

**CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS
EXPERIENCE—GEOFF JORDAN, OMAHA, NEB.
WINNING IN LIFE AFTER DIVORCE**

‘Once I saw what I needed to change and how, my relationship with my former wife changed instantly,’ says Geoff Jordan.

Buddhism is humanism. Buddhism is also win or lose.

I am finally embarking on the relationship I always wanted to have with my wife. That is, my former wife, Mari, and our daughters, Niki, 17, and Georgie, 16.

I was married in the early '80s, and at the time, it looked to me like a make-do situation. To varying degrees we both felt it was not the best match, let alone the right time, but as energetic youth division we were given well-meant guidance that it was the “right thing to do,” considering Mari’s “condition” — she was pregnant. So, I was optimistic and hopeful it would develop into a relationship capable of nurturing love and respect.

Then, after four years of unsteady jobs, turned-off utilities, repossessed cars, evictions, bugs in the house and no milk for the babies, etc., Mari had had enough. We divorced because I abused my wife — economically, verbally and emotionally.

When my marriage came to its early end, I realized this was my worst fear. For many of the last 13 years, I have struggled deeply with intense feelings of bitterness, anger and betrayal, coupled with a need for revenge over my wife divorcing me.

After 20 years of Buddhist practice and innately always willing to rise to a challenge, and, because I found in my heart that I could not quite quit my faith or practice, I naively vowed that my divorce would be different. My determination as the “estranged” father and husband was that I would not be left behind in defeat.

A seed was planted for me almost 13 years ago. Soon after Mari divorced me, she told me she had invited her boyfriend to our meeting that night as a guest. I was horrified! After feeling such heart-wrenching betrayal that she could even divorce me, now she wanted to drag a boyfriend into the mix! All the way to the meeting, I was filled with rage and dread.

Sitting in front of the Gohonzon, my fellow members chanting cheerfully, expectantly all around me, it struck me — an epiphany. What if, this man, her guest, her boyfriend, really wanted to practice? Wow, what a concept! Suddenly things were clear. That is what truly mattered.

I vowed then to the Gohonzon that if her boyfriend was sincere in wanting to practice, I would do anything I could to spark and encourage his pure seeking mind and faith. Suddenly all my anger and resentment melted away and changed to a bright and joyful determination. I realized if he took sincere faith in the Gohonzon, he could only be a positive component of the family unit, building and adding fortune and protection to it.

Amazingly, that’s just what happened. And I am still much in his debt for the way he took care of my children in the capacity he took on as the new dad.

There was no immediate outward result at that time other than I was able to look him in the eye and firmly shake his hand to welcome him to our group. Since then we have enjoyed many SGI activities as young men, Gajokai, Soka Group, men’s division, and, as fathers.

Meanwhile, no matter how many times I self-righteously felt slighted by Mari, I clung to the realization that I introduced her to this practice and was bound by and beholden to

that karma; she had a healthy and strong practice; and she was and is an incredibly strong and devoted mother to our children. Many times I have been greatly encouraged by her example via her experiences, in meetings, in encouraging fellow members in faith, as well as in her daily life.

Today, after 13 years of divorce, I can finally see the glimmer of a successful difference—one that I had almost lost hope and sight of. That of helping to forge a new example, a new outcome, that might encourage others faced with the same difficult karma. An example of both partners finding individual happiness while continuing their practice within the SGI.

I am so grateful and appreciative that we have now overcome many of our difficulties in our relationship. For me, it has been the bare civilities, bitterness over perceptions of wasted effort, the deep unshakable feelings of shame, of being cast aside and ignored as a failure by family, members, leaders and friends. For her, I can only guess that at the very least it has been resentment of my real or perceived freedom to date, party and to play, as well as my inability to meet financial obligations, while she dealt with the day-to-day responsibility of raising two beautiful daughters.

The seed planted at that long- ago meeting finally started to blossom in my life in October of last year when I helped drive my sister 1,800 miles back to her home. Through my sister's eyes, I saw a reflection of one of my darkest potentials, frightening me to my core, in the guise of her abusive husband.

In him I see what I could have become if I didn't practice Buddhism or had quit my practice; if perhaps I had not gotten divorced; and most importantly, if I hadn't ultimately realized the need and been given the blueprint for cutting the cycle of abuse.

All the time I was holding (or pulling) my sister's hand to free her from the immediacy of her abusive situation, my thoughts were instinctively drawn to my former wife. I started to realize that I had been guilty of the same patterns of behavior in my marriage as I saw right before me in my sister's husband, and, that I still was not free of them. Even though I knew I manifested these same behaviors, albeit to a lesser extent, I had the strongest feeling that Mari would know exactly what to do and say at every turn to help my sister.

When I returned from the trip, due to my self-reflection from what I saw in my sister's husband, and even though Mari and I hadn't spoken meaningfully in nearly two years, we renewed a dialogue, a dialogue of the heart and spirit; through the simplicity of e-mail at first, and now through personal exchanges and actions.

I shared this practice with Mari 18 years ago, and this past winter she shared with me the blueprint for overcoming the cycle of abuse deep in my life, and that of my family, that she herself had used to change her own life. It was in the form of a Web site on codependence and abuser/victims: www.drirene.com/you_too.htm.

I am so appreciative to Mari that I now have both tools to break this cycle. The first tool of course, is this Buddhist practice. I have deeply apologized to Mari for manifesting my dark side of abuse in our relationship, and to our daughters, for passing any of it on. We are friends today and continue to deepen our connection.

Through all of this, I have been struck by a very frightening and powerful fact. If not for this practice and if not for the breathing room for self-reflection I got from Mari divorcing me, I too would have ended up just like my sister's husband—intolerant, an abuser through neglect, as well as through words and emotions, if not also physically.

Because economic neglect and verbal and emotional abuse do not generally show immediate physical marks like physical abuse, it is easy for outsiders to disqualify it even

as they refuse to “get involved” and see for themselves because “it’s not their place or business” or “would upset the status quo.”

I am convinced that many of those people are abusers and victims themselves. Their common viewpoint: Appearances are more important than openness, honesty and integrity.

Which makes me wonder about those in our own organization who may outwardly seem to be righteous and upstanding, but who may, even unknowingly, be manifesting the terrible affliction of abuse in their own lives, families or positions.

There are some people who might say that to be an example, you must not reveal your flaws. I believe that to be an example you must realize your flaws and then show human revolution or transformation because of them.

In the Nov. 10 *World Tribune*, President Ikeda states: “Arrogant leaders—those who have stopped growing, lost the spirit of challenge and just strut around self-importantly—are, if anything, a hindrance to our movement.

“It is the time for a new generation of talented people to take the stage, confidently and without hesitation. May the young people stir up a storm with their youthful power and energy, creating a whirlwind of dynamic progress for kosen-rufu in the new century.”

Once I saw what I needed to change and how, my relationship with my former wife changed instantly. I was able to see her change and joyfully embrace my need to change. Not superficially because I was told to, but because I can’t live with not changing. I realize that my change must permeate my whole life, my family, my practice, my organization, through my action.

I know this could never have happened unless Mari and I were each sincere and committed to our day-to-day practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism within this SGI-USA organization. Much love to my daughters and their mother, my sister, and appreciation to her husband for showing me my ‘dark side’!