

Living Artfully in a Technological Society

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Once crippled by self-imposed limitations, this dancer shines in a technologically and artistically enriched world.

Thirteen years ago, I had never heard of faxes. And computers to me were huge, gray machines with lots of blinking lights, just like on *Lost In Space*. OK.... Maybe I was slightly misinformed, but who cares? Back then, dancers didn't need computers!

After graduating from a performing arts college in 1985, I moved to New York to struggle alongside every other hopeful performer there. Within one month, I was dancing in a national tour! However, when the last day of my contract arrived, I had squandered most of my final paycheck on an ugly pair of clogs. Panic-stricken, I called...Mom and Dad!

To my chagrin, my parents refused to cooperate, sending me only money for food. I was forced to contemplate joining the "real" working world.

Fear crippled me. Able to shine like a star in auditions, I crumbled like a clump of dirt in job interviews. I had tons of dance training, but no sense of self-sufficiency! Should this have been something inborn? Did I have a genetic defect? Seeing no other recourse, I invested my remaining money into a word-processing course. BLECH... PHFFFT... PTOOEY!

Needless to say, I was pathetic. Having never turned on a computer, I found myself pitifully searching for the remote! Boy, was I angry! Who had time for this *&!%?

After barely passing the class, my friend Susan submitted my name as a temp to the securities company she worked for. I thought *securities* meant the police force, not stocks and bonds. Beyond pathetic.

My first day was all about finding proper attire (I did not even have one pair of nylons). Not only that, but the closest thing to a briefcase I owned was my red, filthy, canvas dance bag. Better to carry nothing than parade that thing around.

Reluctantly, I stepped outside, sporting dance tights underneath the only skirt I owned, pumps with worn heels and a mismatched purse.

Fume-tainted snowflakes grasped at my eyelashes as I slushed downtown through rush-hour traffic. Suddenly, I understood the empty feeling of being cold and alone. The fear and longing of the homeless bore deeply into my heart. Focusing my efforts on locating the building, I was thankful it was in a nice part of town.

Inside, the popping of radiators comforted me. Now, where was Susan? Before I even had the chance to remove my coat, a supervisor escorted me to the "space" I would share with a million other temps. Couldn't I at least get a cup of coffee?

Then I saw it. Lying in wait on its demonic throne, its size magnified by the fear in my heart, the brutal beast crouched, motionless. My stomach gnarled into knotted rope as I struggled for breath, staring deeply into the creature's emerald eyes. If it had been a Steven Spielberg movie, that computer monitor would have been a T-Rex and John Williams' music would have underscored the action....

....BAM! Correspondence slammed onto the desk, and my supervisor yanked me back into reality, growling, "It's all yours." She had no idea how that lump in my throat was the only thing preventing me from emitting a deep, dark, colossal wail.

During my employment, I was barraged by "simple" assignments. Faxing correspondence was like a Jerry Lewis comedy routine. But with every task I gained increased confidence in myself and the world around me. Befriending that computer was

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the first step in what I called my life-expansion journey.

I only lived in New York City for three years before accepting a teaching job at an arts school near my home in Virginia. Within months of making my exit from New York, I encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, thus marking a brand new beginning in my life.

Since then, my career path has twisted and turned into many unexpected areas. Striving to live my life artistically, one of the most profound things I have learned is that the art of living is the greatest art form known to humanity. It opens us up to all possibilities, allowing and encouraging expansion beyond our self-induced limitations through faith in the Lotus Sutra.

SGI President Ikeda urges us to stay informed of technological advances. Proudly, I can say that I now own TWO computers! Both with faxing capabilities! I also frequently surf the Net and have taught myself to do computerized layout and design. A big change, huh?

It took tremendous courage and love for my parents not to send me that money. But because of their decision, I can now adapt my career choices to the needs and demands of society, utilizing my skills and intelligence in ways that support me in my growth as an artist as well. Compassion means teaching our youth how to take care of themselves, under any circumstances, even if it means implementing tough love.

Before, my vision didn't extend past my nose. My present perspective, although not always global, strives heartily to be so.

Technology can be good. I intend to use as much of it as possible by basing my daily life on the Lotus Sutra, in accordance with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Art is great. Art is necessary. But more so is living artfully, a way of life that calls for common sense and continuous education.

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