

**PERSPECTIVE: Her Legacy: 'Chant for the Buddha Wisdom'**  
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**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Eva Sullivan, 71, a pioneer member in Washington, D.C., died on Dec. 31, 1996, after practicing for 25 years. Her legacy is now woven into the rich history of Buddhism in America, and in particular, the expanding history of African Americans in this practice.

Mrs. Sullivan began practicing through the efforts of her sister, Sarah Jordan, another deceased pioneer member, and Mrs. Sullivan's then-14-year-old daughter, Tracie. In helping Tracie learn gongyo, Mrs. Sullivan herself began to do gongyo and became a Buddhist. One year later, her other daughter, Francine, began to practice as well.

Over the years, Mrs. Sullivan worked as a hostess for servicemen during World War II and a nursing assistant for learning disabled children. In the early years of her practice, when Mrs. Sullivan worked a swing shift, she often couldn't make meetings, but she would always chant for their success.

Her life was devoted to supporting and encouraging other people. She understood that through the practice of Buddhism one can make changes in the depths of one's life. Her standard encouragement, to those who sought it, was, "Chant for the Buddha wisdom." Her Southeast District members adopted this as their unofficial motto.

Although Mrs. Sullivan was always a very independent woman (she purchased and completely paid off her home by herself after her divorce), when she became ill three years ago and was operating with only one-fourth of her lung capacity, she had to rely on others. This was difficult for her because she feared that if she appeared weak others might take advantage of her. But through her practice she started to open her life up even more. Her true nature began to shine and her warmth, which sometimes hid behind her strict guidance, came to the forefront. She continued sharing her life and wisdom with others.

One member recalled that Mrs. Sullivan loved gongyo. When he visited her during one of her hospitalizations, she was determined to do a full gongyo even after a very difficult night. Instead of complaining, she courageously battled her illness, often quoting from Nichiren Daishonin's "Reply to Kyo'o": "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?... A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 119-20).

Mrs. Sullivan's Southeast District is located in an area some consider to be D.C.'s most dangerous and downtrodden, but Mrs. Sullivan never saw it in that light. She always saw its beauty even when others did not. Because of her vision, her members now dream of a future culture center in that part of the city.

The members of Mrs. Sullivan's district came to rely heavily on her wisdom, tenacity and encouragement. They were constantly asking what they could do to help her. When members realized how sick she was and that she was growing closer to death, they, along with her daughter, Francine, began fiercely chanting for her to recover. Their unified chant amounted to: "Don't go. We're not strong enough."

But, Francine recalls, "As I continued to chant, I started letting her go." It was as if Mrs. Sullivan knew before her family and members that she had in fact given them enough to stand on their own and that it was OK for her to leave. Until the very last moment, Francine chanted in her mother's ear at the hospital, telling her how very victorious she was as she made it to the last day of the year, which is such an important day in Buddhist tradition. The hospital staff was extremely courteous — the head nurse hugged Francine and even the doctor told Francine how sincerely sorry he was.

"It was such a warm experience," says Francine, "but I was wondering where were the

1,000 Buddhas who were supposed to come get my mom? A leader had to point out that they were there, all around me in the form of hospital staff, friends and members.”

In addition to her members and her children, Mrs. Sullivan also leaves behind many grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews to continue “chanting for the Buddha wisdom.”

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