

**LINDA MAE KLANESKI, HONOLULU**  
**Getting Serious About Life and Her Responsibilities**

Aloha! I became a member of this organization when I was only 3 months old, and in 1978, my family and I moved from Japan to Hawaii. When I turned 6, my mom began to teach me how to do gongyo. She'd spend every spare moment she had teaching me. At that young age, I loved doing gongyo.

Then as I grew a little older, I began to despise it. I didn't want to pray to the Gohonzon — I wanted to go out and play with my friends. And I would do anything to get out of doing it, including waking up as early as 6:00 a.m. on the weekends, going to my friends' house and not coming home until 7:00 p.m. But my mom, being as strict as she was, never stood for any of my excuses or games, and I'd end up in big trouble.

Eventually, my mom pushed me into Junior Pioneers (now the Boys and Girls Group). I never wanted to go to those meetings; I just wanted to play with my friends. But in my mom's eyes, these activities came before anything else.

I used to feel so frustrated and resentful toward my mom. I couldn't understand why I had to do gongyo, why I had to go to all the Junior Pioneers meetings, and why I had to do all these things and my two younger brothers didn't.

As the years passed, I grew into a very angry child. My attitude became so bad that even my parents were shocked. In my house, it became like a daily ritual for me to fight with my brothers. And this wasn't just any type of fighting. It would get so bad that we'd end up with holes the size of oranges and melons in every door in the house, including the front door. I almost always talked back to my parents, not caring about how mean and hurtful the words I said were. I just didn't care. All I cared about was my friends and having fun.

When I turned 10, my mom pushed me into the Fife and Drum Corps. On my first day of practice, I kept wishing and hoping that my new young women's division leader would forget about me. But she didn't. I couldn't run away either, because my mom made sure I woke up early and was ready and waiting when the leader came to pick me up. I felt so uncomfortable that first day. I recognized a few girls from Junior Pioneers and from my district, but I didn't talk to them. I just stayed with my YWD leader the whole time.

In the beginning, I was extremely shy and quiet. I hated meeting new people and being forced into group discussions. I'd always feel pressured and nervous when I knew I'd have to talk in front of people. Talking in front of large groups of people was the No. 1 thing I dreaded. From introducing myself to strangers, to sharing experiences, to reading aloud the *Daily Guidance*, to helping out in skits — all these things I did regularly in the Fife and Drum Corps. I had no choice but to force myself. Sometimes I'd beg my leaders not to make me talk, to choose someone else, or I'd try and hide in the bathrooms so they'd skip my turn. But none of these tactics ever worked.

As time went by, I actually began to enjoy my practice in Fife and Drum Corps. I received such invaluable training and experience that I otherwise would have never gained had my mom not forced me to join. Not only that, but I began making many new friends as well as gaining the confidence I lacked as a young child. All the training that I received while I was in Fife and Drum Corps helped me out so much in my daily life. But I didn't realize this until much later.

As I entered high school, my attitude towards my family became worse. My practice, too, became worse. I began skipping Fife and Drum Corps practices and did gongyo only when I was at a meeting, or my mom was totally on my back. I believed in the Gohonzon, but I just didn't want to do gongyo, chant daimoku or attend any activities.

Eventually, my attitude toward my practice began to be reflected in my daily life. School became such a chore that toward the end of my sophomore year in high school, I began skipping classes. All the while, every year, my grades got worse and worse. In my senior year, I began going out a lot. I'd go out every weekend and stay out until 4:00 in the morning.

I barely went to school at all, and when I was there, I just slept in class — I was just a body filling a space. I didn't care what my grades were, I didn't care how angry my parents were, or if all I did was fight with my brothers. My happiness revolved around partying with my friends. Because I was always fighting with my parents, I never wanted to stay home. I'd constantly blame my parents and everyone else around me for my unhappiness.

In 1991, I barely graduated from high school. I don't know how I did it, but I did. Immediately after graduation, I enrolled in a community college. During this time, NSA changed to SGI-USA and SGI President Ikeda's guidance was on soft power. A lot of members stopped practicing, including myself. I knew that this practice was good for me, but I was just so lost during this time that I went astray. I quit Fife and Drum Corps altogether.

Somehow, through all this partying that I did, I was really protected. I know this was because of my mom's daimoku. Ever since I was little, all I can remember is seeing my mom always chanting. When everyone went to bed, my mom was chanting. When we woke up in the morning she was chanting. If she wasn't chanting, she was working, doing activities, or reading book after book after book.

