

Taking Control of My Life
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Everything in my life seemed to come so easily. I had very caring parents who were always there for me. Although I grew up in a sometimes hostile environment, where gangs were present and drugs were readily available, my family was always protected. I believe this was a result of my mother being a pioneer SGI-USA member.

But I think because I had it so easy, I began to take my life for granted. During my sophomore year in college, I hung around people who were doing drugs and were involved in illegal activities such as drug dealing and robbery. Also, I began experimenting with marijuana, and my grades dropped.

Strangely, at the same time, a young men's division leader visited me, encouraging me to become an active YMD member. I would listen, but I always came up with excuses why I couldn't. And I realized that I didn't want to go to college anymore.

It was at this point, when my life-condition hit its lowest, that my negative causes finally caught up with me. I was arrested and convicted of being an accomplice to several robberies!

While waiting for my sentencing date, my YMD leader continued to encourage me, and I chanted to change my situation. Also, a few YMD members in my area came over to chant with me. We chanted vigorous, heartfelt daimoku to change poison into medicine. These YMD members were so confident that I would overcome this horrific obstacle. And they slowly but surely instilled their never-give-up spirit in me.

At the time of my sentencing, I vividly remember my mother chanting in the courtroom, praying for the best outcome — one that would exclude state penitentiary time. Our prayers were answered, and I received one year at a rehabilitation camp, a mere slap on the wrist considering the armed robbery charges.

There I started doing a consistent gongyo and chanting consistent daimoku. I introduced some of my fellow inmates to this Buddhism, and my life-condition began to elevate. All of my months in the rehabilitation center were incident-free; I was even chosen as a trusted ward to work at different sheriffs' stations during most of my sentence. Again and again, various SGI members visited and supported me until my release.

I was released three months early, because of good behavior, in October 1983. My life-condition had changed 180 degrees. Immediately, I enrolled back in college. And I became an active member in my district. I began doing Gajokai, Soka Group and roller gymnastics.

In 1986, I graduated from California State University Los Angeles with a bachelor of arts in social welfare, earning a 3.5 GPA my junior and senior years. I have since received my teaching credential for elementary education and have been teaching for more than eight years. Ultimately, I hope to become a principal, and I'm beginning the program next fall.

I find this all so incredible. It's amazing to have received a teaching credential considering my past record. I truly feel my mission is to be a role model for today's youth, using the guidance of SGI President Ikeda and the concepts of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism as my guides.

To all the SGI members who supported me and helped me gain control of my life: Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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