

PERSPECTIVE: Out of the Ashes

By GINA JONES

Riverside, Calif.

We must have been quite a sight for our neighbors that April morning. Our three small children, my husband and I, together with our altar in our front yard, while the fire department extinguished the last of the embers in our home.

Neighbors we didn't even know came from up and down the street with words of comfort, clothes and diapers for the baby, breakfast, coffee and other amenities. They looked on in amazement at our calm and surprisingly cheerful attitude in the midst of this disaster. We thanked them all heartily and welcomed them to return for an open house once we rebuilt.

We were not at all discouraged, having sensed immediately the great benefit this fire somehow was for our family. To many non-Buddhists, the idea of something apparently so negative being of value and offering an opportunity for growth is foreign. That morning, we talked at length with many neighbors, explaining our Buddhist philosophy to them.

A particularly close bond was created that morning between myself and Fran, who lived across the street. To her surprise, we soon moved temporarily into the house next door to her. Since then, I've spent many afternoons at her kitchen table talking about life, Buddhism, cooking, gardening, family.... Recently, she was preparing to make a difficult cross-country trek in her car, and I taught her how to chant. She returned from her trip, sharing with me how she had chanted much of the way, and what a smooth trip it had been.

Though our reconstruction is not complete yet, we decided to host a district end-of-summer barbecue in our yard.

Preparations were well under way when, the day before the event, I awoke in the middle of the night with a pain in my abdomen that was worse even than I remember childbirth being. I kept waiting for the pain to lessen as I tried various remedies, but it only worsened. In between vomiting and groaning, I cried in my husband's arms. The pain was nearly unbearable.

The next morning, I called Fran and asked her to bring me a heating pad and some pain reliever. She kindly came over, prepared a meal for my children and sat with me for a while.

"Why don't you cancel your party tomorrow?" she suggested. "I'm sure everyone will understand."

I assured her that I would be fine by then — though I felt anything but fine at the time. I had known all night, though struggling in agony, that this enigmatic pain was arising as an opportunity for me to challenge my life and grow. I wasn't going to die. I was changing karma. Once again, Fran was surprised by my "unconventional" (to her) spirit.

The morning of the district barbecue, I awakened feeling absolutely invigorated. And all of our preparation paid off. The event was thoroughly enjoyable for everyone involved. The laughter of good friends and the sounds of children playing are still ringing in my ears.

Later on in the day, I went to Fran's to return the heating pad and the platter she'd loaned me for the barbecue. She said to me then: "You look really great! I mean it. You look beautiful."

It was then that I explained to her my philosophy about obstacles from another perspective. "It is the difficulties I encounter in my efforts to bring joy to others," I said, "that makes those efforts so valuable. If it were easy, there would be less value in those efforts."

That day Fran had a friend visiting. She told her friend the story about our fire and even

Title: Perspective: Out of the Ashes

Subject: World Tribune 10/24/97 n.3162 p.3 WT971024p03 Riverside, California

Author: Gina Jones

Keywords: Ashes California Community December Experiences July Opinion Perspectives Riverside
Tribune World

about my illness the day before. Then she told her that we were Buddhists.

“Oh, yeah?” her friend said. “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?”

Incredulously Fran replied: “Yes! How did you know?”

Turns out, 15 years ago this friend was invited to an SGI meeting and chanted briefly.

Fran took out some articles I’d copied for her from the *World Tribune*, and they read them together.

“We really should get to one of those meetings,” her friend said.

“Yes, we really should,” said Fran.

I believe that our confidence in the great outcome of any situation is incredibly powerful, sending ripples out into places we didn’t even know existed.

WT

Title: Perspective: Out of the Ashes

Subject: World Tribune 10/24/97 n.3162 p.3 WT971024p03 Riverside, California

Author: Gina Jones

Keywords: Ashes California Community December Experiences July Opinion Perspectives Riverside
Tribune World