Then one day out of the blue, I get a call from one of my leaders asking me if I'd like to join Fife and Drum Corps and help her put together a Flag Section. I was ecstatic! Ever since I can remember, I've always wanted to do flags, but in the past they needed more instrument players than flags, so I never had a chance. I decided to do it. Not long thereafter, my leader graduated.

The new Fife and Drum Corps chief was same age as I. We knew each other and got along pretty well. But, as time went by, she would get on my nerves. She would constantly call me to make sure that I was calling the members, asking if I was coming to the meeting, the practice, if I had done this and that. It drove me crazy. I began giving her a hard time, making things really difficult for her. Now I really didn't like her at all. And because I was still partying hard, I would always come to practices late. Sometimes, I'd forget to pick up the members I promised to give rides to, and sometimes I just wouldn't show up.

But this didn't stop her. She kept on, no matter how difficult a time I gave her (and trust me, I really gave her a hard time). She was persistent. I could not understand how, no matter what I did, she never gave up on me. This attitude of hers really freaked me out. Her heart was made of gold, and her intentions were, too. She would always ask me: "Linda, what about the members? Don't you care about them?" I could see the genuine concern she had, but because of my low life-condition I didn't care.

When I'd come to practices late, or not show up or whatever, my members would always call me asking me where I was, why I didn't come to practice, etc. I would feel bad, but I kept this routine going for a while.

As days turned into months, I began feeling a change going on inside of me. It was like my heart was opening up, like the hard ice around it was beginning to melt. It was weird, but I began to feel this sort of responsibility toward the members. They depended on me, but I wasn't there for them. I knew I couldn't help them in the condition I was in. I had to change! I had to show actual proof of my life!

I began reminiscing about my days as a young member in the Fife and Drum Corps. I remembered how much I had enjoyed my practice because I had such great leaders to help

guide me along in my practice. From that moment, I made a strong determination to be serious about my practice, about my life, and about my responsibility as a leader.

Slowly, I began chanting daimoku, doing gongyo daily, attending activities. At first, I did it for my members, because I needed to be strong so that I could help them. Helping them to overcome their problems, being there for them, made me happy. It was as if the problems that I was going through in my daily life were so small in comparison.

Through these changes I forged such deep bonds with my members. I made a list with the names of all of my members and every time I chanted, I brought this list out.

Through this, I changed many things. For one, our section was able to grow from only a few, to a whopping 27 strong. It was amazing! My life-condition began to change tremendously, and suddenly I began to actually feel hope for my future. My relationship with the Fife and Drum Corps chief took such a major turn that today we are best friends.

In October 1994, the baton of responsibility as Fife and Drum Corps chief was passed to me. This was a really big step in my life.

Over the past two years I have challenged many difficult times, but I have also gained much benefit! To help any person overcome their sufferings through this practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and to see them blossom into beautiful flowers is the most gratifying feeling I have ever experienced!

I realize how much I've changed in my life through my practice. Today, my relationship with my mom has improved so much that I no longer feel as though I cannot stay in the same room with her for more than 10 minutes at a time.

I can't even believe how much better we get along! We can talk to each other about so many things very open; I feel as though she is not only my mom but my friend.

About four years ago, my mom opened her own business, and I've been working with her ever since. And this is such a benefit for me, because before that I never held a job longer than three months at a time. Not only that, but I was financially ruined. I never had any money, only bills. But now, not only do I get paid well, I also get a lot of fringe benefits.

As for my relationship with my dad, it has improved drastically — so much so, that we can actually have a conversation and laugh about it. I don't fight with my brothers like I used to, and the holes in the doors, well, they're all gone now.

I've been going to school for about a year and a half. After I get my associates in arts degree in cosmetology, I'll be transferring to the University of Hawaii to major in foreign languages. After that, I want to continue to expand my horizon and further my education.

I feel so much hope for my future. I realize now that it was me, and not my environment, that changed. Because I changed, naturally my environment changed. I feel that this all would not have been possible if it were not for the great training that I received in the Fife and Drum Corps. Though I have changed so much, I have a long ways to go. I will do my best to continue raising as many capable young women for the future of kosen-rufu as I can, so that they too may feel the same true happiness that I feel in my life today!

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Title: Getting Serious About Life and Her Responsibilities

Subject: World Tribune 03/28/97 n.3132 p.14 WT970328p14

Author: Linda Mae Klaneski

Keywords: About Corps Drum Experiences Fife Getting Life Music Responsibilities Serious Youth