

**ANN MIKS, CULVER CITY, CALIF.**  
**It's Never Too Late**

Most of my life it seemed that everyone else led a better life than I did. The difference between me and others was so great, I adopted as my motto the old cliché, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” My friends had nice parents, good health and all the wonderful things I always wanted but never had. But there was one thing I thought I *could* have — marriage and children. Those were normal parts of life; how could it be difficult?

My family moved from Hawaii in the early '50s to the Denver area because of my poor health. I was born with asthma. Denver wasn't as good for my health as they thought, so after a year we moved to Los Angeles. In 1961, when I was 11, my family received the Gohonzon.

I was to learn firsthand the meaning of obstacles and changing one's destiny. Around this time, my parents started divorce proceedings. Immediately after the Gohonzon was enshrined in our home, my mother had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. I had to take responsibility for everything, from changing my little sister's diapers and ironing my father's shirts to running to the store for food. There was no time left for me to play with other children. A few years later, my father stopped working because he was stressed out from his job. Since we still had bills to pay, I started working evenings and weekends to pay the rent and buy food. I was 15.

I remember wondering, “Is this what life is about?” I was attending SGI-USA discussion meetings and youth division activities, but I was so overwhelmed with family responsibilities that I always felt ashamed.

I often wondered, “Will I ever have a happy family?” Because I practiced, I knew everything should improve. I was always encouraged when my SGI friends shared their dreams about the future, but I had no confidence that my dreams would come true. And when my friends from school asked me to go out on the weekends to the big dances, I had to turn them down. I didn't have the money, and I had to work.

One of my friends from school even encouraged me to run away from home. She told me that what I had to do to take care of my family was too much — I should be having fun. I pondered this idea for a while and then realized it would do no good to run away. I would still need money, and I would still need to finish school.

Eventually, as I continued to practice, things began to change. I started to enjoy my life. And I found that I had the energy to keep going despite the difficulties of my young life. I was involved in young women's division activities and the Fife and Drum Corps. By the time I reached my 20s, my family problems had improved and I began to feel more like a normal person. My father started working again. My sister graduated from high school and was independent, and my mother was no longer hospitalized. I realized I could live my life the way I wanted. So I decided to chant a million daimoku for ME and MY LIFE.

Just before I started this, a man with whom I not only didn't get along but who used to upset me quite a bit started paying a lot of attention to me, even asking my opinions. I was shocked! As we talked, I found myself falling in love. I had met someone whom I could truly respect and admire. The only problem was that Sonny was in love with someone else. I remember crying in front of the Gohonzon, asking, “How come I didn't meet him first?” Why, I cried, was I so busy taking care of my family that I never had time to find someone I could really like?

As the years passed — and several million daimoku went by — we became good friends. We learned all about each other, our weak points, our strong points and what our true natures were. Those years also gave us the opportunity to develop a relationship that revealed what we had to offer each other. Eventually we married.

When SGI President Ikeda visited the United States in 1990, I remember him saying: “By refreshing your life force through faith, you can work and study much harder than others, and you can also build a model family. People will then place their trust in you and may remark at how, as a Buddhist or as a member of the SGI family, you stand out among others. This is actual proof.”

I felt deep inside that I needed to redouble my prayers and determination to do just that. The idea of actual proof rang over and over in my mind and in my heart. I began to feel stronger and freer — a feeling of no regrets.

Now, if you’ve been calculating my age as you’ve read this, you may have noticed that I learned about karma as a teenager, started to enjoy life in my 20s, got married in my 30s and got serious about life in my 40s. Yes, you’re right — it’s never too late. This is not to say that my problems disappeared; I just became stronger in dealing with them.

I had major surgery just before our wedding, which left me with the feeling that I could never have children. And since I had taken care of my family throughout my life, I felt I’d done that already. I was satisfied with the way things were.

Or so I thought.

Two years later, at 42, I became pregnant. My doctor told me not to announce the news until all the tests showed good results. For a couple of months the doctor seemed happy, but never 100 percent confident. Then he said everything looked good. He assured me that it would be OK to announce my pregnancy. When I did, I couldn’t believe the joy my friends expressed.

The next day, I had a miscarriage.

Feelings of failure and disappointment welled up in my mind as I tried to tell myself: “I’m too old to have a child anyway. Everything will be fine.”

Eventually I felt myself accepting with greater joy the life that died, and I truly didn’t worry. I realized how fortunate I was to have the family I had and grew more determined to care for other people. I enjoyed my life. I was satisfied with the way things were.

Two years later, at 44, I thought I was going through menopause. But no. To the shock of my doctor and my family, I was pregnant again.

Nothing has ever come easy for me. My pregnancy was no different. As the months went by and as the baby grew, so did fibroid tumors. I had three: One was the size of a watermelon, the second the size of a cantaloupe and the third the size of an orange. Specialists reviewed and monitored my condition constantly.

Sonny was completely supportive. He did everything to take care of me. I even worked all nine months. Without his support, I could never have handled the pregnancy. I also need to add that one month before the baby was due, my husband was laid off from his job.

The doctor told me that I could not have a normal delivery, and that the baby’s lungs would be monitored to determine the right time for delivery. My situation was given special attention. Finally a delivery date was decided upon.

But during the Cesarean operation, complications arose and I began to lose blood. The doctors couldn’t immediately deliver the baby as expected because she was trapped by the tumors. A tug of war started; I was losing more and more blood. There was a short window of time for the doctors to deliver our baby before both our lives were threatened — and that window closed before they finally wrestled the baby free.

Although I was awake during all this, the doctors didn’t say what was going on those

precious moments when our baby's life hung in the balance. I was wondering what was going on, but I thought it must all be a normal part of having a Cesarean.

The doctors' first concern was the baby's life; they had no time to lose. They rushed her to the intensive care unit, where she was carefully monitored. I spent a long time in the recovery room — they were trying to replace the blood I had lost.

Apparently I was the talk of the hospital. Each nurse who came into my room would say: "Oh, you're the one! We heard about you!"

By the way, Sonny got his job back the week the baby was born.

We have now been the parents of Alexandra Mitsuko for two years. As challenging and wonderful as her birth was, it was only the beginning. I know we have a lot to look forward to over the next 20 years or so: I'm sure we'll have a lot of challenges, but I know that through them, we'll find even more love.

It's been a fast and enjoyable 36 years since I first chanted to the Gohonzon. I have a lot of appreciation for all the friends who encouraged me to look to the future and never give up hope. I know that all the causes I made to share the practice with others have been my opportunities to change my destiny and enjoy my life.

**WT**

Title: It's Never Too Late

Subject: World Tribune 04/11/97 n.3134 p.6 WT970411p06 Culver City, California

Author: Ann Miks

Keywords: California Children City Culver Experiences Family Late Mothers Never Relationships