

**A Tribute to a Friend**  
**A friend's battle with cancer and victory even in death inspired Teri Clayton**  
**to triumph over her depression.**

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Beverly was a member in my chapter. We did not know each other well, but she was a true friend in faith. I would see her almost every Sunday at the community center, sitting toward the back to be near where her children were playing. She was always smiling a bright, beautiful smile and chanting daimoku as if there were no tomorrow. Unfortunately for us, the day came for Beverly when there would be no tomorrow. She died Oct. 20, 1997, after a long battle with cancer.

My first encounter with Beverly was the day I was on the standby list to see SGI President Ikeda in New York. When I learned that there was no room and that I would not be able to go, Beverly and her bright, shining smile helped me through the disappointment. She helped me to see that I had won, that the benefit was in how much I had grown. Her conviction allowed no room for doubt.

The next contact I had with Beverly was after learning that her cancer had resurfaced and was spreading. Our district held several chanting sessions at her home to support her. I went to one such session feeling guilty that I had not made more of an effort to be supportive. I stayed to tell her that I was chanting for her and that I would come any time, day or night, to chant with her. I wanted to encourage her.

Well, I did eventually get to say all those things, but not until after Beverly, with her smile, spent almost an hour encouraging me to continue fighting for a safe and peaceful environment where I lived. We were both dealing with vandalism and juvenile delinquency within our communities. I was ready to give up, to move and leave it all behind (so I fantasized). Even my daimoku had taken on a defeated, escapist quality.

But not Beverly. "All you have to do," she said, "is say: 'Gohonzon, I am sick of this. It has got to change. I will do whatever it takes.'" This was her attitude of faith.

My third encounter with Beverly was at the community center. I, in the throes of depression, could barely keep myself in front of the Gohonzon and was leaving the meeting early. I stopped to say hello to Beverly, to tell her I was chanting for her. She said, "I'm chanting for you, too." And before I knew it she was encouraging me again: "Don't give up. Do the best you can, even if it's only five minutes. It's OK, you can do it." I could feel Beverly's daimoku supporting me.

My final encounter with Beverly was less than 48 hours before she died. When I went to visit her in the hospital, I was nervous. I didn't know what condition she was in. As I came around the corner, I heard the sound of daimoku emanating from her room. When I opened the door I was immediately struck by Beverly's beautiful face and her wonderful smile. Take away the oxygen and the IVs and you would never have known that she was sick. We talked for almost an hour. She was very candid about her situation, and apologized in advance lest she should drift off to sleep while we were talking. Indeed, she said the doctor had told her that this was probably how death would occur, and that it could be any time. But Beverly was not afraid. She was 100 percent confident in the power of her faith.

"I told the Gohonzon," she said, "that I appreciate the lesson this [illness] has taught me, but I don't have time for this now. I have to go home; I have children to raise." I have worked in hospice a long time and have sat by the bedside of many terminal patients. Beverly was not in denial, but neither did she resign herself to death. She was fully,

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completely and beautifully alive. She epitomized doubt-free faith and was living proof of everything that Nichiren Daishonin taught in his writings, that President Ikeda is teaching us. All the causes we make, the benefits we receive — everything comes down to the moment of death. Beverly's life was a shining example of faith equals daily life.

The day that Beverly died I suddenly recognized the stark contrast between her life and mine. Here was a woman whose body was ravaged by a powerful enemy, determined to take her life away. Beverly rallied her faith and defeated her enemy. True, the cancer succeeded in destroying the shell that was her body, but it could not take away her spirit. She was at peace, and her death was the ultimate benefit of her practice, her doubt-free faith.

On the other hand, I am in good health with every reasonable chance for a long and prosperous life. I have almost everything that is supposed to make us happy: a great job, a nice house, a decent income, good friends. Yet I struggle with an illness, depression, that saps the strength from my soul. While Beverly fought until the last moment of her life, I have been all too ready to give up my battle, to sink into the depths of despair. I have even contemplated taking my own life, that which Buddhism teaches us is so precious that even one extra minute is worth more than all the gold in the world.

Beverly's body was ravaged by cancer, but her spirit was strong. My body is healthy but my soul is being ravaged by the "cancer" that is depression.

With this realization came a determination. As my tribute to Beverly, I pledge that no matter what I will not let this beast that is my depression control my life. I will conquer this obstacle, move beyond it, grow and face new challenges. For Beverly, for me, for those I hope to encourage by my victory, I will summon the power of faith and fight for my life as she did for hers. Because, as Beverly would have said: "Gohonzon, I don't have time for this. There are things I have to do."

What a strong impact we can have on someone's life without even knowing it. Beverly and I were not close, yet my life was undeniably altered by our brief encounters. It reminds me that Buddhism is how we live, not merely how much we chant, how many meetings we attend, or how many people we introduce to Buddhism. It's what we do after we get up from in front of the Gohonzon. It's about being sincere, honest and respectable. Faith is the sum of our existence — it is what we believe, who we are, and how we live. Beverly was not perfect, but she was always true to herself and her faith. This is what we must strive for.

This is Buddhism.

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