

WHY I AM NOW A BUDDHIST BY BRIAN MOCHIZUKI, RIVERDALE, MD.

I was born into a Buddhist family. My mom dragged me to meetings all the time. After awhile, I didn't want to go. When I got older, I refused to go with her. When I got into middle school, I didn't want to be a Buddhist at all. Nobody else in school was a Buddhist and I was very negative about anything having to do with Buddhism.

Last year, one of the music corps leaders in our area asked if I wanted to go to the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the Youth Performing Groups Conference. I agreed to go and my parents said they would pay for me to attend. However, just before it was time to go, I changed my mind and told my mom it was a waste of money to send me. She said it was already paid for, so why not go and check it out? I think she and my dad were really chanting that I would go. So I went.

What an incredible experience! I had a great time and met youth from all over the country who were Buddhist and in the music corps. When I got back, the first thing I told my mom was that I was determined to go back to the FNCC next year. I asked her if she would pay for my airfare if I paid for the conference.

I started saving the money I was earning from working at my dad's restaurant. It was hard to save that much, but I did. I was chanting a little bit, mostly on and off, but didn't want to go to meetings or chant and do gongyo regularly.

At first, I decided I wanted to go to the Junior High and High School Conference instead of going back to the Performing Groups Conference, because the music corps in our area wasn't together anymore. Then, I found out that our region's Create Peace Festival was going to take place on the same weekend as the conference. I wanted to go to the festival, but the only other conference I could attend in the summer was the Young Men's Conference in July. But I didn't want to attend that either because it was all guys—no girls. However, after learning about what the Create Peace festival was all about—to overcome violence in our communities—I felt that I really couldn't miss it, so I decided to go to the Young Men's Conference.

I'm really glad I went. I had a great time, met a lot of incredible people and I began to learn more about the SGI, President Ikeda, the spirit of Gajokai and why people chant.

After going to the FNCC this time, I decided I wanted to be a Buddhist. On July 10, just two days after returning from the trip, I did my first full gongyo on my own—where my mom didn't have to ask me to do it. I wanted to do gongyo for myself and it took me a whole hour to complete both the sutra and daimoku.

The experience of going to the FNCC has really opened me up to want to practice and to do gongyo. I am now trying to do at least one prayer and daimoku just about every day. And since school has started, I have been doing gongyo both in the morning and in the evening. It makes me feel really good inside and a lot of neat things are happening. I also started doing Gajokai.

For the Create Peace Festival, I was asked to play trumpet in the Youth Band. I went to my first band meeting and, even though there were only eight members, the young women's region leader really encouraged us about the spirit of the band and the significance of playing in the festival. It was a real struggle. Many times only a couple of us showed up for practice and we hardly ever got a chance to practice

together.

Then, three days before the festival, we were supposed to play for the entertainment committee. This was to be the first time we had ever played in front of an audience. A lot of us felt negative because we hadn't had much chance to practice together. I was feeling especially negative but I didn't want to disgrace the SGI-USA and mess up at the festival. When we played, we sounded horrible and were very discouraged. After that, many of us didn't want to play in the festival at all. But then our youth leaders and zone leader came back and gave us a lot of encouragement. They talked about the importance of the band, but said it was also our decision whether or not we would play.

I know my mom asked a lot of people to chant about the band, and I chanted about whether or not we should play in the festival. My mom told me to chant to change poison into medicine. I chanted vigorously because, deep down inside, I really wanted to give a great performance. The next day we had practice again. We played for the entertainment committee again, but instead of having the attitude of we can't play in the festival, we determined to do our best. Afterward, the committee and everyone there applauded our performance and said we played well. It was so different from the night before and I learned that when you chant strongly, you can change things around completely. We played in the festival and were great. That was really encouraging because before the festival we all thought it was completely impossible.

Now I am beginning to understand what changing poison into medicine means. Through this experience, I also learned about determination, fundamental darkness and obstacles. When you chant strongly, things really do happen. Now we want to keep the music corps going and become the best music corps in all of SGI-USA! I want to thank my parents for encouraging me to practice, and for their support in my going to the FNCC, being in the Music Corps and participating in the Create Peace Festival.

I want to suggest to the parents of other youth that you should send your kids to the FNCC, even if they aren't practicing and don't want to go. It really changes you and your feelings about being a Buddhist.