

'This Is Truly World Peace'

BY JAMIE CUTLER

CORRESPONDENT

Back in 1974 when we were still propagating this Buddhism on the street, I first met Hermine Gayle. My district chief, Keith Price, and I were out on the streets of New York City asking passersby if they wanted to go to a Buddhist meeting. When we asked Hermine, she said to me, "Not unless you want to follow me home to put my groceries away first."

She didn't expect me to say "Sure." But by the time we took her home, she was way too embarrassed to turn back.

Hermine has been a driving force for kosen-rufu in the Miami area for the last 19 years where she worked as a nurse. Her fighting spirit and determination encourage all who meet her.

But I remember how hard she struggled to learn gongyo. She wanted to get it perfect, so we worked together for eight or nine years. I know there were days when she wanted to "murdilize" me, but we kept challenging things together.

Hermine used to joke about how I followed her to Florida like she was a mother hen, "Peep, peep, cluck, cluck." But when we first came to Miami, there were only a few members who were spread out all over Miami. Together we developed a passion for developing Florida, which SGI President Ikeda had called one of the seven pillars of kosen-rufu on earlier visits to this tropical paradise.

Now, after 22 years of friendship, I can help to tell about one of her benefits. Here is the story that Hermine related to me.

"As I exited the expressway on a rainy day, I had to go around a sharp curve. My car skidded. I went through a guard fence, the car flew up into the air and I landed in the middle of the lake stuck inside the car.

"Immediately the automobile started to sink, so I let down the window. The only thing that came to my mind was how when Nichiren Daishonin was going to Tatsunokuchi to be beheaded he called out to the Buddhist deities for protection. I yelled out at the top of my lungs, 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.'

"A voice inside of my head told me to jump out of the car. Just as I leaped out, the auto sank. I do not swim, and as I was trying to tread water I got tangled up in the weeds. I lost consciousness and went under.

"One man driving by saw the accident, but he could not swim either. So he ran back out to the expressway to try to flag down some help. The first man who came along was a long-distance swimmer. He also had a cellular phone and called 911. Then he kicked off his shoes, took off his tie, jumped over the fence, and started swimming to where the water was bubbling.

"As he was nearing the car my body floated to the surface. Usually drowning victims do not surface until their lungs are filled with water. He grabbed me by the neck, because there was no sign of life.

"Seven to 10 minutes had elapsed since I had gone under. When he got me over the fence I started coughing. It was then that he realized I was still alive.

"The paramedics got me into the ambulance. As soon as I was strapped down, an 18-wheeler coming around the same curve had brake failure and slammed into the rear of the ambulance. The rear end was crushed, but again I was protected and no one else got hurt either. The damage was so extensive, though, that they had to call for another ambulance.

"At the hospital the doctor took X-rays and was shocked to see that my lungs were

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clear as a bell. Not one drop of water was noted on the radiology report. The doctor advised me to go home.

“I called my husband at work and asked him to please come and pick me up. I rested for about an hour, but I was determined to help my scheduled patients. I got myself ready to go back to work.

“My husband, Rick, knows how stubborn I am, so he drove me around all day. This was a real benefit because I was a visiting nurse at the time, and it was necessary to travel from home to home to see my patients. His work had given him the day off to help me. It was all a benefit because there was no way he was going to talk me out of caring for my patients.

“I truly felt that a deep change had taken place in my life. The gentleman who first saw the accident came over to our house that evening to see how I was because he was so impressed that I had survived. He felt that he had witnessed a miracle. He was convinced that I had been reborn. Maybe my mission is not complete, and I have been. My new car had been totaled, but I did not get a scratch. I felt renewed with a rejuvenated sense of mission for kosen-rufu.”

Hermine always talks about how her heart is filled with appreciation for the practice every day. “My mind cannot comprehend the power of this practice. However, my life is actual proof,” she says.

Hermine worked as a first aid nurse during the opening of the Florida Nature and Culture Center last year. Chefs came in from all over the country to prepare food at the center’s cafeteria. Hermine couldn’t believe her eyes when Keith Price, our old district chief from New York, called out her name. She was so excited that she told me and I went to the kitchen to see him. Neither of us had seen him for the past 19 years.

We laughed about following Hermine home that first day 22 years earlier, watching her put her groceries away and dragging her to her first meeting. She admitted that she came because we just seemed to refuse to give up. We were both so grateful at reuniting with our friend in faith.

As Hermine said, “This is truly kosen-rufu.”

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