

EXPERIENCE—JULIE GLENN, HENDERSON, NEV. THE GIFT OF GIVING

Julie Glenn finds inner peace by giving back to the SGI members of New Millennium District.

I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at a very young age by a very strong member who has practiced for the past 38 years. She was poor while struggling to raise six children. Through her practice, she achieved great financial rewards and self-awakening and changed her life completely, which encouraged me to practice. This courageous woman was my mother, Mary Glenn. She says that this practice is her legacy that will be handed down through our family, thereby securing our happiness.

Because I was very unhappy for most of my childhood, suffering from "middle child syndrome," I believed if I could attain all my "earthly desires" I would be happy. When I began my Buddhist practice, I also amassed much wealth financially and for years material gain was mostly what I prayed for.

By January 1999, I was definitely at the crossroads of my 26-year practice. I realized I needed to challenge the study aspect of Buddhism, which I neglected to do because I *knew* Buddhism worked. Then I joined the Sophia Group, a women's study group. Little did I know then that this opportunity would change my practice and consequently the rest of my life.

Reading and understanding SGI President Ikeda's efforts and struggles toward kosen-rufu was the booster shot I needed to make my practice healthy again. As I came to understand Buddhism by reading *The New Human Revolution*, I experienced my own human revolution. I discovered that there was more to this practice than "getting benefits." I found the courage to self-reflect and with that came an inner peace that I had been searching for.

I graduated from the Sophia Group of 2000 with so much appreciation for the practice, the SGI organization and my life—things I had taken for granted for so many years. I had felt as though the SGI should be grateful for me practicing instead of the other way around.

Whenever I was asked to take on responsibility as a district leader, I refused. I would arrogantly say: "I am too busy." "I don't want to be responsible for anyone else." "I have a life."

I also didn't want to practice in my local area. I traveled across town to practice in another district. The best thing that happened was when we were asked to practice within our zip code area. I was asked to give my area another chance. So I did. I was asked to become a district leader again and this time I accepted. My life was ready for this challenge. This was the beginning of a new journey. I would experience life and my Buddhist practice as never before. I would find more happiness in my present life-condition.

Our district grew tremendously. I worked with members that, like me, basically did not want to practice in our neighborhood for one reason or another. I had always enjoyed sharing Buddhism with others and this provided an excellent opportunity. I thought about how my leaders never gave up on me no matter how arrogant or uncooperative I was.

Title: The Gift Of Giving

Subject: World Tribune 07/21/00 n.3303 p.3 WT000721p03 Henderson, Nevada

Author: Julie Glenn

Keywords: Back District Experiences Finds Gift Giving Health Henderson Human Inner July Members Nevada Peace Relationships Tribune World

The district grew so large that it was divided into two. We took charge and responsibility for our new district and our lives. We named our new district the New Millennium District. We made up our minds to achieve kosen-rufu in our community.

We made the meetings what we called “member friendly,” and started to chant together monthly for our personal goals and for the happiness of people in our district. We also started a “rap session” where we could vent our problems or concerns and successes. We discussed questions about the practice in a casual setting and created “dream boards” where we put our dreams and goals on a board in order to better visualize them and therefore focus on achieving them. Last but not least, we chanted for unity in the district to accomplish our goals.

Our success became an inspiration to other districts. Other people started attending our meetings for ideas and encouragement.

Not all the comments were positive but this challenged our determination to continue to chant a lot. I took this as my personal challenge. I received encouragement from a senior in faith to keep me focused on my prayer to develop our district. I also self-reflected and saw that this opposition was a result of *my* life-condition, *my* arrogant nature. I had tried to keep this nature hidden by putting up protective walls. The walls developed over the years as my environment, my struggles, my life constantly sucked my confidence, courage and wisdom. Because I experienced a lot of racism in my life, I displayed a dislike for certain people and cultures. How could I continue to encourage people with this in my heart?

I discovered through praying and studying that this was why I was challenging the same things over and over again in my life. I realized fear was why I had never challenged this problem before. I decided to change it.

President Ikeda has said that you can’t understand or know a person until you understand their culture and where they came from. When I shared my experience about racism at our district meeting, we came up with what we call our Cultural Moment, where we take 10 minutes for a presentation on the history and events of a different culture. Starting this in the district prompted me to take it further, so my daughter and I prepared a presentation for the area board in Las Vegas. Our idea was approved, and we will now host the SGI Peace Cultural Group, which will sponsor quarterly lectures and periodic displays on the history and events of various cultures.

Six years ago I was diagnosed with Epstein-Barr virus, which forced me to quit my full-time and very lucrative sales position. Therefore I started a company based out of my home which has supported my daughter, Shanté, and me for nearly five years.

Then practically overnight business waned and my company was in jeopardy and my world was falling apart. I couldn’t pay my bills. I got serious and began to pray a lot—hours a day in fact—what I call “extreme” chanting.

Shanté joined me in my struggle and her chanting increased. Her life-condition immediately changed. As our young women’s district leader, she made a determination to develop the youth in our chapter. It increased from three youth to 23. I also decided to develop our Boys and Girls Group. Our July World Peace Prayer Meeting was completely run by the Boys and Girls Group.

My co-leader and I took responsibility for setting up rides to the meeting and lunches for the youth. The participation was tremendous. Consequently, our chapter has grown from 8 active members to 52, with 95 percent of them receiving the *World Tribune* or *Living Buddhism*.

When one of our members was diagnosed with a tumor on her pituitary gland and told that she would have permanent damage to her eye, members got together daily to chant for her. She was so encouraged that she never missed a day of gongyo through all of her pain. This made the difference for Dawn. She had excruciating pain and her eye was nearly popping out but now her new diagnosis has changed and it's even amazed the doctors.

Dawn has introduced her entire family to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and has encouraged so many people's practice, including my own, through overcoming this struggle. She understands her mission and is determined to win.

I now know why I had to go through my own struggle of fighting in my life. It was so that I could understand Dawn's heart and her struggle along with those of the other members in my district. I needed to endure those struggles so that I could encourage my fellow SGI members in their own challenges. I had prayed for years for the wisdom, the courage, the confidence and the compassion to overcome the obstacles in my life to fulfill my mission for kosen-rufu, but I never understood what it meant until now. I realize that only by repaying a debt of gratitude, showing appreciation and caring for others can I achieve true happiness. The members always tell me that they feel I understand their hearts, and I'd like to thank President Ikeda for always emphasizing the importance of the heart. I experienced such proof of the power of Buddhist practice through our district. This is practicing for ourselves and others.

President Ikeda says: "In life and in kosen-rufu, we either win or lose. I would like you to be absolute victors in both. No matter what excuses we try to make, giving in to defeat brings misery and loses us the respect of others. I hope each of you without exception will adorn your life with indestructible triumph" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 84).

A winner in life is a person who amasses "treasures of the heart," the mental and spiritual capacity to have mastery over the self and to have genuine concern for others. So instead of complaining about what I don't have, I am grateful for and appreciate my own unique gifts. This makes me a winner in life.