

## EXPERIENCE—KELLY YI, WESTCHESTER, CALIF. CALLING ALL MOMS

**Kelly Yi shares how her experiences as a young woman in the SGI-USA helped her transition to motherhood and start a support group for mothers in her community.**

I began my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism on Oct. 31, 1987, and experienced many wonderful days as a young woman in the SGI-USA. During those activity-filled years, through my practice of Buddhism I learned to have goals and to take action to realize these goals, and that the universe would support me in this realization process.

After having my daughter, Amber, I had a difficult time transitioning into the women's division. Initially, I didn't want to go because I thought that it would be boring. I thought the women would be too mature for me. After all, I was only 33.

Then I got to know my women's district leader, Lillian Lee. I realized from listening to her and watching her that she'd experienced being a new mother, and it helped me to accept moving into the women's division. I realize now the wisdom of having support groups such as the women's division within our organization.

As a new mother, I was very nervous and insecure. I constantly worried, "Am I doing this right?" It was also an exciting experience, for example, changing Amber's diaper for the first time or giving her her first bath.

The hardest part for me was breastfeeding; I wasn't producing enough milk. I asked for a lot of advice, but nobody ever talks about how hard breastfeeding is; they just talk about how "natural" it is. I was having such a difficult time I thought there must be something wrong with me. I was angry at myself and blamed my doctor for recommending formula in the second week of Amber's life. I even went to a class in breastfeeding. All the other mothers in class were successfully breastfeeding, and then I pulled out the "taboo" bottle of formula and fed Amber. I distinctly remember feeling like running out of there as fast as I could, never to return.

Shortly after that, my husband, Philip, and I agreed that it was OK not to breastfeed. It just didn't seem worth the suffering that we were all experiencing. I discovered I wasn't horrible because I couldn't breastfeed and that many people grow up healthy having been fed formula.

Throughout these early days of motherhood, getting little or no sleep and all the added challenges, I had to encourage myself constantly. My mother and mother-in-law were also a tremendous help. My husband had many people over to chant, which really helped me to be more consistent in my Buddhist practice. I prayed for wisdom and patience; I wanted to be a good mom.

Just after Amber was born, all at the same time, Philip became an area leader and began a new job getting a sushi academy up and running, and I decided not to return to my job as a sales/marketing rep for an airlines. I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom; I couldn't bear to leave Amber. I knew motherhood would be challenging, but I never expected it to affect every aspect of my life—emotionally, physically and mentally. In taking care of my daughter, I found that I always had to be "on."

After about two months or so of being cooped up at home, I decided it was time to get back into society. I wanted to get to know other mothers, but didn't know any families in

my neighborhood.

Lillian encouraged me to chant with other new mothers in the SGI. I helped start a chanting group with other mothers in my area. I began to chant to connect with mothers in my community. At parks, I usually met nannies, not mothers. I thought, “Where are all the moms?” From there, I unknowingly was set on a course to bring more mothers together.

Shortly after forming this chanting group, I learned about MOMS Club (Moms Offering Moms Support), a nondenominational organization started in 1983 by Mary James of Simi Valley, Calif., to support mothers who decide to stay at home to raise their kids. It’s actually open to all mothers, they don’t turn anyone away—not even dads!

There were no meetings close to my home, so I realized I needed to put my SGI training and work experience to good use. I decided to start a MOMS Club in my area, which includes Westchester, Playa Del Rey and El Segundo. After receiving information from the international organization, I chanted to meet other women who could help me, who had the same desire.

Within a month or two, I met with four women to see if we could pull it off. I was so amazed to see how the five of us divided up the many responsibilities. We established bank accounts and a treasury; did our own PR and advertising; secured a meeting place; created a calendar of events—which includes a book club, quilting club, a babysitting co-op, a monthly newsletter; and Helping Hands, which provides support for new moms or sick moms. We also are required to provide some community service and by sponsoring raffles, etc., we raise funds to give to charities or to help a family in crisis. Recently the money we raised at a garage sale will help send three kids with diabetes to summer camp.

At our first meeting one October morning in 1998, we had 20 other women join. I’m on the shy side, but at this first meeting I made a conscious decision to open up to these strangers. I talked about why I wanted to start the group—because I felt isolated, needed to be with other mothers and to connect to society in general. I believe my honesty encouraged so many of those mothers to join and to volunteer to take responsibility. With all these women’s wonderful talents, we’ve created a fantastic support group for mothers; presently we have 75–80 mothers in our group. I’m proud of what the women of our MOMS Club chapter have created.

As the chapter founder, I became the president and later the treasurer along with being an area coordinator for the international organization. We are now holding our first elections for the next board; as of June, I will no longer be a board member. I will take on the challenge of state coordinator starting June 1.

This club is run only by volunteers—no one receives a salary, not even the founder, Mary James. I became a coordinator to help create a better-functioning organization and to further support mothers by helping with communication and problem-solving.

I believe my involvement with MOMS Club has happened for a reason, though I’m not sure where it will lead. I still have dreams professionally that I haven’t fulfilled yet. I feel fortunate to be in this position of receiving such tremendous training. Now I know there’s life after motherhood and that the women’s division of the SGI is not dull!!

I welcomed Mother’s Day with so much appreciation for my own motherhood and for my own mother and mother-in-law. I believe all mothers deserve a badge of honor.

I’d like to thank my husband, Phil, my daughter, Amber, my family and all the SGI-USA members for their loving support during my first years of motherhood.