

## IMPRESSIONS FROM THE YWD CONFERENCE

*Stephanie Araiza, Seattle*

I feel so fortunate to have been a part of the most amazing gathering of young woman I have ever experienced. I had the opportunity to work a little behind the scenes for this conference. I was honored to help create such a wonderful kick-off for the young women in the 21st century.

My determination for the conference was to awaken the Soka Spirit in myself and in the lives of the young women who attended, and to have them go home and help others grasp a deeper understanding of what the Soka Spirit is. So many of the participants told me throughout the weekend that they wanted to take what they learned back to their districts, and they made me feel confident that I had sisters all across the country striving for the same dream as me.

I have never felt so alive! I am determined to help foster, in all of our members, an understanding of how special this Soka Spirit movement is, and how rare an opportunity we have to fight together with our mentor.

*Brandi Whitmore, Los Angeles*

The YWD conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center was an even greater experience than I imagined it would be. My heart was so touched by the spirit and sincerity of everyone there. I felt deep appreciation for how fortunate I am to practice this Buddhism. I really began to understand what it means to stand up alongside SGI President Ikeda to fight for and protect this wonderful practice and care for our members with all our hearts. I also realized how important it was for me to take what I had learned and experienced and bring it back to share with as many people as I can and really implement it in my daily life. That's where I will show proof of how amazing this practice is.

*Christine and Miranda Dell, Wyoming, Mich.*

Our trip to the FNCC was so wonderful! It was amazing that even though young women attended from all over the country, it seemed like we were all lifetime friends. The bonds at the FNCC are so strong, the only way to feel that is to go there! We strongly encourage everyone to make the challenge and go to the FNCC!

*Emi Gwin, San Diego*

"One Brave Warrior Stands Up for Peace." What a profound theme. This was the theme of our young women's conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the year 2000. More than 150 young women gathered together to create a bond that stretched across the nation.

I was amazed at how so many of us were struggling with the same types of difficulties. It was as if we were on a mission to gather and encourage one another. On the flight back home to San Diego, I realized that in four days, I had grown more than I had in the past year. My life was filled with this energy that was radiating from my heart. The lessons that I had learned while at the FNCC could not be taught anywhere else. They were life changing and brought a whole new perspective to my

role in the SGI.

In our sessions, we covered very real and powerful topics. At the end of each session, I would say to myself, “That was the best one.” Then we would have another session that was just as spectacular. A conference like this stays with you for the rest of your life. The faces, the names, the hearts — they are all unforgettable. These are people who helped change my life.

My appreciation for SGI President Ikeda’s generosity and one of his gifts to us, the FNCC, has grown a thousand times stronger. As we made a joyous departure from the FNCC, I made a promise to each and every person there — I, as one brave warrior, will stand up for peace.

*Nicole D. Collier, Atlanta*

After years of seeking and spiritual evolution, I recently found my home with the SGI. I joined the organization and received the Gohonzon on June 3 of this year. Two weeks later I had the awesome experience of going to FNCC to attend the young women’s conference. I truly enjoyed my experience there. I met a multitude of people and came away with a wealth of information. I rejuvenated my mind, body and spirit.

My initial impression was how diverse a group we were. I saw people from many different ethnic and cultural groups, and it amazed me again and again. Through this diversity, I gained a myriad of perspectives about the practice. Within this mix I talked to everyone from “fortune babies” (members born into the practice) to those who recently joined the practice. The common bond was that everyone was very supportive of me and sincere in their own practice.

I learned a lot about the practice and about people in general during the conference. For instance, I gained insight about Soka Spirit and began to have a better understanding of the mentor–disciple relationship. I also developed a new outlook about my own human revolution.

The peaceful surroundings offered me the wondrous opportunity to invigorate my mind, body and spirit. I ate delicious, healthful food, rode around the campus on a bicycle (what memories that brought back!), tanned and relaxed by the pool, and chanted daimoku to a beautiful Gohonzon and by a lake under a full moon.

I had a great experience at the young women’s conference. I’m excited about my life in the practice. I know that joy and struggle are ahead and I am ready to win!