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Face To Face With
My Family's Karma

Oct. 7, 1995, 3:10 p.m. — My ex-husband called. My oldest son, Tommy, had been in a car accident and was in the hospital.

I can't tell you the emotions that penetrated my entire existence at that very moment. Immediately after the call, I chanted three daimoku to the Gohonzon, grabbed my sutra book and beads, and my husband, Para, and I were out the door.

At the hospital, we were met by Tommy's father, who was literally in the state of devastation and insanity. Tommy was unconscious in the emergency room. As I held my son's hand, I thanked my Buddhist practice that he was breathing.

I told Tommy I was there with him, fighting and transforming my daimoku into his life force and strength, so not to worry. As I look back, I am amazed at how I maintained my composure in what is any parent's worst nightmare. Nichiren Daishonin states that the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat. By taking this to heart, I summoned up my determination to change this poison into medicine.

Tommy was diagnosed with several traumatic injuries to his head and face. The entire left side of his face was fractured. The doctor said that there was no guarantee that the sight in his left eye could be saved. Tommy was also suffering from internal bleeding in his brain that needed to be stopped immediately or it could be fatal. The neurosurgery and the plastic surgery were scheduled immediately, while the reconstruction of his face was scheduled for a later date.

During the six hours of surgery, I sequestered myself and fervently chanted while others patiently sat in the waiting room. As I chanted, my thoughts flashed back to many incidents before the accident.

It was nearly half a year before the accident when Tommy moved in with his father. At that time, my relationship with my son was deteriorating day by day. He had grown increasingly rebellious since my divorce. He often became violent with his little brother — so violent that Para contemplated reporting him to the police. I tried to understand Tommy's struggle to comprehend and adjust to his new circumstances. However, I felt something fundamental was missing between us — a sense of respect and trust. It was during this time that Tommy decided to live with his father.

I was devastated, as any mother would be. I tried to understand that it would be the best thing for him. The following day, I called Los Angeles and sought guidance from Wendy Clark, our SGI-USA women's division leader. My first concern was the possibility of my son's religious conversion: His father and his stepmother are devoted Baptists.

However, Mrs. Clark said that a mother's prayer determines everything. She urged me not to be shortsighted but to have a long-term vision. She suggested I let him be whatever he desires for now, but to continue to create opportunities for communication through letters or by sending him SGI President Ikeda's guidance once in a while. She said that he may not read them right now but, without doubt, the time will come when he will realize the significance of this teaching through his own experience. I then understood there was nothing to fear as long as my faith was intact.

As I continued chanting during the operation, I realized that this was the very opportunity for Tommy to realize the power of the Gohonzon with his life. I sincerely prayed from the bottom of my heart that he would one day become a capable leader in society by demonstrating the validity of this Buddhism.

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The surgery was successful, though we were told the next 48 hours would be crucial. I furiously chanted throughout the night beside Tommy to fuse his life with the power of the Law. During that time, I was often confronted by the devil of cowardliness within myself that intimidated me with the possibility of losing my son. I had to fight off my weakness with daimoku.

The following morning, I went home to care for my younger son, Tomell. I will never forget how relieved and at ease I felt once I sat in front of the Gohonzon. I cried for the first time since the accident. At that point, I honestly became overwhelmed with appreciation for this opportunity to eradicate our karma.

I thought about a conversation I had had with my mother two weeks before the accident. At that time, I was suffering from a severe rash on my face that kept me awake even at night. I had seen two dermatologists in three years, yet my skin condition continued. When I told my mother about my problem, she pointed out that it was our family's karma to suffer from problems that deal with the neck and head: One brother has suffered from migraine headaches and neck pains for many years following a car accident, and my mother, another brother and my sister have all been hospitalized at psychiatric institutions. My mother urged me to understand this deep-rooted family karma and to apologize for my past slanders of the Law. I acknowledged the concept intellectually, but I was, in my heart, still skeptical about the relationship between my skin problem and my family's karma.

But now with Tommy's accident, I wholeheartedly comprehended this profound teaching with my life.

I prayed to completely eradicate this family karma for eternity. This Buddhism teaches that nothing is coincidental — all phenomena are based on cause and effect.

I looked up SGI President Ikeda's guidance for Oct. 7, the date of the accident, and was convinced of the reason for Tommy's accident:

A strong-willed or courageous person is always the master of his own heart. Therefore, he fears nothing, is defeated by nothing, and shrinks from nothing. As the Goshō states, 'The wise will rejoice and the foolish will retreat.' No matter what may happen, a courageous person advances against any obstacle like a fierce, raging wave. He is, with head held high, confident like the sun, king of the heavens, shining above the clouds. (*Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 302)

I read it to Tommy that day at the hospital. As soon as he was conscious, I had him hold a pair of prayer beads. He continued to hold them tightly throughout his hospitalization. In fact, his father told me that Tommy would search for them whenever they were not in his hand, even though he had never been a consistent practitioner. I also noticed that whenever I was about to nod off as I chanted, he would rub his beads as if to wake me up for more chanting.

The battle, however, was far from over. Tommy was scheduled for major surgery to reconstruct his face. It required placing several metal plates in different areas of his face as well as transplanting a piece of bone. From the surgery, Tommy's face swelled to three times its normal size. None of us could believe a human face could enlarge so much.

I don't think that any of us can understand the excruciating pain that Tommy must have endured. However, he displayed tremendous courage and strength, which touched many of the doctors and nurses, not to mention his family. I believe Tommy now realizes in his heart that he was protected by the Gohonzon because he was chanting at the hospital. The doctors were cautious about the infections that normally develop after surgery, but to date, there has been no sign of infection or of any side effects — and he didn't lose his sight!

The doctors have been astonished with the progress Tommy has made each day. Not only that, I have overcome my skin problem. Also, Tommy's father said to me that he

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recognized the strength that must have come from my religion. He was even explaining to his wife what this Buddhism is about — this from a man who had resisted letting me attend meetings! I never knew he understood any part of this teaching, certainly not enough to explain it to his wife. Since then, we have shared with each other about our religions.

The greatest benefit I received through this ordeal is my improved relationship with my son. Where our mother-and-son relationship had been fragile, now the bond between us is stronger because it's solidified with love, respect and trust. Recently, his father told me Tommy had said, "I was scared throughout the whole incident, but now it doesn't matter anymore, because my mom and I are closer than ever, and that's all that matters."

I have tremendous gratitude for Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, which not only helped me to expand my character a little more as a mother and as an individual, but also provided me with an opportunity to gain greater confidence in the validity of this Buddhism. I am also very grateful for the daimoku my friends in the SGI chanted for Tommy.

How can I express my appreciation for this practice? I will do whatever I can within my capacity for the sake of kosen-rufu and the happiness of all people, together with my husband and my children.

Last spring, Tommy chose to move back home with us. He was accepted at a wonderful private school, where he is now on the freshman honor roll and the football team. We are like best friends now, and he is an excellent big brother to Tomell. I am deeply appreciative to my husband for not only the support he extended during the ordeal, but also for the unconditional love and infinite generosity he gives us in our everyday lives.

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