. It is Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, that encourages and enables people to become aware of their great power, to draw it forth and use it. Buddhism gives people the means to develop themselves thoroughly and open their eyes to the limitless power inherent in their lives" (p.185).

In the year 2000, I will play the lead in an independent movie that Brant wrote. I have done over 16 commercials and voice-overs in the past two years and have a full-time job in an architectural firm. My relationship with my family has never been better. And even though they don't practice, they notice that I am a better son and a better brother. I am happy. I respect my life force enough to no longer waste it. I'm ready to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in my environment, in San Antonio...in the world.