

To Create From What I See
By Kirk Condyles,
Long Island, New York

I FIRMLY believe that my practice in faith brought me to photography. My experience as a photographer, of being primarily involved in social documentary, has broadened my life. I have become much more aware of life's ups and downs, of the greatness of people's spirit. It sometimes seems to me that many Americans are spoiled. Right under our noses are people suffering. I know that even here on Long Island, children are going hungry. And others as well.

I have experienced the great joy that culture brings to people and seen what evil can do as well. I am not so simple as to believe that my work will bring some great change, but I am bringing my bucket to the ocean. I find Edward Steichen's comments useful, saying that he preferred to think of photography not as a fine art, but rather "as the art of photography," comparing it to a manicurist or a bootblack. "That's the way I like it," he said. And I agree. Let others decide what is art.

I was saved from a foolish life by art and culture and my life has been a struggle to become an artist, to keep working freely and furiously. To be honest with myself. I have been fortunate that others have seen something in my work and used my photographs. Now I would like to move on to the next step: to let myself go free and create from what I see. To abandon what is safe and familiar takes a lot of effort.

I feel great gratitude and amazement that I have the Gohonzon. I have many struggles, desires and weaknesses. But none of them compares with the fortune I have gained. My gratitude comes naturally when I chant to the Gohonzon and think of the last twenty-five years as a member of the SGI.

I first began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism the day after my nineteenth birthday. I attended my first meeting in Richmond, Virginia. It was a small meeting of about six people. I felt profoundly moved and began to chant that night. I feel especially lucky to have had as my first leader a Japanese-American lady by the name of Mrs. Costin. She was small but she was tough.

WE were a bunch of spaced-out hippies at first, but she raised us in our Buddhist practice, taught us about the Gohonzon and how to share this practice with others. She showed us how to challenge our problems with daimoku and by reading Nichiren Daishonin's letters. She was strict yet warm and steadfast, and you knew you could depend on her. I can still hear her voice and see her in my mind's eye. And I know that she is still there in Virginia, leading and guiding.

I had been an actor for many years and had become increasingly frustrated with the business as well as with blocked creativity. I knew that I was really finished with show business when I turned down a call to meet with Woody Allen about a new film.

I had always enjoyed writing and began to write short screenplays and filmed them in Super 8. This was my introduction to photography. Over the next three years I worked as a file clerk. I began taking photos on my lunch hour and on

weekends. I had sold my film equipment and bought a still camera. I knew very little about what I was doing, but went up to *Newsweek* magazine where I sold my first picture. Then I went back to school and studied photography. It wasn't long before I received my B.A. My thoughts went back to a time many years ago when I wrote a letter expressing my interest in photography to *National Geographic* for my fourth-grade career day.

They sent back a form letter telling me to forget it. They used only the best and they found the people they needed, not the other way around. Being so young, I took their advice and forgot about it, believing that it was beyond me. After years of practice, I found new excitement using the camera to express myself. When I think of it now, it seems almost mysterious how this practice directed me to my happiness.

THE organization, led by SGI President Ikeda, has always been the place for me to experience the real power of this teaching. Often I think I am my own worst enemy. But as long as I have continued to follow President Ikeda's guidance and participate in the kosen-rufu movement, I have experienced great protection in my life. Chanting and doing gongyo every day have given me the confidence to challenge what needs to get done. Without chanting, my creativity seems to go dormant. But after reciting the sutra and chanting, I have my best ideas or have the energy to make efforts that lead to a day of progress.

I have been exceedingly fortunate to have the support of my wife and daughter, and at times their faith in me seems greater than my own. I am very close with my mother and 95-year-old grandmother.

My father and I were estranged for years, I was able to renew my relationship with him, and we grew close before his death. There's no doubt that my life has been protected, and made far richer, thanks to my persistent efforts to practice Buddhism.

In President Ikeda's *Discussions on Youth*, I ran across this quote from Beethoven: "The true artist has no pride; unhappily he sees that Art has no bounds. Obscurely he feels how far away he is from his aim, and even while others may be admiring him, he mourns his failure to attain that end which his better genius illumines like a distant sun." I am no Beethoven, but I relate strongly to these words. I enjoy the process more than the completed work. The lust for life, the struggle, the need to express and construct flow through me despite the suffering I experience in creation. I admire Beethoven for his great humility and his relentless efforts to create.

MY first inspiration, Michelangelo, worked to the end of his life. He continued to write poems until then. In one, he refers to art as his primary interest, as his "idol and king." But he goes on to say that it is a means to serve. In his case, it is to serve "God" rather than his pride. I wish to serve beyond conceit and pride, to contribute to society whatever talents I have to express the human experience.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have found in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism the most seamless and pure philosophy. Not a day goes by that I do not think of my mortality, the vastness of the universe and our place in it. I am

Title: To Create From What I See

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/98 v.2 n.7 p.42 LB9807p42 Long Island, New York

Author: Kirk Condyles

Keywords: Career Create Essay Experiences Island Long Photo Photographers York

often oppressed by the terrible events around the world. Nichiren Daishonin's writings and President Ikeda's speeches offer answers and show me that I have no other choice but to devote myself to practice—that the answer lies in me and I must dig it out. □

Title: To Create From What I See
Subject: Living Buddhism 07/98 v.2 n.7 p.42 LB9807p42 Long Island, New York
Author: Kirk Condyles
Keywords: Career Create Essay Experiences Island Long Photo Photographers York