

## **EXPERIENCE—STEVE DEPIRO, EAST WENATCHEE, WASH. LEAVING THE DOUBT BEHIND**

**After 25 years of practice, Steve DePiro learns to be happy—in spite of himself.**

My wife, Susan, and I were introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism more than 25 years ago. Susan joined right away—she was and is very sincere—and chanted all the time.

I was a mess, working all the time, taking drugs and being miserable. I had zero self-confidence and spent a lot of time feeling sorry for myself.

Though I often mocked my wife for practicing Buddhism, I watched her grow, getting everything she was chanting for. I stayed the same. Susan was also attending a lot of meetings, and at one point I got fed up and gave her an ultimatum: She would have to choose between her practice and me. And if it were not me, I would leave. She said: "See you later. I'm doing this forever." This, I did not expect.

My wife was moving on with life, while I was standing still. I needed to chant, but my ego would not let me state the obvious. I began to chant after she went to work, too proud to let her know she had won. Yet once I began to practice, I could see things changing for the better.

A short while later, I got a job selling cars. Over the next 24 years, I had almost every position you can have in an auto dealership—from salesman to sales manager to general manager to dealer and back to salesman.

Throughout this period, I was sometimes hit with waves of depression and even self-hatred. I believe that since we all have a Buddha nature, self-hatred is a very serious problem. In a sense, when you hate yourself, you give your Buddha nature a black eye. I was giving myself a black eye for so long, I did not even know I was doing it.

Only by practicing and working with members in the SGI have I been able to face and deal with it. Learning to like who I am and believe that I deserve to be happy is something I had to wrestle with every day.

And although I received tons of benefits, I was a chronic whiner. I did not realize what fortune I had, nor did I realize how my self-slander was blocking me from receiving more fortune.

Around two and half years ago, things got ugly. I could not see the positive in anything. I hated my job and wasn't crazy about my life either. I was miserable. A total burnout—in serious financial trouble and spiritually bankrupt—I wanted to die. I fantasized about buying a motor home and just disappearing, but I knew my wife might find me, and I could not bear the idea of how my kids would feel about their dad.

Fortunately, through my Buddhist study and years of practice, I knew I could never ingest enough drugs or travel far enough to escape myself. I continued to chant, but only half-heartedly. I wanted and needed to change, but it seemed I could not. I did not like who I had become and it was hard to face other members.

During this time, various SGI leaders visited our area, and I was able to receive a lot of guidance. It was suggested that I study SGI President Ikeda's book *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death*. I was asked to study it very carefully; as if my life depended on it. I began to look at Buddhism differently. I slowly started to wake up.

First, I changed my schedule at work so I could chant an hour in the morning before

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gongyo. I studied President Ikeda's writings like never before. I did my best to encourage my members, including visiting them at their homes.

I visited one member that lives on top of a mountain in a bread truck. It is hard to get to his place—there is barely a road—and when he saw me, he said, “Steve, you must really be screwed up to come all this way to visit me!” I laughed and said, “You have no idea.”

As we chanted together, I began to feel the clouds break up and a little joy seep in. We talked a while, I thanked him for being there for me to visit, and I started on my way home. As I drove home, I felt so good, like there was hope. I remembered how great it is to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth and encourage other members.

I soon returned to—and finished—a project I had begun years ago: I wrote a book for car salesmen. I found the perfect editor and got it published. I quit my job and, with no money, started my own business, 1 on 1 Sales Coaching.com.

I now put on workshops and provide newsletters for salespeople and coaching videos for sales meetings. It has been two and a half years, and the business is a success. I travel, am financially fit and love what I do. I get paid to encourage salespeople and managers to listen to others and treat them with respect.

But the real benefit is not simply that I have a great job—I have really changed. Buddhism has helped me to grow up, leaving the doubt, the complaining, the guilt and the self-loathing behind. I can now honestly say that I have become happy. I never thought it would be possible. I thought I would have to practice lifetime after lifetime before becoming happy, but here I am, happy.

So what is truly important to me now? Seeking out President Ikeda's guidance and moving forward with my dreams. Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo no matter what happens” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 681). This is how I want to live.

I want to win in all the challenges I face, deal with the suffering, enjoy the joy and share my heart with others. With my Buddhist practice and the support of the SGI, there is no way I can lose. I cannot fail to become even happier.