

EXPERIENCE—ROSE TRIPLETT, CHICAGO THE COURAGE TO DREAM

Through her Buddhist practice, Rose Triplett accomplishes one impossible dream after another.

I began practicing Buddhism 27 years ago after being told by doctors that I would never lead a normal life. My life's journey has finally proven them wrong.

I am the oldest girl in a once dysfunctional family of nine children. My father was an alcoholic who also suffered from mental disorders. As children, we experienced extreme fear and suffering as a result of his violent behavior. Our weekends were always total nightmares. My father's insecurities and raging jealousy toward my mother resulted in his constantly beating and torturing her. As the oldest girl, I felt petrified and hopeless because I could not protect my mother or my younger brothers and sisters. The pain and hellish conditions continued for many years, entrenching my life in fear, hopelessness and anger, until I no longer wanted to live.

In 1972, I began a journey that would continue for the next 21 years. At the age of 16, I was hospitalized and diagnosed as schizophrenic, psychotic and suicidal. My mental and physical states were so affected due to my childhood experiences that doctors felt a frontal lobotomy would be the only way to sever the traumatic effects. This operation would cause me to lose my memories for life and also leave me in a zombie-like state. Because of my mother's wisdom and compassion, she refused the surgery. Instead, I was administered many psychotropic drugs and told that I would never live a normal life.

Nonetheless, I was released from the hospital and returned to graduate from high school with honors. I also received an honorary and academic scholarship to North Central College, whereupon I was again hospitalized. Following this release, I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

I was so surprised at the tremendous level of hope, courage and confidence exhibited by SGI members and felt as if I had entered a new dimension of my life. I immediately began to study everything about Buddhism and participate in SGI-USA youth activities. A major benefit that resulted was that the frequency of my trips to the hospital and my medication were greatly reduced.

As I studied, the particular passage from Nichiren Daishonin's writings that encouraged me most reads in part: "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412).

As a child, I deeply cherished a desire to become an attorney, but this dream had been totally lost due to my recurring illness. Now it was time for me to travel the path to accomplish my dreams for a loftier purpose. SGI President Ikeda encourages us that life is always a struggle and that we must never be defeated; that this attitude of faith is the key to living a life of supreme joy and happiness.

With these words and the encouragement of my seniors in faith to live a life without regrets, I enrolled at Chicago State University in 1978. However, my illness almost immediately returned and I was again hospitalized. For the next several years, I struggled with finances and mental illness, keeping alive the determination to finish college.

During this time, I re-connected to my family. Shortly before my father's death, I shared

Buddhism with him. Two years later, my mother became very ill and I temporarily moved back home. This gave me the opportunity to encourage and forge deeper relationships with my siblings, three of whom I have lost over the past several years due to fatal illnesses.

Even amid these hardships, my practice of Buddhism stayed strong and after 16 years of determined efforts, I received my B.S. degree in September 1989.

Now I was ready to tackle my impossible dream of going to law school. But this would prove no easy feat. I applied to and was rejected by more than 10 law schools. I chanted with the determination to accomplish my mission for kosen-rufu and, on July 16, 1990, I was accepted at Thurgood Marshall Law School in Houston.

Upon entering law school, I met my study partner, who is today my lifelong friend. Although she is not an SGI-USA member, she would always encourage me to chant when school became difficult and exhausting. And, in 1992, when my old familiar illness reappeared and I was again hospitalized, her husband, a hospital employee, protected and helped me so that this time my stay was only two days. I knew I had changed something deep within me.

While attending law school, the passage from the Daishonin that sustained me was: “A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith” (WND, 412).

On May 4, 1993, I was sworn in as an attorney at law. Finally, I had accomplished my lifelong dream of becoming an attorney for the justice and happiness of the common people. I immediately reported my determination to President Ikeda and received a warm and encouraging letter from his office in response, which stated in part, “How wonderful it is that you will take the oath of attorney on May 4, which is the day after President Ikeda himself departed on the great eternal voyage of kosen-rufu 33 years ago as the president of the Soka Gakkai.”

Successfully completing one journey and beginning another, I was hired as assistant state’s attorney for the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office in the Child Support Enforcement Division. Although I was fired in 1994 after another hospitalization with my illness, this gave me the opportunity to realize an even more impossible dream of becoming a sole practitioner of law, with five employees and the purchase of two buildings.

Today, I embark on yet another impossible dream: to re-develop the area where I grew up in Chicago, once considered one of the most dangerous places to live. But this is the place where I grew up, where my mother literally saved my life and where today our family gathers every third Sunday at Mom’s house for warm family dinners where we share our lives, hopes and dreams. This is where I choose to reply to President Ikeda and build a beautiful fortress for world peace filled with many happy families.

On Sept. 20, I accepted my new position as city planner for the city of Chicago. In fact, the interviewer stated, “Because Rose lives amongst the common people and because of her experience and deep concern for her neighborhood, she is the best candidate for the job.”

I am determined to continue to live the phrase that “no prayer goes unanswered, and that nothing is impossible based on sincere faith in the Gohonzon.” Although I am “filled with butterflies” at my new prospects, I am certain of one thing—the path I have chosen will sustain and fill my life and my environment with absolute happiness. Of this I am certain.