

Bridging the Gap Through My Actions
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When I was hired by the Virginia Beach Police Department in 1987, I really thought I could change things — I was going to save everyone and make everything better. Very soon I realized there were no good or bad people, and no situation was black or white; rather, there were many shades of gray.

I was by no means naive to human suffering. My mother and I were introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1978 when I was 15. It changed my life! Before that, my family endured alcoholism, poverty and often hopelessness. As much as we loved one another, we were dysfunctional.

In 1987, I graduated from the Police Academy and was now "on the street." I immediately found out that wearing a blue uniform, much of the time, created an instant gap. I was seeing that there are people who don't like the police — who even hate them.

As a practicing Buddhist, I tried to treat everyone with respect. No matter how diverse the people I was encountering, they all had the Buddha nature in them. I didn't want to make negative causes, and in some cases it was a challenge. No matter what the other person was saying or doing, I could do my job without being nasty or degrading. I discovered that even in negative situations, I could create something positive.

After several years on the job, I began to feel increasing stress from the events unfolding in the news: There were cases of police officers lying in court, stealing and even beating citizens. There were also regular reports of officers robbing drug dealers. I became depressed and then angry. Who the hell are these guys? I felt they were giving all police officers a black eye! I was working alongside officers who cared and every day endured things most people couldn't fathom.

My lowest point came in 1989 during the Virginia Beach riots. I was walking a beat at the oceanfront when the riots erupted. I worked three 17-hour days in what felt like a war zone. To get to and from work safely — one officer was beaten in his car while leaving work — I had to turn my shirt inside out to hide my police patches. I seriously considered quitting.

I knew I was at a crossroads. I put my faith in the Gohonzon and chanted daimoku to understand and make a decision. I began to see clearly that I couldn't hide from what's happening in the world just because it would be easier. I am a police officer because that is my mission. I am at that homicide, suicide, robbery or child abuse incident so that I can provide strength, compassion and protection for people in need.

I started to focus on the positive aspects and outcomes. In the process, I began to love my job.

Shortly after that, I became a detective and worked burglary and sex crimes. I am the second female in the history of the Virginia Beach Police Department to work robbery and homicide cases.

Although I cannot actively propagate at my workplace, all my co-workers know that I'm a Buddhist. Through my actions, I believe I am propagating this religion. Many times they are amazed at the respect and cooperation I get from the most hardened criminals and hostile citizens. Through my actions, I have changed for the better many people's perceptions of the police.

And I have helped so many people in their time of crisis. That is how I've tried to bridge the gap.

I realize that wherever I am in my life and career is where my mission lies. I am where I

am for a reason. By showing respect to the people I encounter and through sincere, meaningful dialogue, I can touch a person's heart and begin to bridge the gap. I know that no matter how horrendous the situation I may find myself in, I can change poison into medicine through this practice.

I am happy to report that on Nov. 16, 1996, I was reassigned to the position of personnel selection officer in which I handle the hiring and assist with the training of recruits at the police academy. What a tremendous benefit! After all the anger I felt and all the daimoku I chanted, it's great to now have direct input into who we entrust with so much power to protect all of us.

On a final note, I would like to thank my women's division district leader who never gave up on me when I pulled away from the organization. Although I never stopped chanting, who knows how much faster I could have changed things with the support and guidance of the SGI-USA members. It's so good to be back!

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