

**USHONDA'S FNCC EXPERIENCE
LIVING UP TO MY PLEDGE AS A 'BRAVE WARRIOR FOR PEACE'
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June 15–18 and 27, 2000 — these are very significant and unforgettable days I will reflect on for the rest of my life. The first four of these days, June 15–18, I had the great fortune to go to the fabulous Florida Nature and Culture Center for the 2000 Young Women's Conference.

In SGI President Ikeda's message to us, he stated: "I hope that your conference will be filled with harmony, joy and cheer as you expand and strengthen your bonds of friendship. Please be convinced you will always be embraced and protected in this circle of good friends" (*Seize the Day*, July 14, p. B).

I feel this sentiment perfectly expresses what I felt and achieved at this gathering. I was so encouraged by those who shared their life-changing experiences. I gained so much from the sessions I attended—some of which focused on overcoming depression, the mentor–disciple relationship and Soka Spirit.

I also experienced tremendous harmony with my four SGI-USA sisters in faith who accompanied me. We grew even closer. In the depths of my life, I felt all of the young women who participated in this conference had individually shared similar experiences with me in our past lives, therefore we definitely expanded and strengthened our bonds of friendship. This feeling was confirmed when we gathered into a giant circle arm and arm singing to one another, "That's What Friends Are For." I could not stop crying tears of happiness!

My prayer and goal before I left was to take everything I learned at the FNCC and apply it to my daily life. I also wanted to share the conference with as many people as possible so they could do the same. Daimoku is powerful!

Shortly after my return from the conference, I was scheduled to have back surgery due to my ongoing battle with scoliosis. Scoliosis is curvature of the spine. Mine was the result of deformed vertebrae.

Throughout my life I've had numerous surgeries to correct the problem. My last surgery was in 1990, when I needed metal rods placed in my back to stabilize my spine. But within nine years, both rods had broken and it was necessary to remove them.

Before the surgery on June 27, my doctor told me I would spend a minimum of three days to a maximum of two weeks in the hospital for recovery. Everyone expected a routine operation without complications.

However, as I write this, I've been in the hospital for a month and four days. Waking from the surgery semi-paralyzed from the waist down, I am unable to walk. I feel pain (which is a good thing) and can feel certain areas of my legs and feet when touched, but my legs move only during muscle spasms.

I'm not angry about having presently lost my ability to walk. In fact, I feel that this obstacle is one of the biggest benefits of my life. I've been forced to stop everything in my life — my job, SGI-USA activities, hanging out with friends, etc. I'm able to really take a closer look at where my life is going and what it really means to me.

I'm quickly finding out what all the phrases I've heard growing up in the SGI really mean. Phrases like, "Doing Kosen-Rufu," "Changing Poison into Medicine,"

“Going Through My Human Revolution” and “Attaining Absolute Happiness.”

SGI President Ikeda has shared many examples of how he has put these phrases into action and has shown us how to use Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to attain the supreme state of life every human being seeks.

One of the session lectures at the FNCC was on the writing, “Letter to Misawa.” In it, Nichiren Daishonin states:

Although one studies Buddhism, it is difficult to practice it correctly because of the foolishness of his mind, or because, even though one may be wise, he follows an evil teacher and fails to realize that he is being misled. Moreover, even though one may encounter a good teacher and the sutra of the true teaching and thereby learn the True Law, inevitably, at the time when he resolves to free himself from the sufferings of birth and death and attain Buddhahood, he will encounter the three obstacles and four devils, just as surely as a shadow follows the body and rain is accompanied by clouds. Even if you should manage to overcome the first six, if you are defeated by the seventh, you will not be able to become a Buddha. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 894)

Even though one has fortune to encounter the correct Buddhist teaching, we are still not guaranteed to become happy! Happiness lies only in our attitude toward our obstacles. We must become happy through our own individual struggles. This is President Ikeda’s wish. We can fulfill our mentor’s prayer with the attitude of practice for ourselves and others. This current obstacle is my mission. I have no doubt I will walk again.

I realize my recent trip to the FNCC was the solid foundation to help me overcome my present situation. It has provided me with the wisdom and strength to help me challenge not only the paralysis in my legs, but also everything else that has slowed down the process of me personally attaining absolute happiness in this life. I’d like to end with another quote from President Ikeda’s message to the young women’s conference:

Whatever hardships you may be facing now, please turn them into a source of prayer. Improve yourself each day, do your utmost for the sake of others, and study hard so that you can actively and freely contribute in the field of your mission. Nor should you be hasty. Rather, please always base yourself on daimoku, and steadily build a foundation of indestructible fortune.

We all made a pledge at the FNCC to become brave warriors who stand up for peace. I am literally being put to the test to live up to my pledge. I am determined to show actual proof with my life. Profound thanks to my family and friends for their constant encouragement, support and daimoku!